

Bereavement, Widowhood, and Social Construction of Identity: A Study of Roman Catholic Young Widows of South Goa

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. Jessy Crasto, hereby declare that this thesis represents work which has been carried out by me and that it has not been submitted, either in part or full, to any other University or Institution for the award of any research degree.

Place: Goa University
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CERTIFICATE

We hereby certify that the work was carried out under our supervision and may be placed for evaluation.

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Preface and Acknowledgement

This study explores the phenomenon of young widowhood, which has become increasingly prevalent in today's society due to various factors, such as occupational hazards, lifestyle diseases, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden and untimely death of a spouse poses significant challenges for the surviving partner, especially in terms of identity transformation and adjustment to new roles. This research aims to distinguish young widowhood from bereavement in general and later-in-life widowhood, by examining the unique characteristics and coping strategies of young widows.

The study is based on qualitative research, utilizing in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations of young widows in Salcete, Sanguem, Quepem, and Mormugao talukas in South Goa, India. The participants in the study include women aged 25 - 45 years who have lost their spouses due to various causes. The data collected through interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the themes that emerged from the participants' experiences.

The findings of the study reveal that young widowhood is a complex and multifaceted experience that involves several challenges and coping strategies. The study highlights the following themes: the transformation of identity from wife to widow, social stigma and isolation, financial insecurity, parenting and childcare responsibilities, and rebuilding one's life. Coping strategies identified include social support, religious and spiritual beliefs, counseling and therapy, and finding meaning and purpose in life.

The implications of this study are significant for young widows, counselors, policymakers, and academics. The study provides insights into the unique challenges and coping strategies of young widows, which can help in the development of support programs and policies that address their specific needs. The study also contributes to the existing literature on widowhood by distinguishing young widowhood from other types of bereavement and highlighting its unique characteristics.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The death of a woman’s husband marked the transition from wife to widow taking the woman from a central place in the family to its margin; henceforth she was regarded as someone who was physically alive but socially dead” – Uma Chakravarti

Women perform a variety of conventional feminine roles in the private as well as the public spheres. They are often expected to perform multiple roles in society, such as being a wife, mother, caregiver, and wage earner. However, fulfilling these roles can be challenging, as women face a range of problems that arise from the conflicts and demands of these different roles. According to Davis and Greenstein (2009), women's multiple roles can lead to a number of challenges, including role overload, role conflict, and role strain. These challenges can result in negative consequences for women's physical and mental health. Additionally, women who juggle multiple roles often face social and cultural pressure to prioritize their caregiving responsibilities over their professional or personal goals, leading to a lack of autonomy and control over their own lives. As a result, women who attempt to balance multiple roles may face role overload, which occurs when the demands of multiple roles exceed an individual's available time and energy (Goode, 1960). Furthermore, the concept of gender inequality highlights the ways in which the unequal distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities between men and women perpetuates gender inequalities in society (Connell, 2009).

The women also lag behind men because of certain traditions and private spheres which bound her in different areas of her life that needs attention. One such domain is that of patriarchy, a social system in which men hold primary power and privilege, and this system has a significant impact on the lives of women. According to Mohanty (1984), patriarchy creates a situation where women suffer silently as their voices are muffled or ignored. Women are often forced to conform to gender norms and expectations, which can be limiting and oppressive. This can lead to a lack of autonomy and control over their own lives, as well as a lack of access to resources and opportunities.

Additionally, patriarchy perpetuates the idea that women are inferior to men, which can lead to discrimination and violence against women. These factors can contribute to women's suffering, both physically and emotionally, as they struggle to navigate a society that is not designed to meet their needs. Ultimately, patriarchy reinforces societal norms that marginalize widows, particularly young widows, by imposing restrictive expectations on their behavior, social roles, and economic opportunities. It often dictates that a woman's identity is tied to her husband, leaving widows vulnerable to stigma, isolation, and financial instability after his death. These patriarchal structures can limit their ability to remarry, pursue careers, or make independent choices, thereby deepening their suffering. Ultimately, patriarchy can make it difficult for women, especially widows, to achieve equality and lead fulfilling lives.

In many societies, widows in particular face manifold challenges as a result of cultural and traditional norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and discrimination. According to Sen (2000), cultural practices such as widowhood rituals, which require widows to undergo various forms of social and physical isolation, can have a significant impact on their health and well-being. These practices often restrict widows from participating in social and economic activities, leading to their marginalization and impoverishment.

Further, cross-cultural variations among marital survivors reflect the changing cultural values of particular societies. For example, in the past, Hindu widows were treated harshly in the orthodox and predominantly patriarchal society of India. Loss of a husband meant a loss of status and relegating women to economic dependency, and pushing them to social isolation. By and large remarriage of women who lost their spouses was not encouraged. Although still far from receiving equitable treatment compared with widowers, the situation of widows has gradually improved over time.

When we examine the position of widows across the world considerable variations are observed. In the case of Israel, a strongly religious and patriarchal society, war widows are given greater recognition and preferential benefits compared with their civilian counterparts. This favoured treatment could be attributed to the state policy of compulsory recruitment of all young men and women in the army. However, in the traditional Korean

society which was predominantly agriculturally based, becoming a widow resulted in a lowered status and a general prohibition against remarriage.

Over time with the onset of industrialization and subsequent modernisation, the cultural status of widows improved. Also, there was a rapid shift to the cities which further improved their position. Thus, urbanisation and the resultant break from the traditional and rural norms dissipated to a large extent the stigma and trauma associated with widowhood. This was especially liberating for those who moved to the cities (Lopata 1996). Widows in other parts of the world that are undergoing modernization also find that such conditions allow them a more flexible role compared with the previous generations. It is difficult, however, to make international comparisons on this topic. Data gathered by the United Nations Statistics Division (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd>) during the 1990s show considerable variation in the widowed population, both within and between countries and regions of the world.

There is a great deal of heterogeneity among widows, making it impossible to predict any one woman's lifestyle, support systems, or identity. Many factors influence these aspects of widowhood, including the characteristics of the society and community in which she lives, the personal resources she and her husband had, the circumstances of his death, and the personal resources she uses to modify, remove, or add social roles and relationships to her lifestyle and support systems. Her self-concept and the identities she takes on or is assigned by others in social interactions significantly influence who she is and how she lives.

According to the Census of India (2001, 2011), the percentage of widowed individuals has increased over the years, with women being disproportionately affected. The proportion of widowed/divorced/separated female population is higher than males, indicating the socio-economic challenges faced by this group (Population Composition, Census 2011). The suppression, subordination, and exclusion of these women deprive society and the nation of the utilization of their capacity and skills for development (Agarwal, 2015). Furthermore, the Global Widows Report (2015) estimates that at least 245 million women worldwide have been widowed, with more than 1.15 million of them living in poverty. This data highlights the prevalence of widowhood in India and its socio-

economic implications. Moreover, the report reveals that the issue of widowhood is not limited to India, but is a global phenomenon affecting millions of women who are at risk of falling into poverty.

The idea that widows outnumber widowers due to women's longer life expectancy and social conventions mandating a younger wife is supported by various studies. For instance, a study by Shah and Shah (2014) found that women in India have a longer life expectancy than men due to differences in biological and lifestyle factors. Additionally, social norms in India mandate that men should marry younger women, leading to a higher prevalence of widowhood among women. The reluctance towards widow remarriage in India has been documented by various scholars, including Gupta and Krishnan (2005), who noted that societal norms and prejudices against widow remarriage persist despite legal reforms allowing for it.

In 2010, the United Nations declared 01 October as the International Widows' Day. On June 23 2011, a symposium was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to observe the first officially recognised International Widows' Day. Since then, it is being commemorated globally and annually on this day. It is a United Nations-ratified day of action to raise awareness of the plight of widows around the world. Its goal is to address the "poverty, unfairness, and issues" that millions of widows and their dependents confront across the globe. One of the key objectives is to draw attention to what it refers to as an "invisible calamity".

1.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In India, a traditionally patriarchal society, the duty of a woman centers on the home and hearth. The self-identity of women is largely impacted by the status of their spouses. Her identity revolves around the males especially, her husband. Society perceives a married woman as incomplete and incapable without her husband. As a result, the loss of the husband poses several challenges for the surviving widow. This perception has not changed very much even today.

Widowhood, whether for a younger or older woman, presents an intertwined network of social, economic, and psychological issues. According to Chakravati (2006:

96), 'the demise of her husband translates into the loss of an approved cultural identity, and constitutes for all practical purposes, the end of her social identity. This is more complicated, especially for young widows, as they are not prepared for this unexpected life event. When women in their twenties or thirties become a widow, they are thrust into a role for which they are unprepared (DiGiulio, 1992).

Barret (1976) expressed the unfortunate situation of widows stating that 'widows belong to a sub-culture whose members live in despair and loneliness'. They chide each other for self-pity and advise each other to keep busy. They individually hope for an avenue to escape, but collectively succumb to an attitude of hopelessness. The pain of bereavement itself is the first stress that a widow faces. A sense of futility and suspicion that nothing in life is worthwhile, an inability to sleep, and a need to blame her fate, are found common among the widows.

Young widows grieve both the loss of a partner and the death of their aspirations. They also mourn the loss of their identity as a married individual, and future goals such as raising children, celebrating festivals and milestones as well as growing old together which were jointly shared. All of a sudden, a young widow is exposed to face the pain of bereavement, as well as realign herself to the new role. This unexpected loss may also stir up unanswered queries such as, "Will I or should I marry again," "will societal community and relatives accept and support such a union", will such a decision traumatise the children? Such questions implode her mind continuously and prevent the thought of taking a drastic decision. This trauma is due to the collective nature of the societal structure which inhibits individual decisions. Thus, a woman lives solely for the expectations of society and abides by the traditional normative structure.

Further, grieving itself is psychologically draining and disallows rational decision taking. Symptoms following the loss of a life partner include sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, feelings of fear and guilt, and intense emotional feelings. These reactions are rarely understood by others, much less by the widows themselves (DiGiulio, 1992: 73). This is exacerbated due to a change in her attire and appearance. Signs of being married have to be wiped away. Bereavement refers to an objective state of having experienced a loss, grief in contrast is the nature of the physiological and psychological reaction to the loss (Marwit, 1991:76). Grief is a highly subjective condition, characterised by disruptions

in cognitive, emotional, physical, and interpersonal functioning. To state it more simply, bereavement is the unit of time following a loss; whereas grief is the subjective effect experienced by the individual. Again, the period of grief and loneliness is longer as compared to widowhood in later life.

The most difficult period for widows is not the initial bereavement but the latter phase. In the beginning the widow receives support from various social components such as the immediate family and kin as well as the neighbourhood community which buffers the shock of widowhood. But later she must move out of the 'widow role' (Lopata , 1975:60). This transition period is often marked by internal confusion, as well as ambiguity about social mores and what is deemed to be 'socially acceptable' behaviour for a widow. Loneliness is one of the greatest difficulties of young widows. Even if she has supportive friends and family, they are not a substitute for the emotional intimacy and daily interaction she experienced with her spouse (DiGiulio, 1992:81). At the end of the day, it is the spouse that young widows look for to process the day's events or to share trivial titbits and the need for physical comfort.

