

**Dignity, Dependency, and the Search for Identity beyond Agriculture: A Sociological Discourse on the Retirement Experience of Small Elderly Farmers in a Selected Village in West Bengal**

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**Abstract**

**Introduction:** Retirement for small farmers represents a substantial cultural shift, especially in agrarian areas of West Bengal, where agriculture is both a means of subsistence and a facet of identity. In most cases, small rural farmers frequently don't have defined retirement benefits like formal sector workers do. In their elderly ages they are either replaced by their familial descendants or they have to close up their farming activities because of aging problems or so; and accordingly, they have to face difficulties in maintaining their lives, keeping their dignity, and exploring a new identity outside the farming activities. This research article positions retirement not merely as a cessation of farming but as a multifaceted experience influenced by socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural norms, and familial dynamics. As per Bhagavad Gita, 'Dharma' contributes to the harmony and order of society, ensuring that every individual contributes positively to the collective whole. In the Gita, the emphasis on Dharma underscores the importance of fulfilling one's responsibilities as a means to uphold justice and balance in the universe. In that spirit, the elder farmers who retire from farm activities have to confine themselves in 'Dharma' and 'Karma' (Karma never ends- it can be in any form) in social sphere as a respite from their mental retardation, obsession, loss of income due to their inherent retirement from farming.

**Research Objectives:** The research seeks

- ❖ To comprehend how retired small farmers in a specific village in West Bengal face dependency during their old age,
- ❖ To examine elderly farmers' challenges and strategies to maintain dignity within familial and community frameworks, and
- ❖ To investigate the essential processes through which these elderly individuals pursue identity beyond agriculture.

**Methodology:** It is well recognised that methodology is the soul of research, and it helps researchers to be systematic and rational. A qualitative study design was employed, including in-depth interviews with 200 retired or semi-retired small farmers in the hamlet, supplemented by focus group discussions and participant observation. Purposive sampling guaranteed representation from diverse gender, caste, and economic backgrounds. The data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and variances in acknowledging the retirement experiences.

**Findings:** Research has revealed that older people often feel marginalized and isolated due to their dependence on children for financial support and their declining physical abilities. Yet, there is evidence that symbolic roles in various institutions protect the dignity of older farmers through generational care and participation in village councils. In rural areas, old farmers forge new identities through religious affiliation, oral history, and community leadership, and they seek to remain involved and immersed in the social sphere. However, it should be kept in mind that the lack of financial security, the lack of rural pension schemes, and weak institutional support provision make older people even more vulnerable, making it essential for policymakers to consider this more seriously.

**Conclusion:** For small farmers in West Bengal, retirement signifies a major transformation of their identity, with which their role and dignity are deeply intertwined. It is essential to adopt various inclusive welfare policies and community-based initiatives to preserve their dignity and sense of belonging outside the agricultural sector.

**Key words:** West Bengal, retirement, small farmers, reliance, and dignity.

**Introduction**

In West Bengal's economy and culture, small-scale farming activities accumulates a big part. Traditionally, it is associated with rural India's economic development. For many rural people, farming is more than simply a job; it becomes a compulsive sense of attachment for their livelihood and standard of living amid socio-economic atmosphere. It is conventional and a traditional fit that usually in India elderly people retire from their organisational jobs at the superannuation age of 60. However, in the case of rural farmers, there is no hard and first rule to retire from farming activities. Elderly farmers depending on their working condition, health status etc. take retirement from farming by handing over the farming responsibilities on their descendants or by parting

their farming activities partly with their wards in line in a phased manner; and this retirement may happen at any time during the life span of the farmers. Interestingly, they do not get any formal pension since farming is an occupation and not a service or job. By this process of retirement, they lose two elementary things: one is their main source of income, and another is their identification or attachment- and ultimately they become dependent on others for survival. In rural India, elderly people enjoy social status and respect in both the place of the family and outside their family in social sphere. Traditionally, the younger generation and women provide honour and take care of the elderly people. We are aware that society is always changing fast, and it tenders dynamic changes in the economy and society. All these have made a significant negative impact on the traditional joint family prevailing over years owing to frequent dynamism in socio-cultural activities. Presently the younger generations are migrating to the urban area for the betterment of educational and economic opportunities. Women are becoming self-empowered. Generation after generation, elderly villagers are depending on their next generation, and this traditional bridge is being destroyed day by day. Many elderly villagers are feeling alone and less protected through economic and social care. In this regard, small farmers' retirement is indicating less income, loss of dignity, and less mobility.

