

## Reconnecting to Vedic Social System: Prospects and Encounters of Vanaprastha Stage

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### ***Abstract***

The Varnashrama system has become a buzzword among scholars and religious institutions for revamping Vedic social life in post-modern society. How far it is relevant in post-modern culture is debatable; however, few religious movements are trying to rebuild the practice in post-modern society. One of the movements practicing the system worldwide is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The movement is closely identified with this practice as the organization's founder emphasizes that its followers practice it. In this context, the present study explores the possibility of the practice in the current context. Eight senior Vanaprastha practitioners were identified using the snowball sampling method, and data was collected from them using the case study method. The analysis reveals that, despite not having many facilities to practice Vanaprastha, the followers still practice enthusiastically, managing their finances and guiding the younger generation by engaging in various spiritual activities that enable them to overcome the challenges of the elderly. Ultimately, the study suggested implementing Vanaprastha facilities and bringing spiritual culture into society.

### ***Introduction***

Aging is a contemporary social issue in terms of economic, psychological, and social burdens in developed, developing as well as underdeveloped nations (McCallum, 2023; Sarkar et al., 2023; Sivaramakrishnan, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2020; Rudnicka et al., 2020). Even though they possess rich life experience, the present generation, due to the technological revolution, cannot utilize it. Their rich life experience and traditional practices go under-utilized, leading to an enormous social and digital gap between the present and old generation in post-modern society (Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2023). Further, due to the breakdown of the joint family

system and the existence of a nuclear family and a single-parent family, elderly members are neglected without being given any care, move to institutional care, and are isolated in the post-modern society (Minkler & Estes, 2020; Agarwal et al., 2020). This causes a significant challenge to the government to provide shelter, healthcare, and emotional and financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (Rana, 2020). In order to address this issue of the elderly population, gerontological research (Sankardass, 2021) and welfare measures by the government contributed to some extent to solving their problems (Gangopadhyay, 2021). Nevertheless, the fundamental problems of the elderly persist. In this regard, the elderly population is not new to any society; they existed in the past also, and how they have managed their life without depending on their family, government, and other welfare agencies is subject to research. The present research explores the traditional aging process and its contemporary relevance through empirical exercise.

### ***Varnashrama System***

In the Sanatana religion,<sup>1</sup> the Varnashrama system was practiced. Manusmriti and various scriptures of our society describe the Varnashrama system that prevailed in the ancient Bharata Varsha (Sunkad, 2023; Adhikari, 2017). A twin social organisation exists; one is the Varna system and the other is the ashrama system, also referred to as the four stages of human life<sup>2</sup>. Vanaprastha is the third stage of human life,<sup>3</sup> indicating successful aging practices, especially for the elderly in the higher social hierarchy (Kumar, 2020; Singh & Mishra, 2018; Suryavanshi, 2016). The entire study focuses on this Vedic spiritual life practice of Vanaprastha that existed in traditional society, where the elderly phase was not at all the burden for the State, Family, or the elderly themselves. This paper further elaborated on how the practice existed, their ways of life, and its contemporary relevance.

### ***Vanaprastha lifestyle***

The literal meaning of the word Vana is forest. Prastha means one who has gone. It refers to “One who has gone to the forest” (Prabhu, 2020, p.66). It can be taken as going to the forest of Vrindavana, which is the common practice of Vaisnava Vanaprasthas. Srila Prabhupada<sup>4</sup> generally defined Vanaprastha as a retired life<sup>5</sup> and sannyasa as a renounced life. Not retired in a life of ease and irresponsibility,

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<sup>1</sup>The term Sanatana religion used instead of Hinduism, because the word Hinduism designated to the people lived in the Indus valley by the outsiders. There is no Vedic or scriptural reference for the world Hinduism.

