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## Meaning Of Old Age And Age Borders

Ageing is a sequence of events beginning with the birth and continue during the life cycle. Ageing represents the last phase of lifespan, a period when the individual looks back at his life and thinks what he gained and lost during this period.

Every person is older compared to another person or relative to a particular standard. For example, one might be too old to qualify for the cricket team, or appear for Service Commissions.

However, the use of the sacred “old” applies to people at the end of their lives. “How old is the old man?” It is essentially a philosophical question. It invites us to think about what we mean by the old term, in human practice and ageing, and to explain how these meanings (or meanings) can resemble the meaning of the term “old” according to non-human. Is there a realistic sense of an “old” feeling independent of social perception and expectations? Or is ageing - a purely relative concept, so that the person is only old by reference to a cultural or cultural criterion?

Here, I would like to emphasize on the non-medical complications of age and the non-biological factors that actually affect old age. In the title of this section, I have used the word “old” as an adjective. In the sense of this discussion, the “old” is primarily for people and means something like “aged” or “experienced” or “senior” or “elderly”. Ironically, sometimes, we love aged things like aged wine but I am not sure whether we love aged people or even if we do, I am not sure whether we love aged people same as aged wine. Ageing is not a disease, but the notion of growing old in this fast moving technological world sometimes give goosebumps. There used to be a time when we ran shoulder to shoulder together and even ahead of a lot of people in this same fast-paced world. But now the society or the cultural traditions call us seniors and in some ways, tell us that we need not participate in the race. We need to sit down and take rest as we are aged now. The need of the hour is to understand that actually this is not a race to win but rather a race to participate. We should help our elders to be a part of it. We should ask for their help as they are experienced instead of asking them to sit down or be a part of some old age home. We can understand the term seniority as possessing more experience and often relates to authority. Though older people have more experience than young people whether they have authorities is another problem. Considering that the term “old” has many negative meanings while we appreciate the term ‘young’, it closely relates the meaning of “old” in today’s Western society to the ageism. Presently, ageism is a stigma, negative discrimination, and even pressure affecting a particular person or group of people due to their age which actually is a biological event. Ageism can sometimes affect young people also, including children (Progeria). However, the target group of Ageism are elderly people, they can be described as experienced, burden, forgotten, busy, dependent, weak and confused. The description of elderly people as experienced is soon lost in the real context and all other descriptions mentioned above overshadow the experience of elderly. Ageing is twice cheapened.

In addition, ableism plays a role in stigmatizing longevity. Ableism is a preconception, stigmatization, negative discrimination and even repression against a person or group of people because of a biological event that damages them resulting in the reduction of their strengths or qualities. As a matter of fact, everyone who have long lived are likely to be sick and disabled. As

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expected, communities value strength, vigour, and juvenility. At the same time, it can also be said that communities do not like the diseased and disabled individuals. Therefore, as this discussion suggests about “old” meanings, it is considered that the old has several features that are considered undesirable, even subject to escape or rejection. “What is the age of old age?” is knowing when an individual becomes subject to ableism and ageism, and is helpless to the shame of being treated as old. The answer to the point whether communities like diseased or disabled young people or not can be self-understood. Hence, I do not find a point to consider ageing a stigma, it will be better to celebrate ageing as an event of life which blessed individuals achieve.

At the *prima facie*, the question in the title “What is the age of old age?” seems tautology if “age” is used equally in both cases. Hence, it become necessary to reinterpret the two appearances of “age” here.