According to most bereavement researchers, the general grieving process occurs in phases over the course of time. Silverman (1974:1986) and Di Guilio (1992:25) have identified three phases of bereavement among young widows. The first phase is impact and it begins at the moment of death (Silverman 1986:98). This phase is defined by feelings of unreality, numbness, confusion, and disbelief. The numbness serves as a protection from feeling the pain and is sometimes described as a cocoon or an aura. The detachment enables people to plan a funeral without being overwhelmed and allows people to take in the reality of the death in small doses. During this phase, the bereaved is likely to wait for the return of the deceased husband, becoming forlorn when he does not return (DiGiulio,1992).

The second phase is recoil, and is the most painful phase, which includes feelings of anger, bitterness, and isolation. This is a time in which the young widow wants to talk about the circumstances and situations surrounding her husband's death. Often friends and family become distraught because they do not know how to respond. Young widows may prefer to talk to others who have also experienced losses. During this phase, those who are grieving know that they cannot go back, but they are reluctant to go forward. They also realize that it is not practically possible to live by the old rules, which leads to a crisis in

meaning. This relates to Erikson's (1964) notion of the nuclear crisis which occurs during the transition period of the stages and therefore, results in the exploration of identity.

The final phase is accommodation, demonstrated by the widow's ability to experience less pain and distress and possess a renewed sense of hopefulness about her future. She realizes that she is not "starting over" but that she is continuing her life. She realizes that the past cannot be erased and will always be incorporated into her life. Her loss remains part of her, and the feelings of grief reoccurs occasionally, but they never cease entirely (DiGiulio, 1992). The goal of this stage is not acceptance, which is only part of accommodation, but of finding and searching a new direction and assuming a new identity.

Accompanying these losses can be the challenges of single parenthood, the need for career, financial and lifestyle changes (Gass-Sternas, 1994; Mc Ewen & Stellar, 1993). Insecurity among the widowed women, induced by the death of their life partner, also brings many changes in their behaviour and personality. They are pressurised to observe restrictive code of dress and behaviour. Widows also have some normative restrictions placed on them by society in which they live. Other than financial problems, a host of other issues and concerns emerge such as: inheritance rights, prohibition of remarriage, observation of mourning rites, violence and readjustment to life as a single adult. The most common, natural and socially desired behaviour expected of them is religiosity and ritualism (Barik, 2009: 28).

Furthermore, young widowhood is commonly associated with little opportunity to prepare, fewer or no 'role model' to handle the changes in the variety of domains including work, sociality, and parenting (Parkes, 1975:69). These differences are further compounded when the timing of death, that is 'anticipated versus sudden death' and duration of widowhood are considered.

Additionally, a change in residence may be necessary because there is not sufficient money to maintain or afford the home. Sometimes, young widows move closer to their parents who can participate in child care or serve as a source of support. This situation has the risk of another identity adjustment as the young widow is put into the "child role" again.

Her parents may take over and make decisions or step in again as the caretakers to the young widow and her children.

1.1.1 Key Concepts

The thesis gives insight on such concepts as widowhood, bereavement, grief, mourning, single parent, identity, and social identity.

a) *Widowhood*

Widows' social standing has always been a contentious issue, both historically and currently. A man whose wife has died is referred to as a "widower," while a woman who has lost her husband is referred to as a "widow." According to Marriam-Webster dictionary, widowhood is the state of a woman who has lost her husband due to death. As a result, widowhood is a change in a woman's position caused by the death of her husband in a marital relationship.

The Bible defines a widow as a married woman whose husband has died and who has not married. The Hebrew word translated "widow" is "almanac" and it occurs fifty-six times in the Old Testament and twenty-six times in the New Testament. Words that occur in the general semantic field of the term "widow" in the Bible such as weeping, mourning, desolation, indebtedness, poverty; shed light on both her personal experience and social plight. They describe her financial situation, when the main source of her economic support, her husband, has perished. Indeed, she was frequently placed alongside the orphan and the landless in the social structure of ancient Israel, as well as in the ancient Near East. With minimal, if any, inheritance rights, she was often in a "no-man's land." She had left her parents family, and with her husband's death the bond between her and his family was tenuous.

Widowhood is also defined as a crisis in a woman's life, involving new and social adjustments for the family as well as for her. A widower being economically independent does not experience the stigma and shame or judgement as much as it is experienced and expected from a widowed woman. Widowhood is, primarily, a female phenomenon (Roswower, 1967:14).

Millions of women experience the misfortune of losing a spouse, that too the untimely demise and thus have to bear the burden for many years. This problem is not only

due to loss of spouse but also because of the lack of clear-cut cultural expectations regarding the proper role of the widow. Young widows “are an age group at special risk because other studies have shown that the untimely death of a husband gives rise to a more severe and protracted reaction than does a similar bereavement in old age” (Parkes 1975:120).

b) *Young widow*

A young widow (Pearsall, 2001) is defined as a woman between the age of 25 – 45 years whose husband has died. A Catholic widow, similar to a Hindu widow is known as *vidhwa* in Konkani language. This means that a woman acquires this name as soon as her husband dies.

Further, through specific clothing, cultural practices, and periods of mourning; she is identified as the one whose husband has died. Since death has been treated with great respect and continues to be so in our modern-day culture (Pearsall, 2001; Kastenbaum, 2004), different cultural groups symbolise their respect through different practices and rituals. These are discussed in the following chapters of this thesis. In this study of Roman Catholic young widows, an attempt to draw attention to the misfortunes and travails of the woman’s experience as one defined by (Sossou, 2002) as being cruel and dehumanising towards the woman will be discussed. These women are described as silent victims.

c) *Bereavement*

The term bereavement means the state of being deprived of someone by death. It also refers to being in a state of mourning (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). While Bereavement refers to an objective state of having experienced a loss, grief in contrast is the physiological and psychological reaction to the loss (Marwit, 1991). Thus, grief is a highly subjective condition.

Notably, Bannano & Kaltman (1999), Stroebe & Schut, Stroebe et al. (2001: 760-776) consider bereavement in terms of four components. The first is the context of the loss, which refers to the risk factors associated with the type of death. These can be related to age, gender, social support and cultural setting. The second factor is the continuum of subjective meanings associated with loss. These range from appraisals and evaluation of everyday matters and problems, and existential concerns about the meaning of life and

death. The third is the changing representations of the lost relationship over time which plays an important role in the grieving process. The fourth is the role of coping and emotion regulation processes that highlights the range of coping strategies.

Bereavement means “the state of being deprived” (Attig, 2001). When a loved one dies the surviving spouse is deprived of the person she loves. Patterns of bereavement have undergone considerable research in recent years. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) was among the first to work with the terminally ill and to publish her findings. She identified five stages of loss, which include: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. She acknowledged that these stages are general in nature and that the length, the unique circumstance, and the duration of each stage vary among individuals. Since then, because of the recognition of the complexity of grief, researchers have moved away from using stage models such as Kübler-Ross’s. She did, however, lay the groundwork for bereavement research and interest in the process of bereavement.

d) Grief

Grief is referred to as an intense physical and psychological distress (Berk, 2004). Grief is a highly subjective condition. It is mostly characterised by disruptions in cognitive, emotional, physical, and interpersonal functioning. To state it more simply, bereavement is the unit of time following a loss, whereas grief is the subjective effect experienced by the individual. Again, the period of grief and loneliness is longer as compared to widowhood in later life.

Additionally, grieving itself is physically and psychologically strenuous. Symptoms following the loss of a life partner may include sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, feelings of fear and guilt, and intense emotional reactions. These reactions are rarely understood by others, much less by the widows themselves. (DiGiulio, 1992)

Grief, according to Sadock & Sadock (2003:61), is a subjective emotion triggered by the death of a loved one. Grief work is a difficult psychological process that involves letting go of attachments and working through the grief. Grief helps the individual in comprehending the loss and preparing for the mourning process. An unexpected death often results in shock or disbelief, high anxiety, a sense of the presence of the dead person, and feelings of self-reproach. When the marital relationship has been punctuated with

quarrels and ambivalence, the immediate reaction may be relief, but as time passes, chronic pining and despair may emerge.

Grief can take different forms and among them main are normal grief, chronic grief and complicated grief.

i) ***Normal grief***

While grief is different for everyone, most people have common experiences and emotions in the days, weeks, or months following the major loss. This is referred to as normal grief. Symptoms of normal grief include crying or sobbing, sleep problems, persistent lack of energy, feeling lethargic or apathetic about life in general, changes in appetite, withdrawing from usual social interactions and relationships, difficulty concentrating on important tasks, questioning spiritual or religious beliefs, career choices, or life goals, sadness and so forth. There is no set timetable for grief and people with normal grief will gradually be able to establish a new normal in the ensuing weeks or months. They may never entirely forget the loss but, in time, will learn how to cope with it. Hence, it is temporary in nature.

ii) ***Chronic grief***

Chronic grief is defined as grief that lasts longer than what is considered a normal grieving period. Even several months or years after the death of their loved ones, those with chronic grief engage in an intensive search for meaning and have elevated levels of yearning, deliberating, and regret (Neimeyer, 2005). The terms chronic and complicated grief are sometimes used interchangeably. Chronic grief means the difficulty to accept the loss no matter how hard one tries to resolve it.

iii) ***Complicated grief***

Complicated grief is brought about when one cannot even begin to see how their life has changed after suffering the loss. One is in denial and mostly stuck living in the past as if the loved one has not died. Such is the extent that these grieving persons avoid going to the places and doing the things that reminds them of their loved ones. They are known to live in this perpetual state of denial, even going as far as avoiding others so that no one

talks to them about the loss. Overall, complicated grief keeps one from moving forward and accepting that life has changed forever.

Some of the experiences related to chronic or complicated grief includes intense sadness, trouble functioning, preoccupation with the loss, repeatedly visualizing the day they lost the loved one, reliving the loss, failing to accept that your loved one is not here and is not coming back. This type of grief turns into rage and this can negatively affect relationships with the loved ones who are still alive.

In the case of spousal death, it may also emerge when the marital relationship involved an inappropriately high degree of dependency, regardless of whether the survivor or the dead spouse was the dependent person. In these situations, grief is often fully expressed from the outset. Unresolved grief can precipitate clinical depression, behaviour impairments, psychosomatic illness, or alcohol and drug abuse.

e) *Rituals*

Widowhood is a significant life transition that is marked by a range of cultural and religious rituals. Within the Roman Catholic community, widowhood is also marked by specific rituals and practices that serve to honour the memory of the deceased spouse, provide comfort and support to the widow, and help the widow navigate the grief and loss associated with widowhood (Osterweis, Solomon, & Green, 1984). In this review of literature, the various widowhood rituals and practices that exist within the Roman Catholic Church, are explored.

One of the most important widowhood rituals within the Catholic Church is the funeral Mass service. This is a time for family and friends to gather together to honour the memory of the deceased spouse and to offer comfort and support to the widow. The funeral Mass typically includes readings from scriptures, prayers, hymns, and a eulogy (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). The widow may also be invited to participate in the service, such as by reading a scripture passage or offering a reflection on the life of the deceased spouse.

Another important widowhood ritual within the Catholic Church is the practice of praying for the deceased spouse. The Church teaches that the prayers of the faithful can help to ease the suffering of the deceased spouse and help them to attain eternal rest in

heaven (Parkes, 1996). Family members and friends may be encouraged to offer prayers for the deceased spouse, either individually or as part of a group.

The Church also recognizes the importance of providing ongoing support and guidance to widows. Many parishes offer support groups specifically for widows, where they can come together to share their experiences and offer each other support and encouragement. These support groups may also provide educational and spiritual resources to help widows navigate the various challenges associated with widowhood (Pargament, 1997).