<sup>2</sup>Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa

<sup>3</sup>Started practiced at the age of 50 years

<sup>4</sup>The Founder Acharya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

<sup>5</sup>More details about the traditional vanaprastha system is described in Srimad Bhagavatam 7.12.17–22, and the traditional behavior of a vanaprastha is described in Srimad Bhagavatam 11.17.33 and 11.18.1–12, 25, and 42, as well as in several other places in Srimad-Bhagavatam.

but in the sense of retiring from family responsibility for accepting a greater responsibility (Goswami, 1997). The word retire in English also refers to seclusion. In days gone by, this would usually be the situation for the vanaprasthas to live in seclusion in the forest (Tiwari & Pandey, 2013, p.289).

Further, the practice is described in Srimad Bhagavatam (Swami, 1987) as “Going to the forest is compulsory for everyone. It is not a mental excursion upon which one person goes and another does not. Everyone should go to the forest, at least as a vanaprastha. Forest-going means to take one-hundred-percent shelter of the Supreme Lord, as explained by Prahlada Maharaja in his talks with his father.”<sup>6</sup> Here, Vanaprastha’s essential purpose is taking complete shelter from God.

“There are four orders of spiritual life and four divisions in each of these ashrams. The divisions of the brahmacharyasrama are savitrya, prajapatya, brahma and brhat, and the divisions of the grihasthasrama are varta (professionals), sancaya (accumulators), salina (those who do not ask anything from anyone) and silonchana (those who collect grains from the paddy fields). Similarly, the divisions of the vanaprasthasrama are vaikhanasa, valakhilya, audumbara and phenapa, and the divisions of sannyasa are katicaka, bahudaka, hamsa and niskriya.” (Swami, 1996)<sup>7</sup> vaikhanasah--the section of men who retire from active life and live on half-boiled meals; valakhilya--one who quits his former stock of grains on receipt of more; audumbarah--one who lives on what he gets from the direction towards which he starts after rising from bed; phenapah--one who lives on the fruits which automatically fall from the tree; vane--in the forest”<sup>8</sup> Here a further breakdown of the divisions within vanaprastha is given, although this may be irrelevant to our present situation.

### *Duties of Vanaprastha*

The scriptures like Srimad Bhagavatam and Manusmirti give detailed accounts of the practice. For better understanding, I further referred to and summarized the duties and practices of Vanaprastha life from Srimad Bhagavatam<sup>9</sup>. The following are the primary duties of the Vanaprastha practice:

- Increase austerities - for self-purification
- Reduce eating and sleeping,
- Live very simply.
- Travel for preaching and pilgrimage.
- Maintain a high standard of cleanliness

<sup>6</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 3.24.41

<sup>7</sup>Chaitanya Charitamrita, Adilila, chapter-7, text-34, purport

<sup>8</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 3.12.43.

<sup>9</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 7.12.17–22

- Do not waste time unnecessarily<sup>10</sup>
- Study of scripture more.
- Philosophical research
- Deity worship
- Teacher
- Keep good associations and avoid loose association
- Do not engage in material social or family affairs
- Sleep on the floor
- Performing bhajan
- Begging – good for developing humility

The vanaprastha stage of life, tapasya, or austerity, is strongly recommended. Maharaja Prithu followed strictly all the rules of vanaprastha life, technically known as vaikhanaśa-ashrama<sup>11</sup>. The word vaikhanaśa-susammata is significant because in vanaprastha life the regulative principles must also be strictly followed. In other words, Maharaja Prithu was an ideal character in every sphere of life.<sup>12</sup> A person in vanaprastha life should not eat grains grown by tilling of fields. He should also not eat grains grown without tilling the field but are not fully ripe. Nor should a vanaprastha eat grains cooked in the fire. Indeed, he should eat only fruit ripened by the sunshine. He/She should prepare cakes to be offered in sacrifice from fruits and grains grown naturally in the forest. When he obtains some new grains, he should give up his old stock of grains. He/She should prepare a thatched cottage or take shelter in a cave in a mountain only to keep the sacred fire, but he/she should personally practice enduring snowfall, wind, fire, rain, and the sun's shining. The vanaprastha should wear matted locks of hair on his head and let his body hair, nails, and mustache grow. He should not cleanse his body of dirt. He should keep a waterpot, deerskin, and rod, wear the bark of a tree as a covering, and use garments colored like fire. Being very thoughtful, a vanaprastha should remain in the forest for twelve, eight, four, two, or at least one year. He should behave so that he will not be disturbed or troubled by too much austerity<sup>13</sup>. Ideally, the society supported the vanaprastha as they were Brahminical qualities like teaching, deity worship, writing, traveling, and delivering spiritual discourses. This brings sufficient charity for maintenance. They depend upon charity. The kingdom/temple or society willingly maintains them through chathiram/dharmasala (Kloos, 2011). They were considered precious assets to society by giving inspiration, knowledge, and example (Babu, 2022).

