

Generation Gap and Elderly Care: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Elderly care has drawn global attention during the last three decades. Gradual ascendance of the graying population in India and generation gap between the older persons and their caregivers has emerged as a matter of concern and issue to be redressed sooner than later. This paper is an endeavor to know about the demographic profile of elderly population in India and to understand the generation gap in the context of Indian society and also to analyze issues and challenges of elderly care in view of the generation gap. It is discernible that the increase in the percentage of elderly population has been higher ever since India attained independence. Its rate has registered/projected to be recorded many fold increase paving way to aging in the country. Every generation tends to develop distinctive consciousness resulting in generation gap which results in the issue of elderly care. Theories of generation establish that humankind including the Indian population has as many as five generations i.e. from silent generation to generation Z and in between generation(s) of caregivers known to be a sandwiched generation. In Indian society family members are the main care providers to the elderly persons as an overwhelming population of senior citizens stay with their family members at homes. Still socio-economic, health and psychological issues concerning elderly care need to be redressed formulating multi pronged strategy

Keywords: ElderlyCare, Generation gap, issues of Older Persons.

Introduction

Generation Gap and Elderly Care: Issues and Challenges

Global burgeoning aging population has attracted the attention of gerontologists, sociologists, social workers, policy makers, planners and global, international & national organizations, various NGOs and other stakeholders. Rapidly changing demographic profile and change in age structure together have thrown a new challenge and raised multiple socio-economic, health and psychological issues in Indian Society as well. Older persons have different emotional, physical and resource needs and therefore, these are to be met ensuring proper elderly care particularly in view of generation gap that normally exists between the older persons and care providers. Ever-growing generation gap between the older persons and their caregivers i.e. younger generations owing to host of factors including growing digital divide, increasing nuclearization of families, occupational mobility, individualism and the like have been making elderly care a more challenging issue than ever before. Keeping in view the societal realism, the General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled 'UN Principles for Older Persons' in 1991 and 'Care of Elderly'¹ as one of its four main themes. With declaration of 1999 as 'International Year of Older Persons', one of the four priority areas was identified to focus on 'Relationship between generations'. In India, multiple Ministries and departments including Ministry of Social Justices and Empowerment, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Registrar General of India-Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment and National Sample Survey and Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation are some of the main among them. Recently, Government of India has come up with a comprehensive report on 'Elderly in India 2021', encompassing wide ranging issues concerning older persons in the country. This state of affairs is indicative of growing global concern to address the issue of elderly care vis-à-vis generation gap.

Review of Literature

Latest studies overtly and covertly relating to the topic under discussion are being reviewed and given below;

Agewell Foundation (2021)² in its study conducted across India on a sample size 10,000 elderly persons as a unit of study during August-September 2021 on the topic 'Covid Impact on the Elderly in India' revealed that generation gap with respect to three fourth of the respondents has widened in the country during last two years particularly owing to different spells of COVID related lockdowns and restrictions like social distancing. Bridging of growing inter-generational necessitates digital training to digitally illiterate to help them stay connected in the digital world.

William H Frey (2018)³ in his paper entitled 'Old versus Young: The Cultural Generation Gap' focusing on the US population disseminated startling information that the year 2011



Sujit Kumar Surroch
Associate Professor
Dept. of Sociology
SCVB government
College, Palampur,
H. P, India



Anita Surroch
Associate Professor
Dept. of Sociology
SCVB government
College, Palampur,
H.P, India

witnessed unprecedented year in the history of the country when more minority babies (Hispanics, blacks, Asians, and other nonwhite races) were born than the white babies. By the year 2030 when they would grow into adulthood, the baby boomers-the generation that was born in the USA during 1946-64 would need huge expenditure to take care of their needs. The country is going to face unprecedented situation as during the years of the baby boom the share of immigrant population in the overall population was below 5%, which was at an all time low. To quote the finding of the renowned demographer 'The cultural generation gap between the young and the old can exacerbate the competition for resources because the rise in the number of senior dependents is occurring more rapidly among whites than among minorities, for whom dependent children is a larger issue'. This state of affairs is going to pass through a stage of cultural generation gap in communities of all sizes.