Widowhood rituals within the Catholic Church has served several manifest functions, including providing comfort and support to the widow, honouring the memory of the deceased spouse, and helping the widow navigate the grief and loss associated with widowhood. These rituals can also help to provide a sense of closure and facilitate the grieving process for both the widow and her family.

Various studies have shown that participation in religious rituals and practices can have a positive impact on mental health and well-being (Pargament, 1997). For widows within the Catholic Church, participation in widowhood rituals and practices may provide a sense of connection to their faith community and help them to find meaning and purpose in their grief.

f) *Mourning*

Mourning, in its most basic meaning, is the process of grieving. It is the cultural manifestation of post-bereavement attitudes and behaviours (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Mourning is an outward expression of that grief, including cultural and religious customs surrounding the death. It is also the process of adapting to life after loss. Furthermore, Stroebe & Schut (1999) define mourning as "the social expressions or behaviours expressive of sadness, which is moulded by the traditions of a given culture or cultural group". In essence, this means that grief in a socio-cultural setting has value for the people who live there. As a result, grief is both behavioural and cultural.

According to Weizman & Kamm (1987), mourning as understood in the discipline of psychology, refers to the mental and emotional 'work' carried out following a loss. For this reason, mourning is the expression of grief. The word is derived from a Gothic verb

meaning ‘to be anxious’ and it ultimately comes from an Indo-European base meaning ‘to remember’ or ‘to think of’ (Weizman&Kamm, 1987:40). Mourning involves remembering and thinking of the deceased and thereby making a person feel anxious and uncomfortable (*Ibid*).

Mourning in its strict sense is the process by which grief is resolved. It is the societal expression of post-bereavement behaviour and practices (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). In addition, Stroebe & Schut (1999) reiterate the definition of mourning as ‘the social expressions or acts expressive of grief, which are shaped by the practices of a given society or cultural group’ . In essence this means that grieving within the socio-cultural context has meaning for those individuals in that context.

According to Rando (1993) ‘without the experiences and learning provided by acute grief, mourning cannot take place. For most of the twentieth century, it was generally believed that to get over the loss of a loved one, it was necessary to do one’s ‘grief work’ (Stroebe *et al.*, 2000). According to Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & Van Dyke Stringer (2010) mourning the death of a loved one is a ubiquitous human experience. Like any other significant life transitions, following the death of a loved one, the bereaved individuals need to adjust and go back to normal life.

g) Single Parenting

Single parenting is the practice where one parent, either father or mother, solely assumes the responsibilities of raising children in the absence of the other parent (Ali & Soomar, 2019). This includes providing for the children's physical, emotional, and educational needs.

Single parenting is a challenging life circumstance that has become increasingly common in today's society. In this study ‘single’ will refer to young women who are widowed. The challenges and opportunities of single parenting, with a focus on the experiences of widows who never remarried is emphasised upon. The experience of single parenting is particularly difficult for widows, who are not only coping with the loss of their spouse, but also face challenges in upbringing of children. The dual responsibility of earning a livelihood and managing a household can be overwhelming. The demands on a

widow's time and energy are immense, as she must balance professional duties with the needs of her children.

Single parenting can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience as it is an abrupt transition in a woman's life. In addition to coping with their own grief, widows must also provide emotional support to their children and navigate the various challenges associated with raising children on their own (Parkes, 1996).

Another key challenge of single parenting is financial stress and strain. Single parent, particularly those who are widows, often face financial crisis due to the loss of their spouse's income. This can make it difficult to provide for their children's basic needs, such as food, clothing, educational expenses and myriad other needs. Single parents may also have to work longer hours or take on multiple jobs in order to make ends meet, which can leave them with less time and energy to devote to parenting (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). The stress of managing these dual responsibilities can take a toll on a widow's physical and mental health. Homemaking tasks, parenting duties, and providing emotional support for her children can be exhausting. According to Popenoe (1996), the cumulative effect of these demands can lead to significant health challenges for single mothers.

Additionally, the problem of single parenting is social isolation. Widows who are raising children on their own may feel socially secluded due to the demands of parenting and the loss of their spouse's companionship. They may also struggle to get help from family and friends, particularly if they are living far from their support network or if their social circle was largely comprised of couples (Parkes, 1996). Suddenly the woman feels 'left out' and bereft of assistance as well as inclusion from couple activities that she enjoyed during her marital state.

Since death is a difficult and complex idea, the sudden loss of a man who is both a husband and a father, especially to children who may not fully understand that death is permanent and universal, can have a deep emotional effect. Generally, in a family roles are typically divided, but in a single-parent family, the surviving parent must take on additional roles. They must navigate their own grief while also fulfilling the role of the primary emotional support for their children. This role strain can complicate how effectively they can communicate about death. Single widowed mothers must face their grief while simultaneously supporting children through their own bereavement. The woman's grief

can make it difficult to approach the topic calmly and clearly. The intense emotions they are experiencing may hinder their ability to provide a comforting and coherent explanation. She may also want to shield the children from pain and distress, leading them to avoid or soften discussions about death, which can result in confusion and misconceptions for the child.

It is through the process of socialization that the child learns and internalize societal norms, values, and beliefs. The manner in which death is discussed and understood within a family is influenced by cultural, religious, and societal contexts. Different cultures have varying ways of handling death, mourning, and overcoming these issues. For single parents, the dual burden of their own grief and their children's needs can be overwhelming. This emotional labour can lead to burnout and affect their overall ability to parent effectively.

h) Identity

Identity is the product of an individual's inherent quest to make sense of his or her place in society. Erikson (1959, 1994) describes identity formation as a process that begins as soon as an individual is born. He explains personal identity as the way an individual organizes his or her experiences within an environment in relation to one's sense of self (Erikson 1959, 1994). Moreover, one's personal identity is depicted as a core sense of self defined through the personal meaning, traits, and characteristics one exercises and associates with an experience or membership to a group (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

However, for an individual's personal identity to have meaning, it must be applied to a social context which he or she has experienced (Deaux, 1993; Erikson, 1959; 1994; Frey & Tropp, 2006; Hutchison & Rea, 2011; Torres *et al.*, 2009). Once formed, identity is maintained, modified, or even reconstructed through the individual's experiences in various social contexts throughout his or her life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Deaux, 1993).

Identity and grief are interconnected and identity transformation plays a major role in the bereavement process (Neimeyer, 2005). This is especially significant for young widows who in a relatively short duration of time transited from being in a solitary state as a young lady to a married status, to being widowed and again reverted to a single status. The young widows suffer greater consequences following the death of their spouse –

because in the first place their identities were not established and secondly due to the death of their spouse, their identity has now been severely altered. Lopata (1979) suggests that the role of widow should only be a temporary stage of identity reconstruction. Widows need to give up their former identities in order to accept their new identity as a widow, to move on in formulating a new identity.

To fully comprehend the trauma caused by the death of a spouse, it is important to understand the identity formation process of early adulthood. The task of early adulthood is to consolidate a “coherent and positive identity that is grounded in the social realities of becoming an adult” (Pals, 1999). This task includes “investing oneself in new adult roles, responsibilities, and contexts,” and one of those roles usually includes marriage. In Pals (1999) study on the lives of women who navigated the terrain of early adulthood, proposes that marriage is an identity investment that is experienced differently by different women. He developed four prototypes of “identity-in-marriage” – anchored, defined, restricted, and confused. He further elaborated the prototypes. Women who identify themselves within the ‘anchored’ prototype are adept at integrating different identity aspects and at the same time maintaining a sense of individuality. Conversely, women who are more of the ‘defined’ prototype feel their lives are immersed in marriage and family life. They see themselves as wives to their husbands and accept that aspects of their identity are secondary to the marriage. Women who feel their identity is ‘restricted’ by marriage experience motherhood negatively and are dissatisfied with full-time mothering. They are frustrated by the limitation’s marriage places on them. Women whose identities are ‘confused’ by the marriage experience a lack of self-confidence and a sense of competence. Women in this prototype interpret problems within the marriage as related to their own inadequacies. He points out that many women do not fit into these precise categories and that several of the prototypes may represent the women’s unique marital situation.

Pals’ (*Ibid*) hypothesis was that the prototypes were correlated to identity consolidation and had both positive and negative outcomes. The findings supported this, the ‘anchored’ prototype was positively correlated and the ‘restricted’ and ‘confused’ prototypes were negatively correlated with identity consolidation. Identity, for these women, was related to the way they viewed their marriage. The implications of these

results for young widows indicate the possible connection between identity within the marriage and how it relates to the loss of the spouse and the grieving process.

Anthis (2002) found that stressful life events such as death and dying were significant predictors of increase in identity exploration. Therefore, he posits that stressful life events may contribute to changes in identity over time, which supports Farson's (1974) calamity theory of growth. Very often, it is the crisis situation, a serious injury, illness, or accident, the loss of a loved one, divorce, birth of a retarded or crippled child, or the learning that one has a terminal disease; actually, improves us as human beings. Paradoxically, while these incidents can sometimes ruin people, they are usually growth experiences. As a result of such calamities the person often makes a major reassessment of his life situation and changes it in ways that reflect a deeper understanding of his own abilities, values, and goals. Essentially, Farson's theory suggests that while we might expect to be significantly altered by a serious injury or the loss of a loved one because of death or divorce, what we find is that these experiences often inspire growth and cause us to reflect on our own goals and values.

While much of the research indicates that the death of a spouse has mostly negative consequences to widows, the time of identity exploration may surprisingly offer some positive results. Di Giulio (1989) discovered that many women described an "identity rebirth" after the loss of their husbands. They felt more independent, assertive, and a greater sense of competence. He concluded from his investigation and structured interviews with widows that most women survive without psychological damage. He described successful grief as moving beyond widowhood, but only if the widow's identity is reconstructed.

i) Social Identities

To better understand the complexity of identity Deaux (1993) describes identity as multi-faceted, in the sense that it is made up of varying dimensions dependent on the social context. She describes these dimensions as social identities and illustrates them as relatively stable roles or membership groups of which an individual claims to be a representative (Deaux, 1993). In addition to possessing general stability, social identities often demonstrate duration and permanence. While the expression of these identities may differ according to the situation, the structure remains relatively stable except for pertinent

changes in internal priorities or external environment (*Ibid.*). Collectively, these social identities provide the framework and meaning of one's personal identity. To understand an individual's personal identity, one must understand the individual's social identities or membership categories of which one claims to be a part of and how these categories influence one another and combine to form meaning in that individual's life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Deaux, 1993).

A woman's identity is based on her relationship, responsibilities and care of others, especially her family members, since the death or loss of the loved one dismembers her roles and if it is the death of her husband, then the identity is severely altered and hence she suffers greater consequences. Spouses share lives together, which may include children, income, intimacy and many other responsibilities.

The process of becoming oneself often includes various tasks that the widow must complete following the death of her husband. These tasks have direct problems and implications for the shift and transformation of identity. Saunders (1981) defines these as "Pivotal Identity Tasks," which include the disposal of personal belongings and the dilemma of not wearing the wedding ring. The loss of a loved one compels individuals to question life meanings and to examine internal assumptions about life and the world.