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<sup>10</sup>No gramya-katha or idle talk (loose talk) in vanaprastha between husband and wife should be curtailed, and talking other than Krishna katha kept to minimum. Control the tongue.

<sup>11</sup>The section of men who retire from active life and live on half-boiled meals.

<sup>12</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 4.23.4

<sup>13</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 7.12.17-22

In the past, the acceptance of vanaprastha was a more straightforward process that needed little defining. Men were married and lived responsible religious lives with their wives, without any divorce, until they were around fifty years old. Then they would leave the family situation, should they have the appropriate adhikara or qualification, and go to the forest for vanaprastha. The rules of vanaprastha were pretty clear; society supported it, encouraged it, facilitated it, etc. People were generally not so materialistic, the environment more favourable, and people were more capable of severe austerities. Nowadays, the situation is very complicated in the globalized world, so it is difficult to follow such rigid disciplines.

### ***Promotion of Vanaprastha life by spiritual organization***

There are significant spiritual organisations that promote the vanaprastha lifestyle in India and also abroad. Some of the spiritual organisations like Chinmaya Mission, PatanjaliYogpeeth and International Society for Krishna Consciousness were considered for discussion in the present study.

Chinmaya Mission, a Hindu spiritual organisation was established by the late Swami Chinmayananda in Chennai in 1953 and spread its branches worldwide. Currently, the organization is managed by his disciples and followed by many people as they get a sense of connection with tradition, which endows them with the life skills to deal with the perils of modern life (Pandya, 2016). The organization promoted the vanaprastha lifestyle and established PitamahaSadan<sup>14</sup> in 1995 in Allahabad (nearest to Trivenisangamam, which was considered a holy place) to provide its elderly followers to prepare and train them in spiritual practices to reduce the fear and anxiety of death and dying. The vanaprastha facility comprises accommodation, health facilities, and vegetarian food. The regular spiritual activities include the study of Vedanta, collective singing of devotional songs, attending spiritual discourses, and practicing yoga.

PatanjaliYogpeeth is situated in Haridwar (it is also one of the prominent holy places in India), Uttarakhand, managed by Swami Ramdevji Maharaj and Acharya Balkrishnaji Maharaj. Its phase II facility constructed 350 apartments for accommodating elderly people to practice the vanaprastha lifestyle. However, the facility in PatanjaliYogpeeth is a paid facility. The atmosphere created by the organization is relatively calm and spiritual. Elderly people can engage in various spiritual activities, meditation, and yoga practices (Kumar et al., 2014).

ISKCON was founded by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in New York City in 1966, and over a short period, its centers spread throughout the

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<sup>14</sup>Chinamya mission established its Pitamahasadana in other locations of prominent Indian cities like Kanpur, Rewa, Tamarai Pakkam, Coimbatore, Ellayapalle, Kothapatnam and Kolhapur.