Christine Ro (2021)⁴ in his paper entitled 'Why the sandwich generation is so stressed out' observed that the recent recession, COVID and shifting demographics together are intensifying pressures on the sandwich generation who have to take care of the elderly and also to support their children. In the United Kingdom 3 percent of the total population is providing care to two generations. When seen from the point of view of caregiving to the elderly, cases of 'triple-decker sandwich' or 'double sandwich' are on the rise. Such sandwiched persons are the ones who themselves are in their 60s, providing care to their grandchildren so that their adult children could work and are also giving care to their own parents who are in their 90s. Thus increasing life expectancy, modern occupational needs and bonding with older and younger members of family have resulted in a double sandwich of the care providers who themselves are in their old age.

Objectives of the Study

Main objectives of this paper are as given below;

1. To know about demographic profile of elderly population in India
2. To understand generation gap in the context of Indian society
3. To analyze issues and challenges of elderly care in view of generation gap

Methodology

Information was elicited from census reports, various government publications, reports and journals. Different theories concerning aging and generation gap were consulted from books and other reliable sources of information

Demographic profile of elderly population in India

Population aging is a global phenomenon. With the passage of time, every country in the world is experiencing growth in the size and proportion of older persons in their population. Graying population is an inevitable demographic reality that is associated with improvements in the health and medical care system. With longevity and declining fertility rates, the population of older persons (60 years and above) is growing faster than the general population globally. This phenomenon is known as population ageing. When population age increases rapidly, this has implications on the socio-economic and health status of the elderly⁵. As per National Policy for Older Persons (NPOP) 1999, elderly person who is also known as a senior citizen is a person who is 60 years and above. The data compressed in table 1 reveals that a gradual ascendance in the population of elderly persons has been recorded during the last fifty years. Population in this segment of the general population increased from 24.7 million in 1961 to 103.8 million in 2011. It is further projected to reach 137.9 in 2021 and 193.8 in 2031 with male population outnumbering the female counterparts.

Table 1
Elderly Population in India(In millions)

| Source | Total | | | Rural | Urban |
|--------------------|--------|------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Person | Male | Female | | |
| Census 1961 | 24.7 | 12.4 | 12.4 | 21.0 | 3.7 |
| Census 1971 | 32.7 | 15.8 | 16.9 | 27.3 | 5.4 |
| Census 1981 | 43.2 | 21.1 | 22.0 | 34.7 | 8.5 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|------|
| Census 1991 | 56.7 | 27.3 | 29.4 | 44.3 | 12.4 |
| Census 2001 | 76.6 | 38.9 | 37.8 | 57.4 | 19.2 |
| Census 2011 | 103.8 | 52.8 | 51.1 | 73.3 | 30.6 |
| Census 2021(Projections) | 137.9 | 66.8 | 71.1 | NA | NA |
| Census 2031(Projections) | 193.8 | 92.9 | 100.9 | NA | NA |

As regards decadal growth, in every decade from 1951-61 to 2001-2011, the population of elderly has registered a higher rate of increase as compared to the general population. This trend is projected to continue during 2011-21 and 2021-31. If calculated by percentage share of elderly population in the total population of the country, it has shown gradual ascendance during 1951-61 to 2001-2011. It has increased from 5.6 percent of the general population in 1961 to 8.6 in 2011. It is further projected to reach 10.1 percent in 2021 and 13.1 in 2031. Demographically speaking, while elderly population has increased by double the rate as compared to general population during 2001-2011, it is

Table 2
Decadal growth of Population (% change) ⁷

| period | Total population | Elderly population | Percentage share of Elderly Population | Female | Male |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1951-61 | 21.6 | 23.9 | 5.6 | 5.8 | 5.5 |
| 1961-71 | 24.8 | 33.7 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 5.9 |
| 1971-81 | 24.7 | 33.0 | 6.4 | 6.6 | 6.4 |
| 1981-91 | 23.9 | 29.7 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 6.7 |
| 1991-2001 | 21.5 | 25.2 | 7.4 | 7.8 | 7.1 |
| 2001-2011 | 17.7 | 35.5 | 8.6 | 9.0 | 8.2 |
| 2011-2021 (Projections) | 12.4 | 35.8 | 10.1 (Projections) | 10.7 (Projections) | 9.6 (Projections) |
| 2021-2031 (Projections) | 8.4 | 40.5 | 13.1 (Projections) | 14.0 (Projections) | 12.3 (Projections) |