Lopata (1979) and Silverman (1986) offer significant insights into the process of identity reconstruction for widows emphasizing the sociological implications of widowhood on personal identity and societal standing. He posits that widowhood should be seen as a transitional phase in the broader process of identity reconstruction. This perspective implies that widowhood is not a permanent identity but a temporary stage that widows pass through as they adapt to their new circumstances. According to him widows must relinquish their former identities tied to their roles as wives. This process involves significant emotional and psychological adjustments, as widows must let go of their previous role and the associated expectations, behaviours, and social status. She suggests that accepting the identity of a widow is a crucial step in the process of moving forward. This acceptance allows widows to begin the journey of formulating a new identity, which can involve exploring new roles, developing new skills, and finding new sources of social and emotional support.

The formulation of a new identity involves several steps such as role transition, widows need to transit from the role of a spouse to that of a single individual. This transition includes redefining social relationships, financial management, and household responsibilities. The formulation of new identity also involves social reintegration wherein widows must find ways to reintegrate into social networks that may have been centered around their married life. This can include joining support groups, engaging in community activities, or developing new friendships. Another step is personal growth. Here the widows may pursue new interests, careers, or educational opportunities. The goal is to build a sense of identity that is not solely defined by their loss but includes their strengths, aspirations, and achievements.

Silverman (1986) argues that society often marginalizes widows, attributing to them an identity that lacks societal standing and personal meaning. This marginalization can manifest in various ways – widows may experience social isolation due to the loss of their partner and the changes in their social networks. Friends and acquaintances might distance themselves, either because they are uncomfortable dealing with grief or because social activities often revolve around couples.

In addition, widows might face stigma or pity, reinforcing a sense of "otherness" and diminishing their societal status. This stigmatization can prevent them from fully participating in social, economic, and community activities. Society may fail to recognize the unique challenges and strengths of widows, reducing their experiences to their loss rather than acknowledging their capacity for resilience and growth. By integrating the perspectives of Lopata and Silverman (1986), we gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges widows face in identity reconstruction and societal reintegration. Lopata views widowhood as a temporary stage in identity reconstruction, while Silverman highlights the societal perception that often gives the widow identity no meaningful standing. This contrast underscores the need for societal support to help widows transition through this temporary stage without being permanently marginalized.

The process of identity reconstruction, as outlined by Lopata (1986), is heavily influenced by the availability of social support. Society plays a critical role in either facilitating or hindering this transition. Support groups, community involvement, and policies that recognize and address the unique needs of widows can aid in their successful

identity reconstruction. While Silverman emphasizes the societal challenges that diminish the identity of widows, Lopata's framework can be seen as a call to empower widows to reclaim their agency. By accepting the identity of a widow as a step towards a new identity, widows can find personal meaning and societal standing through their own efforts and the support of an inclusive community.

Lopata and Silverman (1986) provide complementary insights into the experience of widowhood. Together, these perspectives emphasize the importance of both personal resilience and societal support in helping widows navigate their journey of identity reconstruction and social reintegration. It is not hard to imagine why young widows suffer greater consequences following the death of their spouse – their identities have been severely altered and were perhaps not well established to begin with.

1.1.2 A Comparison of Older and Younger Widows' Experiences

Widowhood is a significant life event that affects individuals in various ways. Studies have explored the differences between older and younger widows in terms of their experiences and coping strategies. This review of literature aims to examine and compare the experiences of older and younger widows and the coping strategies they employ, with a focus on the similarities and differences between the two age groups.

Various studies have shown that older widows tend to experience a greater sense of loneliness and social isolation compared to younger widows (Aoun, Breen, Rumbold & Nordstrom, 2018). This can be attributed to a range of factors, such as limited social networks and the loss of a lifelong partner. In addition, older widows may also experience more physical health problems, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness (Carr, 2016). Younger widows tend to experience a greater sense of shock and disbelief following the loss of their partner (Adams, 2017). This can be attributed to the unexpected nature of the loss and the disruption it causes to future plans and expectations. Additionally, younger widows may also face challenges such as financial insecurity and parenting responsibilities (Carmichael & Hamilton, 2018).

1.1.3 Comparison of Coping strategies of older and younger widows

Research suggests that older widows tend to rely on religious beliefs and practices as a coping mechanism (Carr, 2016). This can provide a sense of comfort and hope, as well as a community of support. Additionally, older widows may also engage in activities such as volunteering or joining support groups to mitigate feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Aoun et al., 2018). Younger widows may employ a range of coping strategies to deal with their loss, including seeking social support from family and friends and engaging in self-care practices such as exercise and therapy (Adams, 2017). Additionally, some younger widows may also engage in self-destructive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, to deal with the intense emotions associated with their loss (Carmichael & Hamilton, 2018). While there are some differences in the experiences and coping strategies of older and younger widows, there are also similarities. For example, both age groups may experience feelings of loneliness and social isolation following the loss of their partner, and both may seek social support from family and friends (Carr, 2016; Aoun et al., 2018; Adams, 2017; Carmichael & Hamilton, 2018). In addition, both age groups may also engage in spiritual and religious practices as a coping mechanism. However, the nature of this coping mechanism may differ, with older widows more likely to rely on religious beliefs and practices as a source of comfort and hope, while younger widows may engage in more existential questioning and exploration of spirituality (Carmichael & Hamilton, 2018).

Older widows tend to be better adjusted than younger ones; “those under 45 years of age who have dependent children have the worst outcome” of morale (Balkwell, 1981:121). This is due to the additional consequences of solely bearing the financial and maintenance burden of the household, in addition to rearing the children as a single parent. Younger widows suffer more psychological consequences, such as higher intensities of grief in the initial phase of grief (Sanders, 1980: 98); while older widows suffer more physical consequences (Parkes & Weiss, 1983:79). The reason that younger widows suffer more psychological consequences could be related to the circumstances of the death. For older widows, the death of a husband is an expected event and the search for meaning of the death and consequently a disturbance in the assumptive world of the older widow is

less likely. For younger widows, whose losses are least expected this quest for meaning has the potential to become an urgent pursuit and the loss itself perturbs the internal assumptive world of young widows, causing more distress and mental imbalance.

Overall, while there are some differences between the experiences and coping strategies of older and younger widows, there are also similarities. Understanding this can be useful in developing interventions and support systems that are tailored to the specific needs of each age group. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the nuances of these experiences and coping strategies, including the role of cultural and social factors.

1.1.4 Opportunities of Single Parenting

Single-parent families are characterized by a single parent living with dependent children without the presence of a spouse or partner (Feltey, 2022). This arrangement can occur within various household structures, but the key element is the absence of a co-parent. In this study, a single-parent home is specifically defined as a household where a woman, who has not remarried after the death of her husband, resides with her children. This definition emphasizes the role of widowed mothers in single-parent households.

Single parenting can provide opportunities for personal growth and development. Single parents, including widows, may develop a greater sense of resilience and self-reliance as they navigate the various challenges of raising children on their own. They may also develop closer relationships with their children and find greater meaning and purpose in their parenting role (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

Single parenting, particularly for widows requires a range of skills and resources. By acknowledging the challenges and opportunities of single parenting, society can work to provide better support and resources for single parents, including widows, as they navigate the various demands of raising children on their own. Further, widows who are raising children on their own may find support from other single parents, either through support groups or online communities. They may also find spiritual support from their faith community or from social service organizations that provide resources and assistance to single parents (Parkes, 1996).

1.1.5 Implications of Widowhood

The loss of a spouse is a significant life event that can have far-reaching implications for an individual's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Widowhood is defined as the state of being a widow or widower, and it is estimated that approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men will experience the loss of a spouse during their lifetime (Carr et al., 2014). The experience of widowhood can be traumatic and overwhelming, and it can affect an individual's quality of life in various ways. This literature review explores the implications of widowhood on various aspects of an individual's life, including their mental health, physical health, social support, financial well-being, and life satisfaction.

i) Mental Health of Widows

The loss of a spouse can have significant implications for an individual's mental health, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. According to a study by Carr et al. (2014), widows are at higher risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders compared to their married counterparts. The study also found that the risk of depression and anxiety increases with time since the loss of a spouse, suggesting that widowhood has a long-lasting impact on mental health.

Another study by Parkes and Weiss (1983) found that widows experience significant loneliness and social isolation, which can contribute to depression and other mental health issues. The study also suggested that the support of family and friends is crucial in helping widows cope with the loss of a spouse and reducing the risk of mental health problems.

A longitudinal study by Stroebe et al. (2013) examined the trajectory of grief and depression in widows over time. The study found that depression and grief symptoms were most severe in the first year after the loss of a spouse, but they tended to decrease over time. However, the study also found that approximately 10% of widows continued to experience severe and prolonged grief symptoms even several years after the loss of a spouse, suggesting that widowhood can have a long-lasting impact on mental health.

ii) Physical Health

Widowhood can also have significant implications for an individual's physical health, including increased risk of morbidity and mortality. According to a study by Shor et al. (2012), widows have a higher risk of developing chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer compared to their married counterparts. The study also found that the risk of mortality increases significantly in the first few years after the loss of a spouse, suggesting that widowhood has a profound impact on physical health.

Another study by Lee *et al.* (2015) found that widowhood is associated with a decline in functional capacity and increased risk of disability, suggesting that the loss of a spouse can have long-term implications for an individual's physical health and well-being.

iii) Social Support of Widowhood

Eventually, all marriages are disrupted by the death of a spouse. This event affects the surviving partner and the lives of children and kin, as well as the community and larger society. Widowhood also has social implications. Such as changes in friendships. It will no longer feel comfortable to be with couples who were once part of the widow's social scene when her husband was alive (DiGiulio, 1992).

Parkes (1972) found that most widows try to continue the friendships they had when the husband was alive, but that few couple relationships survive the death beyond the initial few months. These social interactions were awkward for the widow and the friends and consequently the relationships ended.

Widows in Parkes' (1972) study were actually shunned, and therefore they no longer believed that they belonged to any social group, including their own family. Family members were a source of support during the initial weeks following the death, but after some time, they seemed to become uncomfortable with discussions about the dead husband and conveyed to the widow that it was time to move on. Widows, therefore, must not only deal with the loss of their spouse, but also with the potential loss of friendship and family relationships. Widows must learn to find new sources of support, which is difficult during such a vulnerable time. They must come to terms with the social dimensions of widowhood so that they can make progress toward the resolution of their grief in whatever time frame that might be (Saunders, 1981,).

Di Giulio (1992) emphasizes those young women whose partners die, often lack role models and feel misunderstood and even abandoned by families and friends. Young widows “are an age group at special risk because other studies have shown that the untimely death of a husband gives rise to a more severe and protracted reaction than does a similar bereavement in old age” (Parkes, 1975). According to Digiulio, those young widows are aware of and understand their identity transformation is a significant aspect of their recovery process. They must challenge the basic assumptions of their internal world – the system of beliefs one has about life (DiGiulio, 1992). Social support is crucial in helping individuals cope with the loss of a spouse and maintain their well-being.

According to a study by Kuo *et al.* (2014), social support is a crucial factor in helping widows cope with the loss of a spouse and reducing the risk of depression and other mental health issues. The study also found that the quality of social support is more important than the quantity, suggesting that having supportive relationships with family and friends is crucial in helping widows maintain their well-being.