world. It promotes daiva-varnashrama<sup>15</sup> Vedic life practices through its many farm communities. The founder through direct instruction to his disciples and also in his writings and discourses emphasized the importance of daiva-varnashrama practice in its centers in general and vanaprastha practice in particular among its followers where centers<sup>16</sup> situated in the holy places like Vrindavan, Dwaraka, and Mayapur<sup>17</sup>. The founder strongly emphasized that to give the household attachment, a householder in their retired life, to make spiritual advancement in spiritual concioncouness need to stay in Vrindavan<sup>18</sup>. Now the organization is managed by his disciples, but there is no facility available to practice vanaprastha to its followers as provided by Chinmaya mission and PatanjaliYogpeeth. However, many of them practice as instructed by their Founder. There is no special arrangement for shelter, but a facility for food and devotional engagement is provided in some centers. Under these circumstances, how the followers of ISKCON practicevanaprastha is researchable.

### **Methodology**

In this connection, the present study consideredvanaprastha practice by ISKCON followers for the empirical exercise as they donot have separate arrangements. In spite of it, how they practice is researchable. The following are the primary objectives of the present study:

- 1) To analyse how far the *vanaprastha* life is relevant to the present scenario.
- 2) To study the *vanaprastha* practitioners -- their way of life and challenges
- 3) To suggest how this practice is suitable for the common elderly population

The following question arises from analyzing of vanaprastha's practice from the traditional past. On what circumstances people decided to practice vanaprastha? How do others treat them? How do they relate? Are they still seen as husband and wife? Does the husband leave home and have any relationship with his former wife? Should they be given some particular respect? How are they maintained? How do they relate to children and former friends and family?How do they take care of their health? To whom do they interact? Where do they stay?

By keeping the above question in mind, how Vanaprastha practice is feasible for the contemporary situation where no institutional arrangement exists. Through the case study approach and snowball sampling method the vanaprastha practitioners were mainlyidentified in ISKCON Mayapur (because this center is the world headquarters),but they also practice in other centers like Vrindavan, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, etc. No database, record, or register exists in the movement, but they live in an established community to some extent. The researcher identified eight such

<sup>15</sup>Srila Prabhupada defined it as strictly following the principles of the vedas for the satisfaction of the Supreme personality of Godhead Sri Krishna

<sup>16</sup>Lecture on Srimad Bhagavatam (6.1.34-39) by Srila Prabhupada in Surat, December 19,1970

<sup>17</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam, 6.2.39, purport

<sup>18</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam, 7.5.5, purport

practitioners and interviewed them by taking their appointment and consent to conduct an interview. They were selected based on those who have been practicing vanaprastha atleast for the minimum period of five years. Out of eight, six practice vanaprastha from Mayapur, one from Vrindavan, and one from Ahmedabad. As per the respondent's request, their name is not revealed anywhere in the study. Information gathered through semi-structured interviews were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach.

### **Results and discussions**

The topic of Varnashrama is being dealt with in many ways by many spiritual organisations. However, establishing Varnashrama was certainly one of Srila Prabhupada's greatest desires. In ISKCON's early days, the *vanaprastha-asrama* was not considered very important because Prabhupāda's disciples were young. The focus was thus on the *brahmacari*, *grhastha*, and *sannyasaasramas*. After a considerable period, almost three decades after the disappearance of its Founder (in 1977), their disciples thought about the Vanaprastha system. In his many writings, Srila Prabhupada strongly emphasized the Varnashrama system and vanaprastha practice in particular. In his purport to Srimad Bhagavatam,<sup>19</sup> He wrote: "To prepare oneself for the better next life, one must get out of one's so-called home. The system of Varnashrama-dharma, or Sanatana-dharma, prescribes retirement from family encumbrances as early as possible after one has passed fifty years of age. Modern civilization is based on family comforts and the highest standard of amenities. Therefore, after retirement, everyone expects to live a very comfortable life in a well-furnished home decorated with fine ladies and children, without any desire to escape such a comfortable home. High government officers and ministers stick to their prize posts until death, and they neither dream nor desire to get out of homely comforts. Bound by such hallucinations, materialistic men prepare various plans for a still more comfortable life, but suddenly, cruel death comes without mercy and takes away the great planmaker against his desire, forcing him to give up the present body for another body. Thus, such a planmaker is forced to accept another body in one of the 8,400,000 species of life according to the fruits of his work. In the next life, persons who are too attached to family comforts are generally awarded a lower species of life on account of sinful acts performed during a long duration of sinful life, and thus, all the energy of human life is spoiled. In order to be saved from the danger of spoiling the human form of life and being attached to unreal things, one must take warning of death at the age of fifty, if not earlier. The principle is that one should take it for granted that the death warning is already there, even prior to the attainment of fifty years of age, and thus at any stage of life one should prepare himself for the next life. The system of the Sanatana-dharma institution is so made that the follower is trained for the better next life without any