projected to witness about three fold ascendance and five time increase during 2011-21 and 2021-31 respectively. Thus India although is considered to be demographically a young country with a median age at 28.4 as per Indian Population (2021) World meter, yet rate of increase of population of older persons unearths that Indian population is aging. As per findings of the study by Christine Ro (2021) care givers in India might be double sandwich in the decades to follow.

Generation gap in the context of Indian Society

In order to understand the generation gap it is imperative to examine it theoretically. Karl Mannheim, a German Sociologist in his work entitled 'Das Problem der Generationen' which is also known to be the first theory of generations or Sociology of Generations which was published in 1928 and its translated version in English was published in 1952 under title 'The Problems of Generations' analyzed generations. He defined a generation as a group of individuals of similar ages whose members have experienced a noteworthy historical event within a set period of time. He laid stress that a generation tends to develop distinctive consciousness which is also dependent on the pace of social change.⁸ It merits a mention here that social generational studies of Mannheim focused on the youth of western societies only.

Straus and Howe (1991)⁹ in their book 'Generations: The History of America's Future 1584 to 2069', on the bases of case studies, delineated a specific span of time of about 20 years for emergence of a generation. For them the time span of generation was considered to be 20 years. However, there could be some variation in this time span depending on certain other factors.

Bengtson V.L. however, argues that the generation gap is based on the differences by generation and also by sex in the perception of parent-child relations.

Mendez N. (2008)¹⁰ stated that the generation gap is a difference in values and attitudes between one generation and another, especially between young people and their parents. These differences stem from older and younger people not understanding each other because of their differences in experiences, opinions, habits, and behavior. In the case of Indian Society, at least theoretically, the differences between generations on the bases of their experiences, habits and behavior are likely to be wider, because members of three to four generations inhabit one household. However, a large amount of empirical research unearths that the differences across generations tend not to be that wide and deep because the older generations keep socializing with the younger ones and the younger generations also keep sharing their experiences with the elderly.

Identification of generation-wise elderly and caregivers in the context of Indian Society

Generation gap may be described as a difference of thoughts, habits, life styles, approach towards life and various social issues between the members of two generations. Though the generation gap has remained a societal reality yet it has widened noticeably during the past two-three decades or so. Before embarking on the analysis of social realism as it exists in the Indian Society, it is worthwhile to know about various generations and there nomenclature developed by social scientists;

The Silent Generation

Members of this generation were born somewhere between 1928-1945. This generation in the UK is usually described as a reference to strict childhood discipline. The crux of such discipline is that children during that span of time were taught 'to be seen but not heard'. It is a generation of older persons. As per SRS Report 2016, about 3.2 per cent of total population or 37.6 percent of elderly persons belong to this generation in India.

Baby Boomers

The term Baby Boomers is derived from the boom in births that took place after the soldiers returned from World War II. Majority of this segment comprises elderly as members of this generation were born between 1946-1965. Data of census reveals that about 5.3 percent and 3.6 percent of the total population belong to elderly and caregiver categories respectively. In other words, about 60 percent of the population in this segment constitutes older persons whereas the rest of the forty percent is care providers and is also on the threshold of becoming of elderly.

Generation X

This generation is an important segment of the population who comprise caregivers to the elderly persons. They were born somewhere between 1966-1980. About 15.3 percent of the total population in the country belongs to this generation.