Another study by Umberson *et al.* (2008) examined the role of social support in mitigating the negative health effects of widowhood. The study found that widows who had high levels of social support had lower levels of depressive symptoms, better self-rated health, and lower mortality

1.1.6 Adjustment to Widowhood

Adjustment to widowhood is difficult because of the lack of clear-cut cultural expectations regarding the proper role of the widow. Adjustments to widowhood also depend on societal expectations, gender, class, race, and ethnic norms. Although the widowed encounter some common problems, it is difficult to specify a normative course of adjustment. One more factor that plays an eminent role in adjustment to widowhood is the society's attitude toward death. Death is a taboo topic for people in most societies. It is a subject that is avoided and this avoidance can be seen in different ways. For example, a society shielding children from death, the use of euphemisms, such as: the person has “left for heavenly abode” or ‘passed away’ and thirdly lack of contact with the dying person or the grieving family. Generally, most people avoid close contact with the dying husband or the grieving widow and her family because they feel uncomfortable with the subject of death. They feel

uncomfortable as they do not know what to say. There is also a great fear that one day, they might also be in the same situation of becoming a widow. What the friends and family do not realize is that their lack of contact with the widow only adds to the widow's grieving process. The widow is already -feeling one loss and to add the loss of friends and family, especially during a time when she needs their support the most, makes her adjustment even more difficult. Hence the society in which we are brought up determines our approach towards the subject of death and dying.

In many modern societies, this adaptive process typically proceeds with few guidelines or even ambiguous signals from the culture as to how to act. In this regard, the role of the widowed person has been described as vague and relatively undefined, in as much as it lacks clearly specified norms or prescriptions for appropriate behaviour. This lack of a normative course of adjustment reflects the diversity of widows and widowers in terms of social and psychological characteristics. In addition, spousal loss evokes a broad spectrum of emotional and behavioural responses from the bereaved, depending on factors such as the nature of the marital relationship and the timing and circumstance under which death occurred. For example, a wife whose husband was killed on the battlefield, in an automobile accident, or in a robbery will respond differently than if he had committed suicide or suffered a long terminal illness. As a result of such factors responses to bereavement often show substantial variation.

When a woman becomes a widow at an early age sometimes in her twenties and thirties, she assumes a role she is not prepared for (Di Giulio, 1992). She has probably not known many widows of her age and she may not have the capacity to anticipate what being a widow will be like. However, Older widows tend to be better adjusted than young person's; "those under 45 years of age who have dependent children have the worst outcome" of morale (Balkwell, 1981). This is due to the additional consequences of solely bearing the financial and maintenance burden of the household, in addition to rearing the children as a single parent. Younger widows suffer more psychological consequences, such as higher intensities of grief in the initial phase of grief (Sanders, 1980) while older widows suffer more physical consequences (Parkes & Weiss, 1983). The reason that younger widows suffer more psychological consequences could be related to the circumstance of the death as well as duration of widowhood.

For older widows, the death of a spouse is an expected event and the search for meaning of the death is less likely. Also, it does not disturb the normal life cycle. In contrast, for younger widows the loss of a spouse is least expected, and therefore, this loss disturbs her assumptive world where she plans and dreams of living a long and happy married life together. The quest for making meaning out of this loss is also very high and urgent.

Another area that impacts the adjustment to widowhood is the financial situation. Many young widows have to adjust to drastic changes in financial status, especially if the husbands were the sole provider. Further, if there was no life insurance or minimal life insurance too, then the adjustment becomes difficult. Loss of income has significant effects on the wellbeing of the young widow. The changes in income status pushes them to seek employment. It becomes very challenging especially if they were not educated enough or skilled enough or have not been in a job for many years. Besides having dependent children becomes a major obstacle in taking up a full-fledged job to support the family. In some instances, even a change in residence may be necessary because there is not enough money to maintain the home. Sometimes, young widows have to depend a lot on their parents specially to look after their children.

1.1.7 Portrayal of widows in popular media

Widowhood is a significant life event that affects individuals in various ways, and this experience has been portrayed in several films. The review of films aims to examine the portrayal of widows in popular films, including the themes and messages conveyed. It is rightly said that theatre is a reflection of social issues. Included is a review of films on issues of identity development among young widows which are significant for a study of this kind. This review will throw light on how the loss of a loved one unsettles the foundation of a married life. It depicts how bereaved individuals are forced to make life altering decisions and social transitions and develop new assumptions about the world and rather learn a new way of being in the world.

Nirmonn (1996) a Konkani film delves into the complex emotional and social challenges faced by a young widow. It is a film narrating the life of a widow. *Nirmonn* meaning ‘destiny’ is set in Goa and revolves around the lives of Marku, a music teacher, and his wife, Claudia. They have two daughters and a son. The couple share undying love. Unable to meet the needs of the household Marku takes up a job on the ship, and makes his best friend Rudolf promise to take care of the family in his absence. Following an accident at sea, Marku is ship-wrecked and loses his memory. He is unable to return home. Deeply shocked by the accident and Marku’s disappearance, Claudia lives the life of a widow, and the family spirals into poverty and starvation. Despite being deeply in love with her first husband, Claudia agrees to marry her husband’s friend Rudolf, who is a rich man.

Although the plot's apparent simplicity and predictability, the narrative employs traditional cultural tropes, particularly that of the "chaste wife." Claudia's character embodies this trope as she remains devoted to her husband, even to the point of near-starvation. It is only when faced with the dire necessity of providing for her children and securing their future that she consents to remarriage. However, when her first husband eventually returns after many years, Claudia relinquishes the comfort and security of her new life to reunite with him. This portrayal underscores the societal expectation for widows to maintain loyalty to their deceased husbands, reinforcing the ideal of self-sacrifice and devotion in the face of personal hardship.

The narrative of the film *Nirmonn* institutionalizes the roles of the virtuous wife, the altruistic mother, and the true loving wife, reinforcing and validating a set of ideals commonly upheld in Indian popular culture. The story is moralistic in nature, conveying a straightforward message – if one adheres to traditional roles, regardless of the challenges encountered, *Nirmonn* (destiny) will ensure the preservation of the family.

Another movie, a Kannada film – *Naathicharami* written by Sandhya Rani and directed by Manjunatha Somashekara Reddy gives a poignant narration about the nuances, women from all walks of life. *Nathicharami* is a Hindu marriage vow which means “I promise to stand by”. It is a promise to be together forever as a righteous partner during

times of uncertainties, overcoming all desires of riches and needs, a promise to embrace and cherish everything life has to offer. The film is about Gowri who loses her spouse after five years of marriage. She is an educated urban class woman, working as a team leader in the information technology sector. The death of her husband leaves her perplexed between her loyalty to her deceased husband and her physical desires and emotional needs. She is stuck in her ordinary life with people from her daily life pattern, which includes her parents, in laws, her maid, colleagues who suggest remarriage. But Gowri feels there is no need of a remarriage to fulfil only her physical desires as barring that she is happy with her life. Some suggest to seek counselling. The counsellor too supports her idea of fulfilling her sexual desire as a 'need' without the commitment of a marriage. She tries to find a man through a dating app and lays down terms and conditions such as not getting emotionally attached, deleting all contacts and texts once the sexual need is fulfilled. Finally, when she feels that she has overcome her ambiguity, the situation takes a leap. She befriends a married man and fulfils her desire. The film narrates the struggles of the protagonist in a society that believes physical desires can only be followed by a nuptial. This film is a bold take on female desire and sexuality and focuses on the internal contradictions in women's status and role.

The movie *Paggalait* (2021) is about Sandhya who loses her husband after five months of married life. She contends with an inability to grieve, to deal with quirky relatives, and also a startling discovery about her late husband who she finds out had a secret lover. There wasn't enough time for love to bloom between the couple, as it was an arranged marriage and death came a few months later. Consequently, Sandhya could not fake feelings she did not possess for her belated husband, leading family members to think she had gone insane or had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She confronts her husband's lover, wanting to know if it was true and to clear up the suspicions growing in her mind. Through the lover, she discovers a side to her husband that she never experienced herself, which sets her free. While all the family members gather to complete the *tehrvi* (thirteenth day) ritual, Sandhya acts frenzied. *Paggalait* is a movie with feminism as its central theme and a tinge of hypocrisy. Dialogues like '*par duniya ladkiyon ke liye sochti hai, lekin yeh nahi puchti hai ki who kya soch rahe hai*' (the society makes decisions for

the woman, but never as what is her decision) aur “*Jab ladki log ko akal aati hai na, toh sab unhe pagglait hi kehte hain!*” (When a woman gets wise enough, she is labelled as ‘crazy’ by everyone). And then there is one moment where Sandhya says, “we need to make our own decisions, or else others will make them on our behalf and we will have to settle down with them no matter we like them or not”. The film brings out the hold of societal norms and conformity to stereotype a widow’s behaviour. It is this journey of self-discovery and a life changing realization that supports this research.

An English film *Our Souls at Night* (2017) explores the lives of a widow and a widower who seek companionship and eventually discover love in each other. After years of living as neighbours, Addie proposes to her neighbour, "Would you be interested in coming to my house to sleep with me?" While this initially seems like a euphemism for intimacy, she clarifies that her request is about finding comfort through the night, not about sex. Both characters are grappling with deep loneliness. As Addie and her neighbour begin to share a bed platonically, their innocent aim is to alleviate their mutual isolation. However, as their relationship develops, they each confront the grief and loss of their former spouses, leading to a genuine romance. The film poignantly captures the reality of loneliness, especially when families become preoccupied with their own lives, often at a distance. It illustrates the profound impact of losing a spouse, where routines of shared meals and companionship suddenly come to an end. The narrative highlights the fundamental human need for companionship over self-pity and highlights the potential for connection and love even in later life. It challenges the notion that aging is synonymous with solitude, instead offering a vision of later years as a time that can be vibrant, spontaneous, and full of new possibilities. The film's portrayal of overcoming loneliness through connection is particularly relevant to sociological discussions on aging, widowhood, and the social dynamics of companionship.

The above review of films is particularly relevant to this thesis on young widowhood and identity reconstruction, as it provides critical insights into the influence of traditional cultural narratives on the experiences and identity formation of young widows.

Further, the conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning the present study includes a combination of all the theories mentioned. In reviewing the literature on status

of women in general with specific focus on widowhood, bereavement, and identity development it is clear that while there appears to be some consistent elements of bereavement, it is also an individualized process that does not neatly follow a time table or a stage model.

Another realisation that comes through the review of literature is that unless her spouse is significantly older, a young widow experiences widowhood as an unexpected event that she is consequently not prepared for it socially, financially or emotionally. The exploration of the unique experience of young widowhood within a sociological framework involves understanding and analysing the social factors that shape and influence the lives of young widows. Through the Sociological perspectives we can examine the broader societal context, norms, and structures that impact individuals' experiences, in this case, those of young widows.

Sociologically, widowhood is not just an individual experience but a socially constructed phenomenon. Society shapes the meaning and expectations associated with widowhood, influencing how individuals perceive their roles and identities after the loss of a spouse. Examining societal norms and cultural expectations can provide insights into the challenges young widows may face in negotiating their social roles and identities.

Social support is crucial for individuals coping with loss. Examining the social networks of young widows can shed light on the availability and quality of support they receive. Sociological research can explore the impact of family, friends, and community support systems on the grieving and adjustment processes, providing valuable information for interventions and support services.

Societal stigmas and stereotypes surrounding widowhood may influence the way young widows are perceived and treated. Sociological exploration can uncover the existing stereotypes and stigmas, highlighting the need for societal awareness and change.

1.1.8 Operational definitions

This study focuses on young widowhood.

- **Single Parent:** In this study, a single parent is defined as a woman/widow who has not remarried after the death of her husband.

- **Young Widow:** A young widow, as defined in this study, refers to a woman between the ages of 25 and 45 at the time of her husband's death.