Research on the elderly people in India has clearly revealed their socio-cultural and economic picture. Through various studies, we have become much clearer about their dependency, economic self-reliance, and social life sustenance. For example, a nationwide survey in West Bengal (2011) found that about 60% are completely dependent on others, while about 14% of the elderly are completely financially independent (Wienclaw, 2021). In fact, most of the elderly people in rural areas are dependent on their children and small government schemes (the central old age allowance of ₹200-₹500/month only). Various data show that less than 10% of Indian elderly people receive any kind of formal pension, and only 14% of them are mostly dependent on family support (Aging in India, 2025). In this context, aging in rural India usually means living on the margins, "defined more by dependency and vulnerability than by dignity or security".

Old age is a particularity of the elderly people in rural areas, creating considerable stress in the lives of smallholder farmers, who are dependent on their families and the next generation. Given these issues, retirement raises important considerations for small and marginal farmers: how do they see their own need for support? How do they maintain their dignity when they can no longer continue to farming? How do people change their social identities when fieldwork is over? This research examines these concerns from a sociological perspective, focusing on 200 retired or semi-retired farmers from five villages (*Baghar-2, Rayan-1, Khetiya, Saraitikar and Belkash*) in Purba Bardhaman district. For the purpose of research, I have analyzed their narratives of aging, cultural norms of respect for the elderly, and coping mechanisms through qualitative interviews and observations. The research shed light on how issues such as gender and caste influence on retired farmers, how retirement and dignity are perceived in the Bengal's agricultural environment. Through this research, I pay my attention on rural aging, dependency, and the social responsibilities of the elderly people retired from agricultural farming.

### **Review of Literature**

It is another important and essential part of the research. For the execution of research, I have covered aging, gender, dignity, social roles, and economic aspects of rural areas. The review of literature concentrates on the following issues:

**Aging, Retirement, and Dependence in Rural India:** There is no regular retirement plan in India's broad based informal agricultural economy. The number of elderly people is growing, and policies and plans for supporting the elderly people are not evolving in line with this. The Wire says, "India's pension and retirement planning system leaves out millions of informal workers and older women who have no retirement support" (Malika et al., 2024). Formal plans cover only 10-12% of the workforce, and most of them are salaried workers. On the other hand, about half of India's workforce, made up of agricultural labourers and small farmers, do not have a pension plan. They either continue to work into old age or rely on family support (Morell et al., 2024). In rural Bengal, the declining joint-family tradition due to youth migration is weakening the safety net: one study noted that elderly villagers are "gradually becoming isolated and lonely in their homes with no one to take care of them in the village."

Rural India's social infrastructure is much more complex, and the lives of the elderly people are deeply intertwined with the socio-cultural context of the village. National and state surveys in India have shown that rural elderly people are highly dependent on others. The 2011 Building a Knowledge Base on Population Aging (BKPAI) report for West Bengal highlighted that less than 15% of elderly people live alone; 60% are completely dependent on others (Wienclaw, 2021). The same survey also found that 80% of elderly men and half of elderly women still advise their children on family matters (Aging in India, 2025). This shows that they still have a role in the family. However, about one-third of women and 15% of men have no role in any family decision-making (Ronanki et al., 2024). Elderly farmers usually have long-term health problems because they have high disability

rates, and their healthcare is not well-funded. Economic instability is a persistent problem: the public old age allowance (IGNOAPS) provides people with only Rs 200-500 per month (depending on the state), which is not enough to meet basic needs (Das & Maji, 2025).

This study shows India's rural elderly as vulnerable: a significant proportion are poor, sick and dependent. However, few studies emphasize resilience. Goswami and Deshmukh's qualitative research in rural Maharashtra reveals that despite the absence of any social structures to support this vulnerable population, older villagers cope with their challenges through a range of strategies. They say that even when current norms do not help them, older people find ways to cope with problems "in a variety of ways." In our case, farmers in West Bengal are likely doing the same, relying on their families, their communities and their own innovative capacities.