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| Millennial Generation | Also known as Generation Y, it is a part of the generation who was born between 1981-1996 and was the first to have exposure to internet & technological advancements. About 24.9 percent of the total population belongs to this category. |
| Generation Z | Born during 1997 onwards, a generation glued to the screen for most of the time, is with mobile, desktop, laptop or tabs. 47.5 percent of the total population falls in this category. |
| Aging, Elderly and Caregivers | aging is an inevitable process. The word old age is horrifying one. Had not Buddha come across an old man he might not have decided to renunciate the world. The 'disengagement theory' of aging establishes that people in their Sunset years tend to disengage from their activities. However, 'theory of active aging' laid stress on the fact that elderly persons should keep themselves engaged in one or the other activity for a healthy and happy aging. It's amply clear from the analysis of various generations above, that elderly in India constitute the whole of the Silent Generation and the majority of the Baby Boomers. However, the Caregivers comprise forty percent of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennial Generation or Generation Y and Generation Z. However, out of the above care providing three generational groupings, the third one i.e. Generation Z is the one who is either pursuing their studies or is on the threshold of taking up their professions. Hence, in the Indian context they are partly caregivers to their elderly. However, findings of the Agewell Foundation suggest that the digital gap between the older persons and generation Z stands in the way of care providing. |
| Issues and challenges of elderly care in view of generation gap | Elderly population is a repository of knowledge and wisdom. This segment of population remained guide, philosopher, mentor, torch bearer and culture transmitter to the younger members of society for millennia in Indian society. As per NSO (National Statistical Office) 'Elderly in India 2021 Report' the elderly population i.e. population aged 60 and above is more than 10 percent of total population of the country. Burgeoning growth of elderly population in India during the last half century has catapulted their absolute number to 138 million. It merits a mention that this number is more than the total population of all of about 200 countries except 9 most populous countries on the earth. Elderly care has emerged as an important issue in India during the past few decades. Establishment of more and more 'Old Age Homes' in the country is also indicative of the fact that the issue of older persons' care needs to be redressed sooner than later. On the basis of above categorization of generations following points emerge; |
| Heterogeneity of Older Persons | Elderly population is not a homogeneous entity. On the basis of age itself they are known by the nomenclature as given below. |
| Young – Old | this group of old persons ages between 60 -70 years. |
| Old – Old | Age of this sub-group of elderly persons is between 70-80 years |
| Oldest - Old | Age of this segment of population is above 80 years. Some of the demographers and other social scientists have offered different divisions of elderly on the basis of their age. |
| Variation in Issues | Needs, issues, problems and challenges of each sub-group of older persons are different on account of social, economic, psychological and health grounds. |
| Gender | Elder males and females confront a few common and several different issues viz. widowhood. Majority of elderly persons in India fall in this category. Being widow & old in Indian society is a double jeopardy due to multiplicity of dos and don'ts attached to it. |
| Family Structure | On the basis of number of generations living together in the Indian society, one can find following types of families; |
| Joint Family | In this type of family members of three to four generations live together. |
| Nuclear Family | In such families parents & their unmarried children stay together |
| Community | Broadly three types of communities are found in the Indian Society. |

| | |
|---|--|
| Rural Community | People inhabiting rural areas are known to be belonging to rural community. As per census 2011, 69.8 percent of the total population in the country inhabits rural areas. It is a distinct community on account of life styles, occupation and ecosystem. |
| Urban Community | Urban community is a group of persons inhabiting a certain town or city or a cantonment board. |
| Tribal Community | Tribal community is defined as such under the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian Constitution. People of this community could be residing in rural or urban areas. But they are distinguished from other communities on account of their name, culture, dress, language, occupation and host of other factors. Issue of caregiving is different in different communities which can be illustrated with the help of following points; |
| Old Age Homes | A new system of Old Age Homes has emerged in the Indian urban settings. It is less to be found in rural areas & more or less non-existent in tribal communities. |
| Occupational Imperatives | Agriculture & allied activities continue to be the main occupation in rural communities where elderly also actively participate. However, in urban settings due to pursuance of modern occupations, the elderly tend to be free and non-engaged, whereas caregivers remain occupied in their occupational callings. |
| Mobility | While movement from one place to another place becomes a challenge for elderly in cities due to high volume of traffic on the roads, less availability of companions and also due to safety and security issues. However, dimensions of this problem are different in rural & and tribal areas. |
| Caregivers - A Sandwiched Generation | Caregivers' generation in India is known to be a sandwiched generation in view of the fact that it has to take care of the older persons, discharge personal professional/occupational responsibilities and also has to work for the fulfillment of the needs of youngsters. Thus care providers remain sandwiched between the older persons and young members of the family. Thus care giving poses a unique challenge in India owing to the following reasons; |
| Social Issues | The elderly has a lot of free time & want to participate in social events like marriages, fairs & festivals and mourning etc. irrespective of distance from their respective homes. Companionship to such events necessitates time, money and energy of care providers. This realism can be better understood by knowing about living arrangement of the older persons; |

