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RETIRE right here

Vaishna Roy

A new idea sees developers assigning a part of their regular projects towards fully planned retirement flats, thus bringing the elderly into the mainstream. Vaishna Roy reports

“We don’t believe in pushing people into separate communities,” says Arun Gupta, the affable CEO of Age Ventures India (AVI). That in a nutshell sums up what this non-profit venture is trying to do for senior housing in the country. In a new and welcome move, AVI is teaming up with developers to persuade them to convert a portion of their new projects into elderly-friendly housing units. Thus, rather than get isolated in retirement homes, the elderly can live and interact with the larger community and yet be cared for with all the little frills that make the sunset years carefree.

AVI liaises with leading developers working on large housing projects or mini townships and works with them to dedicate 15-20 per cent of their units into a separate retirement block. “We don’t retire from life, we just retire from work,” says Gupta. The idea is to provide a setting where the couple can take it easy, enjoy value-added pursuits, be safe and yet stay in the mainstream.

AVI ties up with developers across cities. For instance, it has tied with Shriram Properties in Chennai, Brigade Group in Bangalore, Ramprastha Property in Gurgaon, and the ARG Group in Jaipur. In Chennai, 134 of the 1,800-odd apartments at the Shriram Shankari Complex in Guduvanchery will be set aside for Sanjeevani, the senior living project.

The idea makes sense in more ways than one. As Ashok Iyer, VP, Shriram Properties, says, “It’s a purely economic solution. Surging land costs, even in suburbs, make it unviable for senior citizens. Here, we can even give them a swimming pool or badminton court.”

Melur Meadows, an idyllic retirement village in Coimbatore, is talking to developers for a similar tie-up. Says Maj. Sathyanarayanan, CEO, “The idea is to move away from exclusive spaces for the elderly and create inclusive spaces, where they can share common life facilities with the larger community.” He adds that the elderly need to feel a sense of belonging, to see younger people. “We must find an Indian solution for our seniors.”

It is estimated that the 60+ population in India will touch 240 million by 2050. The demographic is growing at 3.8 per cent per annum compared to the general rate of 1.8 per cent. Unlike the West, where senior living is a mature industry, India has woken up to this segment only in the last decade or so. A number of retirement communities, both middle-end and luxurious, have come up across the country, but this is the first time that the idea of merging them with regular housing has been taken up.

It’s a timely move. As a Jones Lang LaSalle report says, a significant section of seniors today are independent, financially stable, and well-travelled. They want to pursue hobbies or social work. They are healthy and alert and don’t appreciate being shunted out of sight. Then there’s the NRI phenomenon — children in the West too far away to take care of parents here but concerned enough to look for holistic solutions; and NRI retirees who want to come home to world-class senior spaces.

These units have — besides the basics such as kitchen and dining room, 24-hour medical and nursing services, security and green spaces — auditoriums, library and Internet zones, spas and yoga rooms, hobby and indoor game areas with pottery, painting, carrom board and more. Even more useful, there are valet and concierge services to pay bills, book tickets and so on. Says Gupta: “AVI has even collaborated with SRM University for seniors to take coaching or special classes there.” Owners pay a monthly fee for catering, medical and other value-added services to AVI, which outsources these functions.

AVI has tied up with Help Age India for training its staff in geriatric issues and for help in setting up counselling and physio centres. It has also tied up with MHA, UK for laying down policies, procedures and safety standards. MHA will also carry out annual audits. The block comes with an assisted living facility that a couple can move into if needed. This echoes the global trend for continuing care, where a single campus provides the range of services from

independent and assisted living to skilled nursing care.

As Gupta says, “If a retirement home is really good, nobody should need to move out.” And if retirees can spend their sunset years in a sunrise environment, it sounds like a great solution.

1

• Can be bought by anyone above 18 but residency is only for those above 60. The flats are priced at a slight premium. Thus, a Shriram Sanjeevani flat costs Rs 3,000 per sq. ft vs. Rs 2,600 for a regular flat.

2

• The premium covers the larger common area (1,050 sq. ft vs. 800 sq. ft) plus age-friendly features such as grab rails, alarms, and non-skid tiles.

The practical...

- **Doctors and paramedics**
- **Physiotherapy centre**
- **24x7 ambulance & security**
- **Central kitchen and dining**
- **24-hour caregivers**
- **Hobbies, indoor games, yoga**

And the thoughtful

- **Wider lifts & stairwells**
- **Benches on landings**
- **Platforms near doorways (to rest bags)**
- **Non-skid tiles, grab rails, shower stools**
- **Ergonomical designs**
- **Sockets at wheelchair level**