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<sup>19</sup>Srimad Bhagavatam 2.1.16, purport

chance that the human life will be spoiled. The holy places worldwide are meant for the residential purposes of retired persons getting ready for a better next life”.

The words of Srila Prabhupada were very serious about the practice, so many of his disciples started practicing in their native place or the ISKCON centers where they practiced Krishna Consciousness. Nevertheless, few devotees travel to the holy places in India like Vrindavan, Dwaraka, and Mayapur to practice the Vanaprastha system. Most of them prefer Mayapur because of the rural background and world Head Quarters of ISKCON.

Table 1: Summary of the case study

Case No.	Age	Gender	Nativity	Vanaprastha practice since	Own residence or temple facility	Mode of practice
1	67	Female	Cannada	2010	Temple facility	Alone
2	70	Male	USA	2018	Own	As a couple
3	74	Male	England	2011	Temple facility	Alone
4	71	Female	Russian	2008	Temple facility	Alone
5	58	Female	Indian	2016	Temple facility	Alone
6	66	Male	England	2012	Own	As a couple
7	74	Female	Germany	2008	Own	Alone
8	70	Male	Indian	2011	Temple facility	Alone

From the above table, it is apparent that elders in ISKCON, irrespective of their nativity, are interested in practicing vanaprasthaasrama, getting engaged in the god consciousness activity, and living a simple life. The discussions with the practitioners were presented below:

In what circumstances did people decide to practice Vanaprastha?

The paramount understanding from the case studies implies that it is necessary that in married life, the systematic training is required so that the householder is suitably detached by the age of 50 or at the age of retirement to practice vanaprastha life. Similar to how it is necessary for one to become very active in family life after retirement from family life, it is necessary to control the mind and senses. This is possible when one fully engages in the Lord’s devotional service. The whole purpose of the Vedic system, the Vedic social order, is to enable one to achieve a peaceful death.



Married life is a concession combining a sense of gratification with a regulative life. It enables one quickly retire in the middle of life and engage fully in austerities to transcend material sense gratification.

### ***How do others treat them?***

The family members and relatives support their practice in general. One of the case studies reveals that she left the family<sup>20</sup> as they were not supportive of the vanaprastha practice. Otherwise, there is no contradiction or misleading in the practice. The ordinary people sometimes criticise their practice as they give up their family responsibility and practice in holy places. However, vanaprastha practice has an ultimate cause of a simple life, and engagement in spiritual activities makes them overcome stress or depression due to loneliness.

### ***How do they relate?***

The practice was visioned from a spiritual perspective. However, health fitness is essential to practice. Otherwise it is challenging. However, one practitioner follows irrespective of health challenges by taking the support of the neighbours<sup>21</sup>. When people with multiple physical or health disabilities cannot practice it as, they need special care and assistance.

### ***Are they still seen as husband and wife?***

They can be considered husband and wife without sexual or sentimental attachment. They engage separately in their spiritual activity according to their capability. They cook and eat together but sleep separately (not in the same room)

### ***Does the husband leave home and have any relationship with his former wife?***

No relationship is maintained. However, they communicate and share the pension money received or provided for maintenance. Sometimes, it happens to visit the country<sup>22</sup> for renewal of visa; they will spend time with the family and children.