**Dignity, Social Role, and Identity in Advanced Age:** Social acceptance is very important for elder people to feel dignified. In Indian culture, elderly people are considered wise and respected advisors. According to a source, "Elderly people in India... He holds an important place in the family." In rural areas, it is a part of everyday life (for example, pampering the feet of the elderly or seeking their blessings) and duties (the work of the elderly as mentors or protectors of the culture). The BKPAI results show that many Bengali elders still hold power over their families. For example, 79% of rural elderly men and 60% of women help in resolving family disputes, and most of them counsel their children (Aging in India, 2025). These results indicate that elderly farmers may retain a respectable position within their families after retiring from agricultural labour.

Still, being dependent on someone else for money can hurt your reputation. Qualitative research indicates that when older people are dependent on children or inadequate pensions, they may experience feelings of humiliation or worthlessness. An article in *The Lancet* states that India's broken social pension forces older people to "see old age as a personal burden rather than a collective responsibility" (Bagchi, 2025). The death of a husband can be very difficult for older women (widows often feel neglected, as some research from West Bengal on widows in holy cities shows). While our primary focus is not just on widows, this literature highlights that older farmers may face similar marginalization if their economic value decreases.

Retirement is not only an economic phenomenon, but also a change of identity. International research on farmers, mainly in Western culture, indicates that numerous individuals face difficulties in redefining their identities after farming. A recent journal study identified farmers as suffering from "loss of self-image" when they are unable to engage in farming. In India, "agricultural identity" is often a mix of work, land connections, and being part of a community (SIMMoNs, 2020). Not being able to do farming every day can create a vacuum. But elderly villagers usually look for new jobs to fill this vacuum. For example, participation in religious activities such as temple ceremonies and devotional gatherings gives people a sense of purpose and social connection. The results of our research demonstrate that rural elders derive significance from their roles as storytellers, traditionalists, or advisors (Sandra & Sathyamurthi, 2025). Elderly farmers can volunteer at temples, become village preachers, or lead family guilds. We also notice the emergence of "elderly self-help groups" and retirees' clubs in certain cases (in anecdotes and other studies) that provide a sense of collective identity (Muhammad et al., 2021).

The literature indicates that the retirement experience of small farmers is influenced by the balance of dependency and status. Dependency stems from poverty and the absence of pensions; Yet dignity can be maintained through the continuation of social responsibilities (e.g., counselling the family and managing rituals) and newly accepted identities (for example, mentors and staff). This study explicitly investigates these dynamics in elderly farmers in rural West Bengal, attempting to fill a gap using comprehensive qualitative methods.

### Research Methodology

I have used qualitative sociological framework intent on semi-retired and retired small-scale rural farmers inside a cluster of five villages in the *Purba Bardhaman* district (*Baghar-2, Rayan-1, Khetiya, Saraitikar and Belkash*). Villages were deliberately selected to illustrate typical rural villages in the *Purba Bardhaman* region. For the execution of this study, I have gathered information from two hundred rural elderly farmers. Table 1 demonstrates that 200 elderly people (120 males and 80 women) aged 60 were interviewed. Purposive sampling method have been adopted in this regard. Concurrently, I have paid attention on caste, mix of genders, economic statuses and landholding sizes. About 35% were from Other Backward Classes, 25% of the people under study were from Scheduled Castes, and 40% were from general or other categories. I have noticed that most of the elderly farmers (85%) lived with their adult children. On the other hand, the rest of them lived alone or with their elderly spouses. This research was only on "small farmers," hence all the landholdings were small (75% were less than one acre and 25% were 1 to 2 acres).

### Table-1: Demographic profile of Research Population (N = 200)

#### Source: Field Investigation, 2025

Data were gathered through inclusive, semi-structured interviews, participant's observation and augmented by many focus group discussions (FGD). Gathered data by the use of interview process in *Purba Bardhaman* covered

over a six-month field period (2025). Making this research more effective, I have used proper discussion guides

Category	Group	Frequency (Percent)
Gender	Male	120 (60%)
Gender	Female	80 (40%)
Caste	Scheduled Caste	50 (25%)
Caste	Other Backward Class	70 (35%)
Caste	General	80 (40%)
Living arrangement	Lives with children	170 (85%)
Living arrangement	Lives alone	30 (15%)
Landholding	<1 acre	150 (75%)
Landholding	1–2 acres	50 (25%)

included subjects like life history (farming before retirement), everyday living aspects, sources of primary and other income, social relationships and gatherings, and views on dependency and dignity. Research also explored community and social gatherings, family interactions, and participation in local festivities.

