

The age factor

Designing homes for senior citizens involves careful planning and attention to detail in order to foster their requirements and make homes livable, says Suchita Patil

Most housing societies have a large number of senior citizens, and there is now a growing awareness that they need spaces that are adapted to their needs. Senior citizens have a number of requirements and a normal house or society complex may not be well equipped with the right facilities. Architects and designers point out the importance of building senior citizen-friendly spaces, with facilities that will help them lead a healthy, pleasant and a hassle free-life.

M H Dalal, CMD, M H Dalal Architects Pvt Ltd, says, "The concept and ethos while designing a home for senior citizen should be such that it allows them to live independently with dignity. There are certain parameters, which need to be considered while designing. A few of the physical parameters are that all edges and corners must be rounded as far as possible, the width of all doors should be adequate enough to make them wheelchair accessible, there should be a sliding bathroom door to facilitate easy movement, wide passageways, grip rails at strategic locations, no level difference in flooring, anti skid tiles, and switches placed at manageable levels, among other things. Besides, the complex should also have good amenities and infrastructure that are unique to such a complex, such as a library, small canteen, physiotherapy clinic instead of a gym, multi-purpose hall, advanced security systems like video door phones, panic buttons, and pendant buttons to help in case of emergency."

Niteen Parulekar, design principal, Niteen Parulekar Architects Pvt Ltd, says, "With age, their bones become fragile and eyesight weakens. So stress should be given on maximum use of natural lights with cross-ventilation, dimmable lights with light switches located in accessible locations along with use of technology like video-door phones, alarm system. An old age home must have easy access to hotline services like hospitals, ambulance in case of emergency."

Citing the demand, many developers too are showing interest and coming with senior citizen-friendly facilities in their projects. R Karthik, senior vice-president marketing, Lodha Group, says, "There is a definite need for designing homes for senior citizens. With regards to safety, there are motion sensors for automatic lighting in bathrooms along with medical facilities to take care of any emergency. For example, we have signed with the Hinduja Hospital to set up a medical facility at our township at Dombivali for our projects Casa Bella and Casa Bella Gold."

Kaizad Hateria, GM, Corporate customer relations and sales, Rustomjee, says, "Townships or gated communities are the best for designing homes for senior citizen homes. Providing security through video conferencing, guard on call through videophones, grills at the door, through checks in gated communities while entry and exit of a person in the township will make it more user friendly. At our project Rustomjee Urbania, we have even consulted experts for fixing lampposts such that the height and

distance between the two lampposts, avoids the falling of shadows directly on the ground, which will be very helpful for them."

Manju Yagnik, vice-chairperson, Nahar

Group, points out that the concept is still market driven. The demand exists but both senior citizens and developers are yet to wake up towards this need. She says, "The facilities enabling wheelchair entry into the lobbies, anti-skid tiles, accessible light points and bells in the house and providing at least one stretcher-lift in the normal projects can really help senior citizens in their day-to-day life. Considering the security, avoiding multiple entries, video door phones along with providing easy shopping, medical and recreation facilities within their complex are necessary."

Talking about the demand and response from the consumers, M H Dalal says, "Senior residences across the world are of different types including adult living, enriched living, assisted living and specialty care. In India, the demand is high for assisted living space, but at the moment, we mainly have the adult living module and we are trying to convince developers to develop some part of their huge projects in the form of an 'oasis' for senior citizens, and have at least 5% of their living spaces designed that are conducive to senior citizen homes." Golden Nest in Pune by Vascon Engineers has been developed and work is going on another project in Bhopal by Aakriti Dwellings Pvt Ltd. The developers in Mumbai too are actively discussing such projects. He strongly feels that there exists a vibrant demand and that entrepreneurs should take development and management of such homes as a business module as is prevailing in other parts of the developed world."

With the trend moving towards nuclear families, creating an environment that enables an older person to feel independent and gives them the pleasure of staying in their own house should be the aim of all home design.

INPUTS: NEHA DANI