

# Untold Story of Parents Whose Children Settle Abroad: Rheumy Eyes and Cheerful Exterior

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Umpteen employment opportunities, salaries in dollars, free education, good medical facilities, fresh air to breathe and peace of mind, all these are benefits of off shore living which fascinates the youth of India to settle abroad.

Every year thousands of people, young or middle aged, boys or girls, single or in family move to foreign lands in search of higher education, lucrative jobs, improved lifestyle and a better standard of living.

The parents of these children, right from their birth, aim to send their children abroad for their bright future due to paucity of employment opportunities and a healthy life in our country. They spend their chunk of savings, take loans and leave no stone unturned to make their child's life brighter in other lands. Slowly and gradually, these children move towards accomplishment of their dream goals. They complete their education, get into rewarding jobs, buy their dream houses and get settled. But in a race to achieve all these milestones, they leave behind their treasures alone. Their parents who toiled their entire life just to see their kids settled in foreign countries living a comfortable life are left lonely and rheumy.

These are the parents who were the most admired that they managed to fulfil their dreams and send their offspring abroad. The picture looks rosy in the beginning. The excited parents in their hay days make frequent visits to be with their kids. The initial years look promising when these parents spend their holidays abroad, baby sit their grandchildren and receive expensive gifts sent from their NRI children. However, the picture becomes gloomy when these parents of NRI children become old, cannot travel and their children become preoccupied in their own busy schedules. These enthusiastic parents who frequently visited the foreign lands in their hay days have now become reluctant to travel due to long air travel and their children also do not encourage their ageing parents to visit them due to unaffordable medical expenses.

The paradox is till the time, the parents are middle-aged and young at heart, this life seems happy on both the sides, the real concern starts when the parents become

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old and dependent. The irony of the situation is the same parents who spent their entire lives in saving and sending their kids offshore and looking after their own elderly parents do not have the same emotional and physical support. Most parents choose to live in their own country, in their own houses, living autonomously until they can survive. They don't want to be aloof from their social lives in their own country due to some sense of familiarity where they have lived all their lives.

It is absolutely too much to expect them to live a new life in a new country at their age. These elderly parents with pasted smiles on their faces and cheerful exteriors, hide behind their eyes, the untold stories of loneliness, anxiety, fear and uncertainty.

Moreover, in some cases, the NRI children who have settled off shore, start showing a back seat to emotions, affection and sense of responsibility. They become selfish and restrict their lives around their nuclear family. Although they try to provide all types of care and facilities but what they lack is the emotional support and availability on their calls. This is what that their old parents want. However, this does not become possible all the times which leads to serious consequences. These parents become part of what is called as "Empty Nest Syndrome".

Empty Nest Syndrome refers to the distress, grief and other complicated emotions that parents often experience when their children leave home either for studies, job or living their own relationships. The satire is that people want their children to grow up and spend independent lives. However, the experience of letting go is often emotionally thought-provoking. Parents may feel secluded, sad, and have some degree of grief when their children leave the nest.

Women normally suffer more than men do, and feelings of sadness may be more obvious among stay-at-home parents whose lives were organized around meeting the everyday needs of their children.

After a particular age, these parents don't want to take any initiatives and add zeal to their lives. They lose the very purpose of their lives. They develop a feeling that everything is over as their children are not living with them and gradually end up living a depressed life leading to mental instability, fear and depression.

These parents need a sense of affection, mental and physical security. Moreover, they need a common platform where they can spend their sunset years of loneliness.

The problem is complex and require real life solutions.

### **Suggested solutions to combat these issues:**

- 1. Frequent video calls and yearly visits by children is one of the main solutions to provide them with emotional support. Seeing them and feeling their presence once in a year keeps them working the rest of the days peacefully.**
- 2. Teaching them technology which can make their lives comparatively easier and indulging.**
- 3. Parents should be encouraged to indulge in social and religious activities so that their minds are diverted and relaxed.**
- 4. The Government should make a rule for children to come back to their own country after a stipulated period of time to serve their own parents and country.**
- 5. The children should make sure that their parent's house is near other similar age group people so that they can spend quality time together.**
- 6. The children should hire a healthy and trustworthy helper for their parent's household chores.**
- 7. The children should have good contact with their parent's neighbours. Both must share each others' contact numbers.**
- 8. The children must provide their parents with enough money for any emergency situation or treatment so that the old parents are not under any stress of paucity of funds that might refrain them from going for any health check-ups.**
- 9. Ensure that your parents live near a medical care center, clinic or hospital. A health care service or hospital located close to their homes would ensure speedy treatment should an emergency arise.**
- 10. There are certain NRI Parents Association (NRIPA) organisations set up in various cities for NRI parents to provide a support network to share common set of concerns. These organisations assist the left-behind parents who suffer from painful separation, need emotional support and physical security.**
- 11. Old-age homes, which is still a taboo in our country must be promoted so that these oldies can have a support system from people sailing in the same boat. This taboo should be removed first as living in old age homes is not a curse. The society should become rational in their approach in accepting these houses as better places rather than living in isolation.**

**These are just possible solutions that can be accepted by different individuals in different ways. The actual and feasible solutions are the ones taken by parents**

themselves. They must realise that these were the only people who sent their children away for their bright careers. Therefore, they can't make their children's lives fuelled by expecting return from them or mentally pressuring them. These parents should go and spend their sunset years with their loved ones abroad for a peaceful end.



### Advisor Speaks

In the preface to his book "Man's search for meaning", Victor Frankl relates the following story. Shortly before United States entered World War II, he received an invitation to come to American Consulate in Vienna to pick up his immigration visa. His old parents were overjoyed, but he hesitated. He happened to come across a commandment "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land", and decided to let his visa lapse. He was arrested soon thereafter and sent to a concentration camp and suffered much, but lived to write about it, without any regrets. Long before his time, towards the end of Trojan war, knowing that defending the burning city of Troy was futile, Aeneas fled the city with his aging father Anchises on his back, though he lost his wife Creusa in the confusion of the battle. Most Indians are familiar with the story of Shraavan Kumar in Ramayana who carried his blind, old and frail parents to pilgrimage on his shoulder.

Fast forward to the present times, when millions of young Indians have left the country in search of better life, leaving their parents behind in the process, though not without their active support and encouragement in most cases.

In order to live a healthy long life late into retirement, important elements include careful planning begun early in life including financial planning, addressing housing needs and paying close attention to health and fitness. Some of these elements remained unaddressed for various reasons in previous generations. Safety nets such as healthcare for older people through Medicare and basic monthly income through Social Security do not exist in India presently. Even as the parents send off their children abroad for better opportunities, there are unspoken expectations that both parents and children are aware of.

While the article very well outlines the struggle faced by parents in India as they get older, the other side of the coin is that the children have their own share of struggles as they attempt to settle in a foreign country against many obstacles; every immigrant has a story to tell. The hardest part, as any immigrant will tell you, however, is an overwhelming sense of having abandoned one's parents, with extraordinary burden imposed on siblings remaining in India. That regret is the price an immigrant has to come to terms with and learn to live with; any other struggles they may have faced settling in the new country are easily dwarfed in comparison.

As economy improves in India with increasing opportunities, higher incomes, improvement in infrastructure and law and order situation, with improvement in governance and provision for safety net in older age, younger people may find it less and less attractive to leave their families to settle in the US and elsewhere abroad. Until then, the parents and their children leaving them behind will do well to take advice from the article. □□□

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