For conducting the research, I have translated and transcribed the qualitative data into quantitative variables for analytical purposes. The research used thematic analysis to find common themes and specific differences in the individuals' experiences. Inductive coding interview technique helps to figure out their viewpoints and making them systematic and categorized. It helps me to explore every topic systematically such as including family support, social roles, coping techniques, identity shift, and economic vulnerability. In this rural belt of *Purba Bardhaman* I have noticed a lot of social stratification based on caste, gender and age group.

### Research Findings

This research covered different dimensions and fields of orientation to explore the scenario and its orientation. Here, I have mentioned the detailed discussion and findings.

### Economic Dependence and Exclusion

Most of the small farmers feel loneliness, financially insecure and dependent on others by the time they are 60 to 70 years old. Rural elderly people are unorganized, and few of them have foresight. A lot of people said that their own savings were quite small and that their agricultural earnings had pretty much stopped because they were becoming elder. Many of the elderly people are less aware about financial savings and future. As joint-family systems got weaker, more elderly people relied on their kids to provide for their daily needs. The structures of traditional joint families and modern joint families are totally different. A 68-year-old man said, "Now I don't even have a small field to work in; everything I earned and saved goes to buy medicines for my grandson."

The majority of people in West Bengal reside in rural areas, where agriculture serves as their primary economic activity. A lot of old people in West Bengal are poor, and most tribal farmers hardly make enough to get by. For poor farmers, agriculture is the prime source of livelihood. Statistical data expressed that around 90% of the people covered under the study said that financial instability was one of their biggest problems. They mostly get by asking kids or family members for help (for example, working relatives give money) or looking for any seasonal work they may find. "I beg my son for a little money every month for rice," one woman stated. I skip meals if he doesn't have any. A few better-off retirees had some savings or got Rs. 200–500 from the government pension (IGNOAPS), but even these payments were typically so meagre that they only covered a small part of their food costs. As people become aged, they face various physical problems that impose a specific financial cost on them. This is in line with national studies that show that less than 10% of seniors in rural areas get any kind of formal pension, which means that more than 80% of them have to rely on family support (Das & Maji, 2025).

As people turning into aged, their working capacity substantially decreases. As a result, it is normal for older people who have been involved in farming for a long time to experience a decline in their working capacity. About 70% of the people covered under the study said their health were getting worse or they were having trouble moving around. Knee problems and eye problems are one of the biggest problems for the elderly people. After surgery on their hips or losing their eyesight, many people could no longer provide labour long hours in the fields. The study highlighted various physical problems faced by the elderly people. They said they made up for it by doing lighter jobs, like weeding around their homes or taking care of goats, or by becoming full-time dependents.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind that physical disability increases the elder's dependence on others or family members. A farmer who is 75 years old said, "My bones are weak now and I just sit and watch my sons plant the rice". Another major problem in old age is mental depression or regret. At this time, a person spends a lot of time thinking about his past life and work and field and becomes more and more disturbed by thinking about the future society based on that. This change often made people feel alone because when they couldn't move around as much, they didn't want to be around other people (Dasgupta et al., 2018). In old age, due to various physical problems, a person's contact with neighbours and other close friends decreases, which often becomes one of the causes of physical and mental problems for them. Several elder people said that their younger family members went to markets or social gatherings while they stayed home alone.

Research has shown that the generation gap and lack of contact with modern society and technology have become one of the major causes of age-centered deadlock among the elderly rural people. Many elderly farmers are in danger because of these things: not having enough money and falling ill. "I feel useless" or "I am a burden" – these are the words they say. Many elderly people live in financial distress that there are no large pensions and medical insurance. This means that any illness can drag them into economic insecurity and poverty. The combination of need for goods and adequate support from the government leaves rural old age homes "more dependent and vulnerable than dignified."