Table 3

Percentage distribution of aged persons by place of stay and type of living arrangement in India, 2017-18

| All India | Older person with place to stay | | living with spouse only | living with spouse & other members | living with children |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Own house | Other's house | | | |
| All | 94.2 | 5.8 | 17.9 | 64.1 | 14.5 |

Data given in table 3 reveals that the overwhelming majority (94.2%) of older persons in India reside in their own houses and just 5.8 percent stay in others' houses. About two third of all the senior citizens live with their spouses and other members of family whereas about one fifth stay with their spouses only. It unearths that more than four fifth of the elderly persons stay with their respective spouses and or other family members. However, 14.5% of the older persons live only with their children. It is indicative of the fact that in 94.2 percent of the cases family members are care providers to the elderly persons.

Economic Issues

Food, clothing and house which together comprise bare minimum needs either are economic issues or integral part of the economics of elderly. It is discernible from the data given in table 4 that the percentage of elderly persons being supported/taken care of is different for males and females in rural and urban communities. Overall 15 % and 18 % of the older persons are supported financially by their respective spouses in rural and urban communities. Percentage of males

Table 4
Percentage distribution of economically dependent aged persons by category of persons supporting the aged¹³

| Year | Population sub- group | | Category of persons supporting | | | | Total |
|---------|-----------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------|-------|
| | | | Spouse | Own children | Grand children | Others | |
| 2017-18 | Rural | Male | 4 | 92 | 1 | 3 | 100 |
| | | Female | 1 | 72 | 3 | 4 | 100 |
| | | Person | 15 | 79 | 2 | 4 | 100 |
| | Urban | Male | 4 | 91 | 1 | 4 | 100 |
| | | Female | 24 | 70 | 2 | 4 | 100 |
| | | Person | 18 | 76 | 2 | 4 | 100 |

Source: NSS 75th Round (July 2017 - June 2018) – Social Consumption in India: Health

supporting their spouses in rural and urban areas is the same (4%). More than three fourth of the elderly persons are supported by their own children in rural (79%) and urban (76%) areas. Financial support being extended to the older males and females in both rural and urban areas by non family members is about 4. It unearths that the overwhelming majority (96%) are financially supported by family members. It can be deduced that a family is the main financial caregiver to their elder family members. In fact quality food, hygiene, sufficient clothing, beddings and pocket Money (which elderly need to meet certain expenses or to make some donations or to give to their loved ones especially young ones) are some of the economic issues older persons confront.

Health Related Issues

Health of elderly is one of the main concerns of caregivers in India due to lack of free medical facilities, poor health services, expensive health care and growing health problems among elderly. Poor health of the aging population is a matter of concern. National Sample Survey 75th Round elicited information and generated it in percentage form with respect to the distribution of aged persons at all Indian level by their (Elder's) own perception about current state of health. The data so collected has been divided into two categories i.e. the persons reporting chronic illness and the ones being without chronic illness and has been compressed in table 5.

Table 5
Percentage distribution of aged persons by own perception about current state of health- All India

| Characteristics | Percentage distribution of aged persons | | | | | |
|---|---|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| | Rural | | | Urban | | |
| | Male | Female | Person | Male | Female | Person |
| <i>Percentage of aged persons reporting illness</i> | | | | | | |
| all-India | 24 | 25 | 25 | 34 | | 34 |
| <i>Own perception about current state of health with chronic illness</i> | | | | | | |
| Excellent/very good | 2 | 2 | 2 | 7 | | 4 |
| Good/fair | 62 | 56 | 59 | 67 | | 67 |
| Poor | 36 | 43 | 39 | 26 | | 29 |
| all | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | 100 |
| <i>Own perception about current state of health without chronic illness</i> | | | | | | |
| Excellent/very good | 11 | 7 | 9 | 15 | | 11 |
| Good/fair | 74 | 73 | 74 | 75 | | 76 |
| Poor | 15 | 19 | 17 | 9 | | 13 |
| all | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | 100 |