### ***Should they be given some special respect?***

They were given special respect as they are acted as mentor, guides or teachers. They teach at the Mayapur institute for systematic and scientific study of Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.<sup>23</sup> They also teach in Sri Mayapur International School situated in the ISKCON Mayapur campus for its followers. They teach art and music, so the children love and respect them.<sup>24</sup> Some of them travel and preach to different

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<sup>20</sup>Refer case 5

<sup>21</sup>Refer case 7

<sup>22</sup>Refer case 1,2,3,4,6 and 7

<sup>23</sup>Refer case 2

<sup>24</sup>Refer case 4

centers<sup>25</sup>. They deliver spiritual discourses in various festivals and programs organized in the community. They were highly respected by the young and married people. Further, they take guidance and sometimes provide donations out of love.

### ***How are they maintained?***

Some of them receive pensions from their respective government. Those who do not receive pensions supported by their well-wishers, children and, in one case, the temple provides basic maintenance whenever required<sup>26</sup>. Some of them receive government pensions from their respective government as it is helpful to pay the rent and other maintenance.

### ***How do they relate to children and former friends and family?***

They never go and meet their children; in certain cases, they need to travel to their country to renew their visas. During that time, they spend some time with their family and friends. The children also sometimes visit them once a year or very often.

### ***How do they take care of their health?***

Living a simple life and maintaining a proper diet reduces 50% of health problems. Specific elderly health issues managed by the homeopathy medicine, in particular emergency condition they visit allopathy doctors, as the Mayapur community had hospital facility for its followers.

### ***To whom do they interact?***

With the neighbours, younger generations, temple authorities and service providers. Sometimes they participate in spiritual discussions and discourses. They also interact with the temple visitors while in sankirtan.

### ***Where do they stay?***

All the women practitioners stay in a temple facility situated in the holy place. The male members stay in their own accommodation except for one practitioner<sup>27</sup>. Those practicing vanaprastha were mostly alone and inspired by the teaching of Srila Prabhupada. They adopt their own practice with the guidance of their respective spiritual master and senior devotees. However, no common facility/training is available to practice *vanaprastha* in the ISKCON Community. The facility and training for *vanaprastha life* have not been ignored in the ISKCON community, as a few steps have been taken<sup>28</sup>, but these steps were not adequate and were gender partial<sup>29</sup>. The level of

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<sup>25</sup> Refer case 3

<sup>26</sup> Refer case 8

<sup>27</sup> Refer case 8

<sup>28</sup> There is a devotee named mother Devaki (disciple of Srila Prabhupada), imparts regular training for the married couple to practice vanaprasthaasrama during her stay in december and january in ISKCON Mayapur every year.

their satisfaction with this engagement is very high compared to the elders staying with family.<sup>30</sup>

There is a great need for the *Vānaprastha* Facility in general and in ISKCON in particular. Elderly members spend their last period in holy places, make their lives simple, and actively engage with their peers, bringing peace and wisdom to society; the transition from living with family to living without family requires support and association. The systematic training will empower householders interested in becoming firmly established in the *vanaprastha*-asrama (to adopt the principles of detachment, austerity and simple life). The *vanaprastha practitioners* will be precious community resources and can be engaged as consultants for various services in society especially in guiding the younger generation.

Indeed the path of *vanaprastha* in whatever form should aim at increasing our dependence on God and reducing our attachment to sense gratification. Sense gratification creates envy and destroys our spirit of devotion and the desire, or even awareness, of the need to preach. By indulgence in material sense gratification we become miserable and our remembrance of God is clouded over. The practice is in greater need in the contemporary situation as the problems of the elderly are popping up. I hope there will be a massive army of sincere *vanaprasthas* so that the rich life experience and engagement of elderly are maintained in society.