**Table-2: Challenges faced by retired farmers and reported coping strategies**

Challenge	% of respondents	Coping/Adaptation Strategies
Financial insecurity	90%	government pension, dependent on children's support, small-scale trade
Health decline	70%	home remedies, relying on family care, shifting to lighter work
Social isolation	60%	storytelling, community meetings, participation in religious activities
Loss of farming identity	50%	learning crafts, passing on farming skills, taking on community roles

**Source: Field Investigation, 2025**

#### **Maintaining Dignity via Social Roles**

Maintaining dignity in the social platform is a matter of great concern and mental satisfaction to each and every one. Even though they don't have much money, many older people still feel proud to be active members of their families and communities. According to BKPAI data, our respondents still find it important to give advice and make decisions. We found, and older people supported, that most people still "have the last word" in family matters. A famous saying goes, "My sons can grow the crops, but I decide what we will eat today." In fact, three out of four men and almost half of women said they have given advice on matters related to the home or farm. This is similar to what the survey found: about 80% of older men and 60% of women in West Bengal help resolve family disagreements or advise children. Many older people also talked about caring for others. An important topic was elder people helping to raise their grandchildren (39-53% do this nationally (Rana, 2025) or helping with household chores. Although they could not farm, many women said they cooked and cleaned (although it was difficult), and men sometimes helped with marketing or minor repairs. These contributions reminded them that they were still useful. One widow replied, "I have not lost my respect yet because I can still take care of the cows and the baby."

Elder farmers still have symbolic power in the village. We found that in some communities, respected elders (mostly former farmers) chaired as informal advisors in the village council (village council) or helped solve community problems. An 80-year-old man was affectionately called "dada" (elder brother) and young farmers still come to him for advice. About half of the people under study opined that being a village elder or community leader made them proud. This is important because it brings them public attention. One man said, "I can't sow seeds now, but I teach the young people old songs and prayers – I'm still a farmer in spirit." Religion plays a central role in the lives of the elderly people, providing a sense of peace and social trust. A lot of retired farmers become more involved in prayer groups, temple ceremonies, or community festivities. Belief in religion gives them strength and helps them become self-reliant. It was usual to visit temples, lead devotional music (bhajans), and host pujas. Religion based plays and dramas play a central role in the rural social environment for the villagers. Another way to keep up dignity is through religious groups. For instance, a former who could no longer hoe fields recited every day at his local Kali temple, earning the respect and little gifts of his neighbours. This is in line with what other studies in West Bengal have found: elder people typically find meaning in sacred locations or devotional habits as their familial support fades (Singh, 2025). It has been reported that elderly people attend religious ceremonies in villages and stay in the temple premises for a long time. We also heard stories of older



people volunteering on church or mosque committees. By becoming a part of these groups, individuals get a respected "elder" position that goes beyond their lost job.

Every person wants their self-esteem to be protected, and this is more evident in the case of elderly people. Because for a person who has played a significant role in family decision-making for a long time, self-esteem is deeply linked to receiving respect from the family. In general, social embeddedness seems to be important for keeping dignity. Over time, as their relationship with agriculture diminished, the importance of their self-esteem in the family began to diminish. The transition away from farming is less unpleasant for families that still respect their elders (for example, by massaging their feet or asking for advice on rituals). It was observed from the interviews that older people do not want to lose their social capital as they age. In fact, a lot of people indicated they didn't lose their social capital when they retired: "I don't work the land, but I still lead the moon festival and join the Panchayat." Every village elder has a specific story associated with them. These stories show that, in line with Indian traditions, elder farmers can enjoy the cherished desire for life again through the help from younger generations and being active in their communities. This shows that dignity in old life is as much about culture as it is about money.

### **Identity Beyond Farming**

Not all people in rural areas are involved in agricultural activities, some of them are also engaged in various handicrafts, rural artisans, potters etc. so that an overall balance is maintained in the village economy. Even though they don't want to plough fields, many small farmers are actively looking for new identities outside the farming. There is a deep historical structure behind a person's choice of profession. People who were interviewed typically talked about being a mentor to young people, telling the history of their community, or volunteering. Some elderly people, for example, proudly called themselves "gurus" on organic farming. Even if they don't work anymore, they nevertheless give their neighbours advice on how to be more environment-friendly farming. Elder people are known to have considerable knowledge of rural agriculture and other social issues, which gives them a different status. Some people started doing little crafts or trades, like weaving bamboo or raising chickens, to keep themselves busy. It is clear that some images and infrastructure are deeply connected to every elderly person in the village. About half of the people who answered claimed they had found "work after work" things to do that make them want to get up in the morning.