This research takes into consideration the intersectionality of factors such as age, education and socio-economic status in the experience of young widowhood. Different social identities may intersect, creating unique challenges and opportunities for individuals. An intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences within the young widow population.

The unique experience of young widowhood deserves to be explored so that this population that has been relatively overlooked can be offered opportunities to be heard and encouraged to move ahead in life. This thesis aims to fulfil a gap where more research is needed that considers these women's experience and the factors that influence their grief process and how they adjust to losing a mate and reconstruct a new identity.

1.1.9 Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework of the study comprises four theories of identity development and constructivist research. They are Family Systems Theory posited by Bowen (1966), Erickson's (1964, *et al.*) Theory of Lifespan Development, Gilligan's (1982) Theory of Women's Identity Formation, and The Constructivist Theory of Niemeyer (2003). In the foregoing account a theoretical review of literature pertaining to the topic of research is presented.

I) Application of Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory, developed by Murray Bowen (1966), serves as a foundational framework for understanding the interconnected emotional dynamics within families. According to this theory, individuals cannot be understood in isolation from their families, as they form part of an emotional unit where the behaviour of one member inevitably affects the others. In the context of this thesis, which explores bereavement, widowhood, and the social construction of identity among young Roman Catholic widows,

the theory offers valuable insights into how grief is experienced not just individually but collectively within the family system.

The loss of a husband disrupts the established emotional balance of the family. For a young widow, this disruption often requires a renegotiation of her role and identity within both the marital and natal families. Family Systems Theory helps to analyse how this renegotiation is influenced by the reactions and expectations of other family members, such as in-laws, children, and siblings. Literature reviewed through this lens reveals that the young widow's process of adjustment is often shaped by a complex web of relational dynamics, wherein her grief and identity reconstruction are entangled with the family's need to maintain emotional stability.

In traditional Roman Catholic families, especially in tightly knit communities, there are often implicit norms and values regarding how a widow should behave. Studies have shown that widows may face expectations to maintain modesty, silence, and dependency. These expectations can conflict with a young widow's desire to rebuild her life or assert independence. Family Systems Theory allows us to understand these tensions as systemic reactions aimed at preserving family equilibrium. The widow's pursuit of autonomy, for example, may be perceived as a threat to this equilibrium, prompting emotional resistance from family members.

Furthermore, the parenting role of young widows frequently becomes central after the loss. The literature indicates that while this role can offer a sense of purpose and continuity, it can also be heavily influenced or controlled by extended family members. In many cases, widows are expected to focus solely on child-rearing and are discouraged from pursuing personal or professional goals that deviate from traditional roles. Bowen's concept of emotional interdependence explains how these expectations are often less about the individual and more about the family's collective attempt to maintain its structure and identity after a loss.

Another significant aspect of the theory is its focus on emotional cut-offs and enmeshment. Some widows, in an effort to redefine themselves, may distance themselves from their marital families, while others may become emotionally over-involved, suppressing their personal aspirations for the sake of family harmony. These patterns are influenced by the family's coping mechanisms and are often embedded in broader cultural

and religious values. In the Roman Catholic context, these include ideals of sacrifice, duty, and reverence for the deceased, which may further shape the widow's reconstruction of her identity.

Thus, Family Systems Theory provides a holistic approach to reviewing literature related to young widowhood. It emphasizes that bereavement is not merely an individual emotional experience but a family-wide adjustment process. By applying this theory, the review of literature gains depth in understanding how familial relationships and emotional expectations influence the widow's journey of grief, role transition, and identity reconstruction within the Roman Catholic cultural framework.

II) Eric Erickson Theory of Lifespan development (1964)

Eric Erickson (1964) is regarded as one of the forefathers of identity theory, and his work has served as a model for subsequent approaches to identity development. In his famous work 'Theory of Lifespan Development' he claimed that identity development is linear and that we advance from one stage to the next throughout our lives. Individuals must complete stage tasks to go to the next stage. His idea is divided into eight stages, each of which addresses a different aspect of our lives. The subject at each stage is a set of opposites, example – isolation versus intimacy is the theme for early adulthood. He states that a person starts at one extreme of the spectrum and progresses to the other during that period.

According to Erickson, finding a companion is the ultimate task and human desire during the adult stage of life. Establishing a feeling of purpose, achieving a sense of self, developing concern for future generations, and accepting the reality of death, as well as achieving a sense of happiness with life, are all goals of successful adulthood. He states that, a young widow had previously completed the process of early adulthood and was most likely moving towards the completion of the other goals, but due to the loss of their spouses, they find themselves in this position. The relevance of the theory to this research is that it lays the groundwork for understanding how identity is linked to partnership and how that plays into a sense of purpose and a sense of self.

III) Gilligan's (1982) Women's Identity Development Theory

Women's Identity Development Theory is a framework through which Gilligan (1982) explains how women develop their sense of self and identity over the course of their lives. This theory was developed in the 1970s as a response to earlier developmental theories, such as Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, which were largely based on male experiences and did not adequately account for the experiences of women. Women's Identity Development Theory focuses on the unique experiences and challenges women face in developing their identities. This theory integrates psychological, sociological, and feminist perspectives to explore how women's identities are shaped by personal experiences and societal influences.

In another groundbreaking work "In a Different Voice" (1982), Gilligan argued that traditional theories of moral development, such as those proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), were male-centric and did not accurately reflect women's experiences. She introduced the idea that women's moral reasoning is often based on principles of care and responsibility in relationships, rather than abstract principles of justice. Unlike Erik Erickson (1964), Gilligan aims to establish an identity strategy that takes into account the particular elements of women's development. A method in which the "concept of identity" is broadened to include "the experience of interconnection" (Gilligan 1982, 1983:173).

In Women's Identity Development Theory Gilligan (1982), posits that women's sense of self is influenced by a variety of factors, including their relationships with others, their roles and responsibilities, and their experiences with sexism and discrimination. According to this theory, women go through a series of stages as they develop their sense of self, and each stage is characterized by specific challenges and tasks. The first stage in this theory is known as the "individualization" stage. During this stage, women begin to separate themselves from their families and develop a sense of independence and autonomy. This can be a difficult stage, as women may feel guilty or conflicted about leaving their families behind and pursuing their own goals and aspirations. The second stage is the "exploration" stage. During this stage, women begin to explore different roles and identities, trying out different careers, lifestyles, and relationships. This stage can be challenging, as women may struggle to balance the expectations of others with their own

desires and goals. The third stage is the "crisis" stage. During this stage, women may experience a crisis or turning point that forces them to re-evaluate their goals, values, and priorities. This crisis could be triggered by a major life event, such as the loss of a loved one or a job, or it could be a result of a gradual realization that their current path is not fulfilling. The fourth stage is the "integration" stage. During this stage, women begin to integrate their various roles and identities into a cohesive sense of self. They may develop a stronger sense of purpose and direction, and they may feel more confident and self-assured. Finally, the fifth stage is the "redefinition" stage. During this stage, women may redefine their sense of self and identity as they enter new phases of life, such as retirement or old age. They may reflect on their past experiences and accomplishments and look for new ways to contribute to their communities and society.

Gilligan's Women's Identity Development Theory (1982) is an important framework for understanding how women develop their sense of self and identity over time. It highlights the unique challenges and experiences that women face as they navigate through life, and it provides a roadmap for women to explore and develop their own sense of self and purpose. Research by Gilligan finds connections between crises and the formation of a woman's identity. "Crisis reveals character," according to one of the women in her study, and "crisis builds character," according to Gilligan.

The link Gilligan (1982) draws between women and relationships is crucial to this study. "The knowledge that one's self and others are intertwined and they can only be preserved if people take care of one other" is significant for this research. This has a lot to do with how young widows keep the sense of still being in love with, married to, and wanting to connect to their departed spouse, and it has a lot to do with how this connection may be preserved during the process of reconstructing a new identity. As a result, losing a spouse means losing not only a physical companion, but also the object of their dedication, care, responsibility, affection and identity.

IV) The Constructivist Theory of Niemeyer (2003)

The constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping individuals' experiences and understanding of the world. It suggests that

knowledge is constructed through interactions between individuals and their environment, rather than being objectively determined (Niemeyer, 2003). For example, in a review of literature on the experiences of single parenting, the constructivist theory could be used to examine how different authors construct their understanding of the challenges and opportunities of single parenting. This might involve analysing the ways in which they have drawn upon their own experiences as single parents or their interactions with other single parents, as well as the cultural and social contexts that shape their perspectives.

By emphasizing the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping individuals' experiences and understanding of the world, the constructivist theory can help to provide a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the research topic. A persistent endeavour to integrate various life situations while keeping a sense of which we are gives rise to our sense of self. Significant losses, according to Niemeyer, test survivors' self-narratives and show how these losses might manifest themselves in a variety of ways. This emphasis on the connection with the deceased spouse is what many bereavement researchers are finding to be significant and a new component to embrace in meaning and identity reconstruction. Neimeyer offers this new view of bereavement by proposing that 'meaning reconstruction' is the central process in what we conventionally refer to as grieving. For instance, one of the factors contributing to comfort for older widows included having positive memories which preserved the connection with their deceased spouse. The difference for young widows is that as their marriages were usually not as long as the older widows, they are left more with dreams of their marriages rather than a history of memories (Neimeyer, 2001).

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a growing research literature on widowhood. Most of it is concerned with the explanation of psychological and emotional adaptations to bereavement and the socio-economic conditions of widows.

The present study is confined to the study of 38 young widows belonging to the four talukas of South Goa. Several realms will benefit from the significance of this study. This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on identity reconstruction of widowhood. As research has been done about the experience of young

widows, fitting into the age group of 25-45 years of south Goa, which will benefit women in general and young widows in particular. This is the first in-depth study on young widows in the Roman catholic community in Goa, India. It is also intended to help bereaved children to deal with the loss of a father.

This study will explore the identity transformation of young widows, a specific population that has yet been overlooked, and may offer a sense of hope and validation to widows who are struggling with this experience. By conducting this research to study experience of loss and reflect on how it has impacted their identities, this study will broaden knowledge of counsellors and other mental professionals and enhance their understanding of the unique experience of young widows. The study could be a benefit to the widowers, professional care givers, prospective researchers and religious leaders to acquire more knowledge on the significance of bereavement and adjustment to grief.

Additionally, this study also provides support for other women coping with the traumatic loss of a spouse. It will offer participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and consider the effects it has on identities and their lives in general. The significance of the study is that it addresses a population that has not yet been carefully examined. It is also hoped that the study will increase the level of awareness among the community members of the population under study.

Another significant outcome of this study may be the identification of certain coping factors, which will further help in construction of their identity. The findings of this study will also help for bereavement support groups.

1.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conducting research for this study was not only a scholarly endeavour but also a deeply personal and enriching journey. Engaging with young Roman Catholic widows who had endured profound loss required a great deal of empathy, sensitivity, and ethical awareness. While the research process provided valuable insights into the social construction of identity following bereavement, it also brought with it a responsibility to respect and protect the dignity and emotional well-being of all participants involved.

Given the nature of the study, which focused on the lived experiences of women who had lost their spouses, utmost care was taken to uphold ethical standards at every stage

of the research. The emotional vulnerability of participants was acknowledged from the outset, and all necessary precautions were taken to ensure that the research did not add to their emotional burden. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and only those who willingly agreed to share their experiences were included in the sample. No form of coercion, persuasion, or manipulation was used at any point to influence their decision to participate.