Have we ever thought, what a person is emphasizing when he/she asks us “What is your age?” Is he/she intends to know our chronological age i.e. the number of years we have lived or he is interested to know our biological settings. By biological settings, I mean to emphasize on the bodily conditions related to ageing or the biological events increasing our propinquity to death. According to Simon de Beauvoir, ‘chronological and biological ages do not coincide’ (Beauvoir 1972, p.30). According to the World Health Organization (2015), ‘Although there are commonly used definitions of old age, there is no general agreement on the age at which a person becomes old. The common use of a calendar age to mark the threshold of old age assumes equivalence with biological age, yet, it is generally accepted that these two are not necessarily synonymous’ (WHO). Ageing *per se* is not a disease or a sequence of diseases (Hayflick 2002: 419), but ageing is often associated with aggravation, disease and loss of function. According to Leonard Hayflick, a renowned microbiologist and gerontologist, “ageing processes by definition are losses in function or physiological capacity” (Hayflick 2002, p. 420). He also quotes that ‘the ageing process is the leading risk factor for all age-associated diseases’ (Hayflick 2002, p. 420, 421). The words of Helen Small defines “old age” as “the later years of a long life, when there is an inevitable and irreversible deterioration in the organism as a consequence of its age” (Small 2007, p. 3, my emphasis). Few years later, philosopher Anita Silvers describes “old age” as ‘a stage of life when individuals are at higher than species-typical risk of encountering impediments to their usual modes of functioning’ (Silvers 2012, p. 11, my emphasis). Revisiting the title of the paper “What is the age of the old age?” emphasizes on “What is the chronological age of progression of disease and loss of function?” or “What is the chronological age of nearing death?” Ageism can also be understood in a conventional way in terms of closeness of death. However, people who live a few decades also die soon and people who live long may have even a longer life. Hence, it is perilous to accept that everyone will die at a high chronological age. Existing literature support this statement with the words of Geoffrey Scarre who writes, “I remember once reading about an old man, well past his hundredth year, who woke up each morning with the thought, “Still here?” When one reaches extreme old age, it is obviously foolish to bank on having many more days of life” (Scarre 2007, p. 27). Looking for the answer proposed in the title “What is the age of the old age?” it is also necessary to look into consideration the species concerned with the question. I mean to say that, the answer to the raised question will vary from species to species. Likewise, if asked “What is the age of old age?” to a 10-year-old dog, who is already in its old age will be 10 to 12 years, but the same question asked to a tortoise who is of same age (10 years old) will have an answer of 450 years. Hence, in this sense and in the experimental sense, the age of a person is not only a function of years of life the person has lived compared to the number of years of life a person of

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that particular species is expected to live.

Life expectancy varies from country to country and within a country, the life expectancy also depends on various factors like gender and race. For example, the life expectancy of women in the United States was 81 years in 2012 (World Bank 2015b), while it was only 76 years in men (World Bank 2015c). In United States, the life expectancy of an individual also depends upon his/her ethnicity (Caucassians have a higher life expectancy than non-Hispanic blacks or Hispanics) (Arias 2014).

According to Simon de Beauvoir, there are no “initiation ceremonies” that marks the beginning of old age. An elderly person still has the same political rights and duties, as well as the responsibility to enforce the law at half the age (Beauvoir 1972, pp. 20-23). Nevertheless, accomplishing senior citizenship may mean the loss of some roles and authorizations (may or may not be elective) and possibly the gain of others (again may or may not be elective). These roles and authorizations may be associated to family relationships (for example, if one become a grandparent or elder then he/she is expected take care of the younger members of the family), societal and public rights (for example, if one retires from a paid employment or receive a state pension or help); liability and expenses (if it is expected, for example, that the authority is transferred, or that the adult children have changed); and the right to be a member of groups or institutions (eg special groups for “seniors”, “retired” etc.).

However, this view of the Old is not the only possible descriptive depiction of age. In fact, there is a potential problem when we consider age as a level where a person lived long enough to have a full and satisfying life. On the one hand, some people can succeed by living a long and full life and yet not being chronologically or biologically old. On the other hand, some people may live for a long time, but may not have enough education, social support, and opportunities to live a full and satisfying life (Overall 2003, pp. 47-51).

When should we use the term “old” in our life? It is a tough question to answer but, it is not surprising that perceptions of seniority are related to the chronological position of a person relative to other human beings. Probably, the implicit concepts of people change about what is old as they live longer, and our perception of seniority is related to what is old. Actually, we begin to understand ageing only when we age. It may be because we gain wisdom with ageing or we become helpless.

The immediacy to justify the classification of a person as an elderly person depends upon when it will be appropriate to call a colleague, friend or loved one an old one. Or even more appropriately when will we consider ourselves old? Are we going to set up the same demarcation bar of old age beginning for ourselves compared to others? All these questions remain unanswered and can only be understood when we actually grow old.

It is reasonable to know seniority in terms of its relation to maximum life expectancy which varies from one country to another and from one species to another. Hence, old people are the one who have reached the life expectancy of their society and are at risk of deteriorating health and function and are about to die (although it is not inevitable).

Ageing is a global likelihood whether we all age or not depends upon whether or not we are lucky. The fact is that we will all grow and age (if we live that long till wrinkles season our skin). There are no reasons to defame ageing, the point is to celebrate old age as an experienced

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identity.