One interesting trend was the establishment of informal organizations. For example, in two villages, older men would meet under a banyan tree every morning to talk about events and history, effectively acting as the village think tank. In the same way, older ladies in one village started a sewing circle that met every two weeks to share designs and recipes. These social networks make people feel like they belong to a group ("We are the Nakshi artisans now") and fight with loneliness. In one focus group, retired farmers talked about starting a cooperative to sell organic veggies from their home gardens. This was an obvious attempt to keep linked to farming in a new way. Being aware of politics is also important. Some elderly farmers talked about recent farmer demonstrations, such the nationwide agitations in 2020–21 and said they would support those movements. A former rice farmer went to Delhi once to attend a Farmer March and said it was "our fight, too." Taking part in rights movements, frequently with younger family members, gives them a new sense of power. Not all older people can go to protracted protests, but even passing out petitions or holding village meetings about farming policy made them feel included. They are basically changing their farming identity to be more about advocacy and teaching.

Religious affiliation frequently integrated with identity formation. A lot of people said that their faith irrespective of their caste, creed like Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, gives them strength and overall impetus to unite, fight and move towards prosperity. One person said that he joined a mosque committee to set up healthcare camps for older people, which connected his religious responsibility with community activity. Another person said that taking care of temple cows or volunteering for temple festivities earned him honorific names like "purohit" or "karmai." In conclusion, we found that elder farmers often base their identity after retirement on community involvement and tradition rather than just farming. These support the idea that elder people create new identities by continuing to help others. One participant commented, "I may have sold my last crop, but I have not lost my place I am still a teacher, an elder, and the father of the village." These kinds of anecdotes show that elder people are not only passive dependents; they are actively looking forward and nurturing for the upcoming days to be brighter and more useful for survival and growth.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The research shows that retirement for small farmers in West Bengal is a complex process that is influenced by cultural values and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Because there aren't any formal pensions or savings, almost everyone has to rely on family or community support. Many elder people don't have enough food, good health care, or the peace of mind that comes from being able to sustain independently. As indicated by respondent comments and BKPAI data, the material foundation for dignity is fragile: when daily survival relies on others, elders experience marginalization. This is similar to what other research has shown on aging in India: macro

reports say that India's pension system is "broken" for rural workers, and comparative studies show that rural elderly health costs take up most of a household's budget. But the picture is hardly one of complete decline. The social structure of rural Bengal still shows respect to elders, which in turn optimises their dignity. The fact that many older men and some women give advice on family matters and this suggests that rural families still value the knowledge and experience of their elders. In our study, when children honoured or engaged their retired parents (e.g., in prayer, legal matters, or family rites), the elders expressed feelings of pride and significance. This is in line with what anthropologists have seen: elderly Indians still have symbolic responsibilities (such as senior community members or keepers of tradition) even when they aren't as useful economically.

There were significant gender disparities: retired men more frequently occupied formal or informal community roles (such as village councils or religious committees) and recounted providing counsel to their sons' agricultural enterprises. Conversely, women indicated heightened social isolation, aligning with existing work on gendered aging. However, they typically found mental strength and attachment in large family networks, including taking care of their grandchildren, which might give them a sense of dignity. However, both men and women resorted to spiritual life, where temple ceremonies and devotional aggregations gave them a sense of identity and a way to connect with others. One woman remarked that after her husband died, she "found her family again" during the neighbourhood prayer groups.

These qualitative observations underscore a significant theme: identity is negotiated rather than static at retirement. Many elder farmers see their worth in their ability to farming, but they also see themselves as "elders, teachers, and godly figures," which are roles that are highly respected in Indian society. The discovery that older farmers stay active through religion, oral history, and activism indicates that agency endures. It also shows how important "active aging" models are: elder people can help society when they are given the chance. Our participants exemplified what global aging academics refer to as "positive aging," utilizing their experiences to mentor others, impart cultural heritage, and engage in community governance. Still, the literature and our data agree: elder farmers require supportive measures to help them keep their dignity. The Indian government's rural pension (IGNOAPS) is a good start, but the amount needs to be enhanced and the number of people who can get it needs to be guaranteed (many eligible seniors still go without it because of red tape). State governments like Kerala have shown that pensions based on rights can get almost everyone on board. West Bengal and other states might follow these examples. Targeted programs, like loan or seed subsidies for elderly farmers who want to grow tiny home gardens, could also help people make more money. Our responses came up with basic solutions, including free medical camps for seniors and utility plans that cost less.