Source: NSS 75th Round, (July 2017 - June 2018) - Social Consumption in India: Health

About one fourth of the elderly males and females in rural areas in the country and one third of the older males and females in the urban areas have reported illness. Among those who are chronically ill (the ones suffering from respiratory, cardiovascular, central nervous, Skin diseases, Goitre, Eye problems/diseases, ENT problems/diseases etc.) poor health was reported by 39% of the elderly persons in rural areas and 28 percent in the urban areas. Care providing of such elderly who have reported to be ill or suffering from chronic illness is the issue to be redressed

Psychological Issues

Some of the issues being confronted by care providers include quality time for elderly care, emotional support during their Sunset years, loneliness and dementia are some of the issues and problems of the older persons which pose a challenge before the care providers to take care of the senior citizens.

Main Findings

Main findings of this paper are listed below;

1. The Population of older persons registered more than fourfold increase during fifty years i.e. from 24.7 million in 1961 to 103.8 in 2011. It is further projected to record 87 percent ascendance during twenty years i.e. from 2011-31. It merits a mention here that in every decade from 1951-61 to 2001-2011, the population of elderly has increased at a higher rate as compared to total population in India.
2. India is considered to be a young country with a median age at 28.4 as per Indian Population (2021) World meter, but rate of increase of population of older persons indicates that Indian population is aging. It can be gauged from the fact that the elderly population witnessed an increase from 5.6 percent of the general population of the country in 1961 to 8.6 in 2011. It is further projected to reach 10.1 percent in 2021 and 13.1 in 2031. It is discernible that while elderly population has increased by double the rate as compared to the general population during 2001-2011 it is projected to witness about three fold ascendance and five time increase during 2011-21 and 2021-31 respectively.
3. Analysis of data about different generations reveals that elderly in India comprises the Silent Generation and majority of the Baby Boomers. However, the Caregivers comprise forty percent of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennial Generation or Generation Y and Generation Z.
4. Generalization of issues of caregiving would be an oversimplification of societal realism as these tend to vary in rural, urban and tribal communities, different age groups i.e. among young-old, old-old and oldest-old, males and females and joint & nuclear families.
5. More than three fourth of the elderly persons are supported by their own children inhabiting rural and urban areas. However, financial support by non-family members is given to 4 percent of the older males and females in rural and urban areas.
6. Care givers in India is also a sandwiched generation in view of the fact that it has to take care of the older persons, discharge personal professional/occupational responsibilities and also has to work for the fulfillment of the needs of younger members of their families.
7. An overwhelming percentage (94.2 %) inhabit their own houses and are taken care of by their family members.
8. As regards morbidity, about one fourth of the elderly males and females in rural areas in the country and one third of the older males and females in the urban areas have reported normal illness. Among those who are chronically ill. However, poor health was reported by about two fifth of the elderly persons inhabiting rural areas and by one fourth living in the urban areas.

Conclusion

High rate of growth of elderly population and resultant burgeoning number, increasing rate of migration of youngsters to pursue their higher studies or to take up modern professions, increasing rate disintegration of joint families and fast growing digital gap resulting in digital divide between the elder persons and their caregivers has made the issue of care providing an important one. Generation gap in Indian society appears to be more evident between the silent generation and millennial & generation Z. It calls for certain measures including orientation of caregivers, promotion of measures to ensure active aging, development of community places for elderly where they could interact with members of their generations, better social security net for elderly, making older persons digitally literate and above all strengthening of joint family system. Generation gap can be minimized or bridged with more engagements of empirical research endeavors by social scientists who should suggest suitable action plan keeping in view of requirements in

particular social settings, communities, groupings, regions and segments. However, it can be said that the generation gap cannot be completely divorced from care of elders nor care of older persons be divorced from society or sub-society nor society can be divorced from generation gap. The three constitute the union of trinity.

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