

Deconstructing Retirement Blues

Dignity Foundation, Ulsoor, performed a play at Nightingales Elders' Enrichment Centre, Malleswaram, an activity-based daycare facility. **Kala Sunder** reports its after effects

Scene One

Ram, newly retired, is happily reading the newspaper when his wife, Krishna, enters.

"Still reading the paper? When will you have your bath? The servant will be here soon, and who will wash the bathroom if you bathe late? I'm going to my kitty party today."

Ram flings the newspaper down. No words are needed to convey his anger. Does a man have to stick to a routine even after retirement?

Scene Two

Ram is engrossed in a football game



Still reading the newspaper

on the TV when Krishna returns from the kitty party.

"Oh, I had such a good time. It was a lovely party!"

"GOAL!" yells Ram, waving his fists in the air. He doesn't seem to have heard Krishna.

"But what is this? You *still* haven't eaten lunch!" The meal she had left for him on the table is untouched.

"Oh! I wasn't hungry."

Krishna is upset.

Scene Three

Krishna is at home. Ram enters with a box in his hands, looking very pleased with himself. "Look! I brought you a gift."

It is an imported grater-cum-cutter.

"But *why*?" moans Krishna. "I'm very happy with my ten-rupee knife."

"But this will do everything in a jiffy. You won't have to spend so much time in the kitchen now."

"How much did it cost?"



Shall I heat up the lunch?



I've brought you a gift

"Only two thousand."

"Two thousand! Have you forgotten you are retired now? We can't afford to spend so much money on unnecessary things like this."

These three short scenes were enacted in less than ten minutes by Dignitarians of Ulsoor Centre, Bengaluru. They had a very receptive and appreciative audience in the members of Nightingales Elders' Enrichment Centre, Malleswaram, no strangers to the problems of life after retirement.

'Retirement Blues' drew laughter and applause, but it was not performed for entertainment. It was an offering of Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of community-based education that presents an issue and invites solutions. The facilitator was Radha Ramaswamy, founder of Bengaluru's Centre for Community Development and Change, an organisation that promotes theatre as a learning tool for people of all ages. She asked the audience to diagnose the underlying cause of the retirement blues that had just been enacted. Responses bubbled up -- Ego; Not knowing what to do with new-found leisure; Not on the same wavelength; Poor communication; Lack of planning for retirement...

So What Could be the Solution?

The same three scenes were

enacted again, but this time anyone in the audience could call out 'STOP' at any point, replace one of the actors, and take the play in a different direction by suggesting a way of defusing the conflict. The wall between performers and audience dissolved. 'Specta-c-tors' came up with a variety of solutions -- comical, practical, fanciful.

"I'll clean the bathroom," said a gallant Ram to a chorus of "Ah-ha-ha! And what if you slip and fall?"

"Never mind, it doesn't matter if the bathroom is not cleaned one day," said a conciliatory Krishna.

"Explain this game football to me. Then we can watch together," said another Krishna.

"Shall I warm up your lunch again?" offered the next (a man, incidentally).

"If this gadget is so useful, why don't you cut the vegetables?" suggested a combative Krishna.

The play made everyone look at themselves and at others with greater sensitivity and understanding. From there, it is but one step to better communication, to exploring ways of changing oneself to adapt to changed circumstances.



A comical solution

"I didn't buy it actually, it was a farewell gift from the office." That was a Ram trying to make peace.

The group agreed or disagreed with these and other solutions, applauded or ridiculed them, and laughed all the way. No one remained untouched by the proceedings on the 'stage', which was just a small space in one corner of a hall. Radha Ramaswamy and her Theatre of the Oppressed group had made everyone look at themselves and at others with greater sensitivity and understanding. From there, it is but one step to better communication, to exploring ways of changing oneself to adapt to changed circumstances.

Retirement is only the first in a long line of problems that senior citizens have to tackle. CCDCC is ready with their next Theatre of the Oppressed offering -- 'Dementia'. Watch this space! ■



Exploring causes and solutions



The 'stage'