But social policies are just as important as money. One study says that continuing learning and getting involved in the community can make getting older more active. This may entail adding more self-help groups (SHGs) for older people in communities, like the one our participants found in a cooperative sewing circle in one village. These SHGs might help each other out, give out small loans, and do volunteer work. We also agree with experts who support intergenerational programs that match students or young people with rural elders to impart skills, such agricultural techniques or handicrafts. This would honour the seniors' knowledge and give them a sense of purpose. Lastly, putting money into healthcare access (like mobile clinics and geriatric care) and infrastructure that is easy for seniors to use (such benches at markets and local transportation) can help older farmers stay active and connected with others.

For small-scale farmers in rural West Bengal, retirement isn't just the end of work; it's a big change to understand who they are. They have learnt a lot by working in the fields for years, but giving up the plough strains in the shoulders of the descendants as a matter of their pride and sense of attachment. Our research indicated that numerous elderly farmers perceive themselves as marginalized due to financial dependency, reflecting national trends of insecurity; nonetheless, they simultaneously affirm their identities through social and cultural roles. As counsellors, caregivers, temple patrons, or village elders, they work hard to stay respected members of the community. By doing this, they create new identities outside of farming, including being activists for farmers' rights or teachers who pass on cultural customs.

These results show that protecting the dignity of retired farmers needs support from all areas of life. Material assistance, such as pensions and subsidies, needs to be combined with social inclusion. Public policy and grassroots initiatives should not just seek to alleviate poverty but also to affirm the ongoing contributions of the elderly. One commenter said it best: "Old age is when I become my own grandchild, needed and loved." Society may assist retired farmers live their later years with the respect and identity they deserve by respecting their experience and making sure they are safe. They should not be seen as burdens, but as important members of the community.

Life is precious- be it of young people or elders. The spiritual lessons from the Bhagavad Gita- the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom, highlight that Dharmayog, Karmayog, Self-realisation, Mastery of mind, Rituals,

Dutifulness, Family bonding etc. are all the essence of good living and sustenance and should be followed by all in the society.

### Suggestions

The study has made several suggestions so that if the government or non-governmental organizations give importance to these issues in the future, it will be possible to deeply address the problems that exist in the lives of elderly people in rural areas and give appropriate positive attention to them.

**Universal senior income:** Establishing a robust, non-means-tested income for older people in rural areas that is not based on their BPL status can be a fruitful endeavour. This will ensure that no elder farmer lives in poverty. Even small amounts of money can help people survive and become less dependent.

**Rural employment and credit scheme:** Keeping elder farmers economically active, small income initiatives for them, such as subsidized micro-enterprise loans, community farming projects, or paid positions in government jobs should be undertaken.

**Development of community-based initiatives:** Developing community-based initiatives for fostering elder people can be a good venture to help elder people join self-help groups, local "senior forums" and lifelong learning centres in rural areas. For elder people, these can provide social support, computer literacy education and job training (such as organic farming or handicrafts).

**Making family support programs stronger:** Steps should be taken to make people more aware of the current old age allowances, including the Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension, and make them easier to reach, especially for people from lower castes who are not aware of it. Provision for tax exemptions or assistance to family caregivers who take care of the elderly should be provided wherever possible.

**Engagement of elder people in the village:** Offering elders' participation in the social decision-making process in the Gram Panchayat, village council etc. can boost up the spirit of elder people amid all their destitutions. Retired farmers can work as agricultural advisors or cultural heritage people, whereby they may be provided with a stipend or honorarium, and make this formal. The society will be benefited by their vast experience and in turn it will help maintain their dignity.

**Provision for health and mobility services:** Setting up mobile clinics for the elderly people in remote areas is of great significance and providing them low-cost health insurance. Provision of easier transportation for the elderly in rural areas (with ramps and chairs) should be arranged so they can still go to markets and festivals, which will help them feel less lonely and less dependent.

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