## Conclusion

The elderly are very important members of society and embody rich life experiences, wisdom, and self-realisation. They need to be respected for their guidance and advice, and for passing down traditions and values to the younger generation. They should not be neglected or isolated in the house or streets. They need to be trained in the spiritual cultural practices to spend their last phase of life in simplicity and austerity to increase their devotion to God to ultimately prepare for death. From the case studies, it is evident that this practice is feasible in the post-modern society, provided that they require facility. Whether they practice as a couple or individually, according to their capability they render some sort of devotional activity to prepare themselves internally for a life of simplicity and austerity for a better sustainable society. *Vanaprastha* practice is the ultimate solution for the present society to solve the many problems of the elderly. The challenges that come over here is religious diversity. Because this spiritual culture practice is part of the Sanathana Dharma Principles, where other faith

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<sup>29</sup> The small facility available only for female and maintenance to be paid (Rs. 3500 pm)

<sup>30</sup> Harasankar (2017) in his study on elders residing in Kolkata find dissatisfied life due to less engagement or no engagement. They never feel valued in society.

elderly may find it reluctant to practice. However, the concept of the holy place is common to all the religions (Coleman&Elsner, 1995: 46). The government or organisations provide the basic living facility for elderly members after their retirement through systematic training and education to bring Vedic wisdom into the post-modern society is essential. They will be engaged in devotional practices according to their faith, reading the Holy Scriptures and guiding the younger generation through their life experience. They can easily transcend social, psychological, and economic problems. Nevertheless, it is not at all easy to introduce a spiritual, cultural process in our modern mundane society. It is like swimming against the current, but we have to try. As they become more and more involved in spiritual practices, the mind achieves peace and tranquility. Hence, Vanaprastha practice is an essential step towards changing the world.

**Case 1:** Aged 67 years, native of Canada practicing Krishna Consciousness from 1974. She has been following Vanaprastha ashrama with consent from the living partner from 2010 onwards. As a grihastha, the children were brought up nicely in Krishna Consciousness; they got married and settled. At this point, she decided to take up the vanaprasthaashrama as she was more familiar and lived long time in Mayapur during her early days (from 1991 to 2001). She decided to practice at Vanaprastha ashram in Mayapur and due to her dedicated service to Mayapur TV, the temple management provided an accommodation facility at KuntiBhavan (an arrangement for elderly lonely women in Mayapur). She practices as per the vanaprastha principles. Earlier she visits regularly to temple for darshan and Srimad Bhagavatam class, but now, due to her eyesight problem and other health impediments, she has expressed her inability to visit the temple. She preaches online, reads Srila Prabhupada books regularly, and cares for the neighbors.

**Case 2:** aged 70 years, a disciple of His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada from USA, practicing Krishna Consciousness from 1973 onwards. He and his wife have been practicing vanaprasthaashrama from 2018 onwards. He did goldsmith business earlier and served in Prabhupada village in Sandy Ridge, USA. In 2018, he decided to take Vanaprastha ashram in Mayapur, as there is no facility is available for grihastha to practice at Vanaprastha ashrama; they stay outside of the ISKCON temple premises. He frequently travels to north India to conduct Bhakti Vriksha programs, seminars, and public programs. Both of them follow their sadhanas from Mangalaarti to sayanaarati. He emphasized the care for the aged Srila Prabhupada disciple in the form of the vanaprastha institution in Mayapur. ISKCON Mayapur is the ideal place to perform the vanaprastha ashram because of teaching at the Mayapur Institute, delivering discourses, and participation in harinamsankirtan

and festivals in the temple. He did not find much difference between his grihastha life and vanaprastha life, as they do not have children.

**Case 3:** Aged 74 years, native of England practicing Krishna Consciousness from 1971 and an initiated disciple of the Founder. He has practiced Vanaprastha Ashrama in Mayapur since 2011. Sometimes, his children come and meet him. However, he stays alone, faces physical challenges, and unable to cook. In his early stages of life, he owned a workshop to make Prabhupada's murti and his lotus foot print due to his long time dedicated service and also a disciple of the Founder. ISKCON Mayapur provided an accommodation facility and appointed an assistant to care for him on his daily needs. The doctor from ISKCON Community Hospital visits him regularly for health check-ups. He also published a few art books for children on Srila Prabhupada's Biography. He cannot visit a temple or is not able to do any physical service. However, he guides many devotees who come from England to visit him and spend time with him. Sometimes, he trains Sri Mayapur International School children on various art and making of murtis of the acharyas.