To maintain trust and safeguard the privacy of the respondents, confidentiality was a central principle of the research process. The identities of the participants were strictly protected. Names, personal details, and identifying characteristics were not disclosed in any part of the research. Each respondent was assigned a code or pseudonym for data handling, analysis, and presentation of findings. This anonymity not only respected their privacy but also allowed them to speak openly and honestly without fear of judgment or repercussion.

Furthermore, the nature of the questions posed during interviews was carefully considered. Since the subject matter touched upon grief, identity, and personal transformation—topics that are often painful to revisit—efforts were made to create a safe and comfortable environment for participants. Intrusive or potentially distressing questions were approached with caution and compassion. The language used was respectful and non-judgmental, and the pace of the interviews was adapted to suit the emotional readiness of each respondent.

Informed consent was another critical aspect of the ethical process. Participants were fully briefed about the purpose of the study, the use of the data, their rights as respondents, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Before each interview, written or verbal consent was obtained, depending on the participant's comfort level and literacy. They were reassured that they could refuse to answer any question they found uncomfortable or withdraw from the interview at any point without offering an explanation.

It was important to convey that the research process was meant to empower rather than exploit the respondents. By sharing their stories, they were not just contributing to academic knowledge but also giving voice to a reality that is often overlooked in mainstream discourse. To honour this contribution, efforts were made to ensure that their narratives were represented with integrity, compassion, and respect.

At times, interviews became emotional, and participants reflected on aspects of their grief and widowhood that they had not previously discussed with anyone. In such moments, it was crucial for the researcher to exercise emotional intelligence, pausing the interview if needed and offering the option to stop or reschedule. Participants were frequently reminded that their mental and emotional well-being was of far greater importance than completing the research.

In summary, the ethical considerations for this study were not treated as a mere procedural requirement but were integrated into every interaction with the participants. The guiding principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, emotional safety, and informed consent were upheld with sincerity and commitment. By respecting these ethical standards, the study ensured that the voices of the widows were not only heard but heard with dignity, compassion, and care.

1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Identifying potential weaknesses of the study is a crucial aspect of ethical research. As a researcher, it is a moral responsibility to specify the limitations to provide a clear understanding of the study's scope and constraints. The study titled "Bereavement, Widowhood, and Social Construction of Identity: A Study of Roman Catholic Widows in South Goa" faced the following limitations:

The sensitive nature of the research topic posed significant challenges. Convincing respondents to participate and share their personal experiences with an unknown researcher was a daunting task. The respondents were apprehensive about the researcher's intentions and the purpose of the study. This apprehension could have influenced their willingness to open up fully, potentially affecting the depth and authenticity of the data collected. The emotional burden associated with discussing bereavement and widowhood further complicated the engagement process.

This study is limited to the experiences of only young widows, in contrast to including widows of all ages. While focusing on young widows allows for a detailed exploration of their unique challenges and identity reconstruction processes, it excludes the experiences of older widows, which might differ significantly. Older widows may have

different coping mechanisms, social support structures, and identity reconstruction experiences, which are not fully captured in this study.

The experiences of widowhood can vary significantly across different religious communities. This study focuses exclusively on Roman Catholic widows in South Goa, which limits its scope to this particular religious and cultural context. While this focus provides in-depth insights into the specific experiences and social constructions of identity among Roman Catholic widows, it excludes the potentially vast and enriching data that could be gathered from widows of other religious communities. Each religious community has its own beliefs, rituals, and support systems that influence the widowhood experience. Including diverse religious perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social construction of identity among widows.

1.4 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organised into 07 chapters which are as follows:

Chapter I – Introduction

This chapter sets the stage for the entire thesis by providing a comprehensive overview of the status of women in Indian society, with a specific focus on young widows. This includes historical, cultural, and social perspectives, and how these have evolved over time. The introduction should touch upon the patriarchal structures and gender norms that shape the lives of women in India, particularly widows, who often face social ostracism and economic challenges.

The thorough literature review helped to identify existing research on widowhood, highlighting key findings and theoretical perspectives. It helped to point out gaps in the current knowledge, which the present study aims to address. The review includes sociological theories related to bereavement, such as the Disenfranchised Grief theory, which posits that certain types of grief, like that experienced by widows, are not socially acknowledged or supported.

This chapter also integrates various sociological theories on bereavement, widowhood, and identity. For example: Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development can be applied to understand the identity crises widows may face. Particularly relevant is the stage of "Generativity vs. Stagnation"

and "Integrity vs. Despair," where the challenge is to find meaning and purpose in life after a significant loss. Young widows, in particular, may struggle with finding new directions and roles in society.

Robert A. Neimeyer's Constructivist Theory of Grief – Neimeyer's theory emphasizes the process of meaning reconstruction in the aftermath of loss. This perspective is crucial for understanding how widows make sense of their loss and rebuild their identities. The focus is on how they reinterpret their life stories and integrate the loss into their ongoing lives.

Gilligan's work on moral development and care ethics provides insight into the relational aspects of widows' experiences. Her emphasis on care and relationships helps in understanding how widows navigate their roles and responsibilities, particularly in the context of family and community support systems. By incorporating these theories, the study aims to provide a multidimensional understanding of the experiences of widows and the processes they undergo in reconstructing their identities.

Chapter II – Research Setting and Methodology

In this chapter the research problem was clearly defined, explaining its significance and what the study aimed to achieve. The focus was on understanding the socio-economic and psychological impacts of widowhood on young women in Goa and how they navigated these challenges. The objectives included exploring the coping strategies employed by young widows, the support systems available to them, and the broader societal attitudes towards widowhood.

The geographical and demographic scope of the study was described, including the rationale for selecting specific talukas and villages. The study was based in four talukas of Goa. A representative sample of respondents was ensured through careful sampling methods, which included selecting diverse villages within each taluka to capture a wide range of experiences. This chapter also explains the different tools of data collection which are being used for this study. The data collection tools included both qualitative and quantitative methods. The in-depth interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of personal and communal narratives.

The significance of the study was outlined for academic, policy, and social work fields. Practical challenges encountered during fieldwork were reflected upon, such as difficulties in gaining trust and accessing certain communities. Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality, were emphasized. The study's limitations and potential biases were acknowledged, providing transparency and a basis for future research improvements.

Chapter III – Socio-Demographic profile of the Respondents

This chapter presents the primary data collected from the respondents through structured interviews. It offers a comprehensive overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of young Roman Catholic widows, which include variables such as age, level of education, and monthly income. These variables are crucial in understanding the lived realities of the respondents and form the foundation for analyzing their social and economic conditions post-bereavement. To enhance visual clarity and facilitate easy interpretation of the data, each of these variables has been presented using pie charts. These visual representations allow for an immediate understanding of the distribution and proportion of each variable within the sample, thereby highlighting patterns that may not be as evident through textual explanation alone.

In addition to individual data on the widows, details about their deceased husbands—such as their age at the time of death, educational background, and previous occupation—were also collected and analyzed. This was done to better comprehend the socio-economic status of the family prior to the husband's death and how his absence has reshaped the widow's life. Furthermore, the study explored variables such as age at marriage and duration of the marriage, as these play a significant role in shaping the widow's sense of identity, autonomy, and resilience. Each of these indicators has been visually depicted in pie charts to emphasize their relative significance. The analysis of these variables is essential because they contribute to the understanding of the widow's position within the family and society, and they influence the way she reconstructs her identity after loss. Whether she assumes a role of independence, faces social marginalization, or negotiates a new identity within traditional norms is, to a large extent, determined by these socio-demographic factors.

Chapter IV – Bereavement and Socio-Cultural Dimension

This chapter examines the customs and rituals associated with death and widowhood in the Catholic community in Goa. These practices reflect and reinforce broader social norms and values, illustrating how the community perceives mourning, gender roles, and the place of widows in society. By understanding these customs, we gain insight into how widows are perceived and treated within their communities.

Specific rituals, such as the bangle-breaking ceremony, are detailed and analyzed. The bangle-breaking ceremony, for instance, symbolizes the end of a woman's married life and her transition into widowhood. Using sociological theories like Durkheim's ideas on the social functions of rituals, the symbolic meanings of these practices are explored. Durkheim's theory suggests that rituals serve to reinforce social cohesion and collective beliefs, thus these widowhood rituals function to reaffirm community norms and the widow's new social identity.

The prevalence and variations of these practices across different talukas are compared and contrasted. Regional variations and their significance are explored, highlighting how local customs can differ even within a relatively small geographical area. These differences may be influenced by factors such as local history, economic considerations, and sub-cultural identities within the Catholic community. By examining these regional variations, we better understand the diversity of experiences among widows in Goa and the specific socio-cultural contexts that shape their lives.

Chapter V – Widowed Young: Issues and Concerns

This chapter discusses the specific challenges faced by young widows, including the lack of physical intimacy, financial insecurity, and the burden of single parenthood. Young widows often find themselves isolated, lacking the companionship and support that comes from a marital relationship. Additionally, they may struggle with managing household finances and providing for their children on their own. The emotional and mental health issues associated with young widowhood, such as depression, anxiety, and social isolation, are explored.

The analysis focuses on how economic instability and the absence of family support systems exacerbate the difficulties faced by young widows. Many young widows may not have access to stable employment or sufficient income to support their families. This section discusses the role of government policies in alleviating these issues, highlighting the need for provide financial assistance, employment opportunities, and social support to young widows.

Chapter VI – Negotiating widowhood through Identity Reconstruction

This chapter primarily focuses on the identity reconstruction of young widows and their transition towards a new identity. It explores the strategies used by these women to cope with their new ambivalent marital status, drawing on sociological theories and concepts to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Young widows often face the challenge of reconstructing their identity after the loss of their spouse. This process involves redefining their roles and self-concept in the absence of their marital partner. Sociologically, this can be understood through the lens of identity theory, which posits that individuals' identities are shaped by their roles and the meanings they attach to them. The transition to widowhood requires these women to renegotiate their social identity and find new ways to integrate their past and present selves. The chapter discusses the strategies young widows use, such as taking up a job, remarriage, and accepting their present position, to cope with widowhood and find new directions in life.

Chapter VII – Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, the key findings of the study are summarized, offering a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of young Roman Catholic widows in the process of identity reconstruction after bereavement. The conclusions drawn are based on both the statistical data and the qualitative insights gathered during the research. A significant aspect of this chapter is the inclusion of the widows' own voices—highlighting their suggestions, expectations, and hopes for greater empathy and support from their families, churches, and wider communities. Many widows expressed a desire for emotional validation, opportunities for economic independence, and social acceptance beyond traditional roles. Their insights provide practical and heartfelt recommendations for interventions that can

ease the process of transition and healing. Additionally, this chapter outlines areas where further research is needed, especially in exploring the role of cultural norms, community support systems, and long-term psychological outcomes. The widows' suggestions serve not only as valuable feedback but also as a guide for policymakers, social workers, and religious leaders.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the framework in which the present study has been undertaken. It mainly focuses on the research problem, methodology and design of the study, the specific objectives of the research, research questions, research universe, and locale of the study, sampling procedures, field experiences and methods of data collection. Since the study is complex in nature, multi tools are used to study the various aspects of widow and widowhood. These include: observation, informal and formal discussions, interviews and case studies. This chapter also highlights the practical significance of the study.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods ensures a more holistic understanding of the widows' lived experiences. Special attention is given to cultural and emotional sensitivity while interacting with the participants, given the deeply personal and often painful nature of their narratives. The chapter explains the rationale behind selecting Roman Catholic young widows in Goa as the focus group, based on their unique social positioning and the evolving cultural expectations surrounding widowhood. It also explores the challenges faced during data collection, including establishing trust and ensuring ethical boundaries. Each method employed is described in detail to reflect its contribution to the research findings. Ultimately, the chapter provides the foundation upon which the entire study is built, linking theoretical insights with empirical evidence gathered through fieldwork and data analysis.