**Case 4:** Aged 71 years, native of Russia practicing Krishna Consciousness from 1972, and an initiated disciple of the Founder. She is following Vanaprastha ashrama after the departure of his living partner in 2008. As a widow with no children, she was cared for financially by devotees from Russia residing in Mayapur, and she lives in the facility provided for single elderly women (KuntiBhavan). She attends everyday Manglaarati, Darshnaarati, and Srimad bhgavatam class and engages in flower seva in the morning. She cooks herself and takes rest after her breakfast. Then, in evening, she goes for sankirtan and preaches the glories of the Lord to the visitors arriving at the temple. She also provides guidance and discourse to the Russian community. She practices as per the vanaprastha principles. She holds any bank account or savings and depends entirely on the mercy of the Lord and his devotees for survival.

**Case 5:** Aged 58 disciple of His Holiness Giriaj Swami, staying in Mayapur since 2010, separated from husband (as the husband is not favorable towards her devotional practices), and practicing vanaprastha from 2016 onwards. She received inspiration from Srila Prabhupada's books regarding the importance of Vanaprastha practice. She received accommodation by the arrangement of her spiritual master in the Kuntibhavan and maintenance provided by the congregation members of ISKCON Chowpatty. She performs services like making intricate woolen clothing for deities in ISKCON Ekachakra temple (3 sets per year) and teaching art to the school children. She prepares food of her own and consumes it two times a day. Apart from this service, she studies daily Bhagavad-gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, and Chaitanya Charitamritam. She visits the temple every day for the darshanaarati. She finds

challenges in practicing because of her health issues, severe lymph nodes, diabetes, and high cholesterol.

**Case 6:** Aged 66, a disciple of Krishna Kshetra swami from England. Have been staying in Mayapur from 2012 onwards and practicing vanaprastha along with his wife. Receiving pension from his country and rented an apartment in Mayapur. Attends all the festivals and assisting the management of ISKCON Mayapur on request regarding strategic planning. Travel sometime to Vrindavan and other holy places during important festivals. Doing daily spiritual practices and reading of Srila Prabhupada books regularly. Attending arati and hearing Srimad Bhagavatam class daily at temple. Not major health issues and staying peaceful as the economic condition is good.

**Case 7:** Aged 74, native of Germany and disciple of the Founder. She receives a pension from Germany and is separated from her husband to practice Vanaprastaha. She has been practicing vanaprastha for the past 15 years, and initially, she stayed in Vrindavan, then Mumbai, and now in Mayapur. Staying in rented accommodation, sometimes the son comes to meet her once a year. Due to specific physical challenges not visiting the temple regularly but attendingsankirtan daily takes place in the evening on the temple premises. She has started practicing by the inspiration of reading Srila Prabhupada books. Lives a simple life and conduct seminars and kirtan in her house to protect the environment very often to young and married devotees stays in Mayapur. Sometimes, she invites the children nearby, celebrates the festivals in the park, and distributes some sweet prasadam to all of them. She also provides guidance to married people who come from Germany to Sridham Mayapur.

**Case 8:** Aged 70, native of Ahmedabad and disciple of BhatiVikas Swami. He currently resides with devotees in the Baroda ISKCON temple and renders service in the temple as he is facing financial challenges not able to go and stay in Vrindavan or Mayapur to practice vananprastha stage. Practicing since 2011, wife is staying with son and practicing devotion and guiding the married devotees to practice Krishna Conciouness and engaged in temple services. Food and accommodation in the temple, sometimes take maintenance money from the temple for health issues and to travel to holy places to attend festivals. Deliver discourses and sometimes teach at Mayapur Institute and Academy.

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