2.2 RESEARCH UNIVERSE

The universe for the study was the state of Goa. The State of Goa, admeasuring 3,702 square kilometres ,is situated between 15-47' -59'' and 14-53' -57'' North Latitude and 73- 40'-54'' and 74o-20' -11'' Longitude East of Greenwich (Desai, 2001: 4).It is bounded on the west by the Arabian Sea and on the east by the Sahyadri range of mountains. The Sawantwadi district of Maharashtra forms its northern border while Karwar district of Karnataka is its southern border.

Goa was under the domination of the Portuguese from 1510-1961. Tiswadi taluka was occupied in 1510. Later the rule was extended to Salcete and Bardez in 1543. These are referred as to the Velhas Conquistas (old conquests). The policy of Christianisation and assimilation of the local people happened here. The Portuguese started Catholic missionary activities soon after arrival, The taluka's of Pernem, Ponda, Bicholim, Satari, Sanguem, Quepem and Canacona, collectively known as Novas Conquistas, were added one by one to the Goan territory by 1788. Thus, they were under Portuguese rule for a shorter time, their social-cultural influence therefore, being minimal. The old conquest have a large catholic presence, whereas the later conquest periodically Hindu. This being an important distinction, the study has kept in mind all its corollaries and accordingly selected the towns and villages for the study.

Goa became the 25th State of the Union of India on 30th May 1987. Goa has 359 villages and 44 towns. For administrative purposes the State is divided into two districts and 12 talukas. The South Goa District comprises the talukas of Mormugao, Salcete, Quepem, Sanguem, Dharbondara and Canacona (census Department, Panaji). The talukas of Pernem, Satari, Bardez, Tiswadi, Bicholim and Ponda form the North Goa District. This

research is located in south Goa district .



South Goa District

In 2011, South Goa had population of 640,537 of which male and female were 322,463 and 318,074 respectively. In 2001 census, South Goa had a population of 589,095 of which males were 298,746 and remaining 290,349 were females.

Out of the total South Goa population in 2011 census, 64.59 percent lives in urban regions of district. In total 413,733 people live in urban areas of which males are 210,935 and females are 202,798. Average literacy rate in South Goa district as per census 2011 is 89.11 % of which males and females are 92.61 % and 85.47 % literates respectively. In

actual number 329,783 people are literate in urban region of which males and females are 174,527 and 155,256 respectively.

As per 2011 census, 35.41 % population of South Goa districts lives in rural areas of villages. The total South Goa district population living in rural areas is 226,804 of which males and females are 111,528 and 115,276 respectively. Literacy rate in rural areas of South Goa district is 84.83 % as per census data 2011. Gender wise, male and female literacy stood at 89.89 and 79.98 percent respectively. In total, 172,644 people were literate of which males and females were 89,558 and 83,086 respectively.

2.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The position of a widow in society is a vital topic that sociologists have discussed. Having had a sheltered life with their husbands, the untimely death of her husband results in a range of issues. Young widows have a short span of married life. They also have the burden of rearing of children and parenting bereaved children along with their own grief and challenges. This severely affects not only their physical, mental but also their social wellbeing. Other than facing personal issues and concerns, they become vulnerable to socio-cultural pre-judgments, gossips and shaming.

Even though studies on women are increasing during the last few years, studies on young widows remain relatively few. A majority of these studies are devoted to the problem of working women, role conflicts, problems of adjustment at house and workplaces. It is disturbing that in a country with such a large population, 4.6 percent of the population is widowed, as per the 2011 census, with women outnumbering men, little attention has been paid to widowhood research; aside from recognising that the widow may have financial problems for which Social Security can provide some assistance, few people understand what it means to be widowed. There is no consistent pattern of widowhood, either in terms of the situations that lead to it or in terms of the impact. Widows do not even have a set way of life. For these reasons, the researcher opted to explore widowhood issues. The goal of this research is to look into the challenges that come with widowhood, particularly for young widows and see what alternatives might be available. A secondary purpose of this research is to raise more awareness about the predicament of widows.

his research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the specific challenges faced by young widows, particularly those in the Roman Catholic community of South Goa. The study seeks to explore the peculiar issues involved in the experience of widowhood, including the profound identity shift from 'wife' to 'widow' and the subsequent efforts to reconstruct identity amidst loss. Additionally, this research examines the transitions young widows undergo, from being married to returning to a single status, with particular emphasis on those who have dependent children. By analysing these aspects, the study aims to enhance awareness of the structural barriers faced by young widows and to identify potential strategies or alternatives that could help mitigate these social inequalities.

2.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The broad objectives of the present study have been articulated into some sociologically relevant questions as delineated below

1. To understand the social construction of identity formation that takes place among young widows of South Goa.
2. What are the socio- cultural and economic issues that young Roman Catholic widows of South Goa have to negotiate ?

2.5 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

1. To undertake a socio demographic profile of young widows of South Goa.
2. To discern the socio-cultural rituals and customs of bereavement among the Roman Catholic widows of South Goa.
3. To enquire into the socio- cultural and economic issues that young Roman Catholic widows of South Goa have to negotiate, and
4. To understand the process of social construction of identity formation that takes place among young widows of South Goa.

The study on widowhood seeks to answer the above-mentioned questions regarding widowed women's search for identity. The study focuses on identifying problems and

finding answers to the questions emerging while going through the process of identity reconstruction.

2.6 SOME RESEARCH PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS

i) Locale of the study

At first data on the overall Roman Catholic population in both districts of the State of Goa were gathered using religion-specific statistics, as shown in table one and two. Then, after analysing the religious data of both districts, the District of South Goa was chosen for study because the Catholics are more than double in this District as compared to North Goa. Whereas the Hindu population is more prevalent in North Goa.

Table 1: Religion Wise Data of Districts of Goa, 2011

Description	North – Goa (in per Cent)	South – Goa (in per cent)
Hindu	76.06	53.34
Muslim	7.08	9.93
Christian	16.40	36.21
Sikh	0.08	0.13
Buddhist	0.07	0.08
Jain	0.07	0.09
Others	0.02	0.01
Not stated	0.19	0.19

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/goa.html>

Table 2: The Catholic Population in the Taluka of South Goa, 2011

Name of Taluka	Percentage of Catholic population
Salcete	55.57
Quepem	48.21
Sanguem	38.73
Marmugao	21.54
Canacona	17.7
Dharbondara	Came into existence after census 2011.

Source: https://censusindia.gov.in/2011_census/dchb/goa.html

ii) Identification of the respondents

The universe of the study consists of young widowed women residing in Goa. In order to select the respondents, the identification of young widows was the first step as there is no official record of the widows with necessary details. Hence, the researcher had to rely on the church sources.

a) Parish Church: In Goa, the churches have a Parish Pastoral Council. This consists of four elected members from each *Vaddo* (ward) of the village. Every three years, the church elects four representatives by secret ballot. Every ward is required to nominate eight members of their ward, after which they must vote. The chosen members serve as a link between the parishioners and the main church. The researcher through the assistance of Parish priest of different churches and Chaplains of different chapels of the selected talukas was able to contact the Parish Council members. This enabled to identify the young widows.

b) Monthly Bulletin: The second strategy was by making use of the Monthly Bulletin and Death records maintained by the church. A Monthly Bulletin published by the churches in Goa was another major source. For example, Our Lady of Rosary Church, Navelim publishes a monthly bulletin called “Ruzaichim pavlam” (in the footsteps of our

lady of Rosary). This Monthly Bulletin includes information on the number of births, nuptials, and deaths that occurred during that particular month, as well as the mass dates of the first, second, and third death memorials. This data served as a significant base for selection of respondents.

c) Snowball Sampling Technique

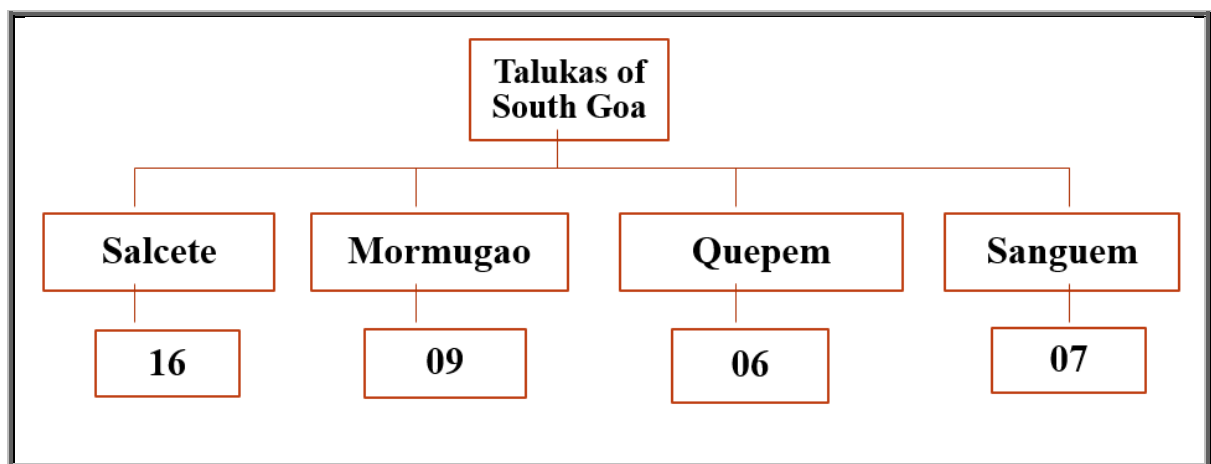
This technique was used to select the respondents from the identified young widows. The snowball sampling technique enabled the researcher to cover relevant variables related to the investigation. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances (Troutman, 2021). Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball.

In this study, the researcher proceeded through the process of reference from one person to the next to select the respondents. Each one was asked to recommend one or more respondents. This method helped the researcher to build up a reasonable size of respondents i.e., through priests, relatives, friends, colleagues, and other acquaintances.

Chart One: Taluka wise Distribution of Respondents

iii) Selection of respondents:

The respondents of the study are selected from the below mentioned four talukas of South Goa



There is variation in the sample size in respect of each taluka. Salcete has the highest number of respondent due to the high catholic population that is 55.57 which is the highest among all the twelve talukas of Goa.

The study is largely qualitative and descriptive. Since it is based on lived experiences of young widows it is also more explanatory and in-depth in nature. The age of the respondents was between 25 years to 45 years at the time of the spousal death. The respondents are selected only from the Roman Catholics as there is a lack of sufficient and in-depth research in this area. Since the focus of the study is on bereavement and the social construction of identity, the researcher found it meaningful to select young widows, preferably, those who were raising dependent children and who had a longer duration of widowhood. It also focused on how these young widows discern their new position and make meaning out of the new unexpected status. The in-depth study of 38 respondents was done and the researcher found that it helped in meeting the objectives of the study.

2.7 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted prior to the in-depth interviews. It was conducted to understand the topic appropriately and identify the gaps within it, along with understanding the mindset of the respondents. It also provided the researcher with relevant precautions to conduct fieldwork. The pilot study was necessary as it probed in the sensitive aspects of the study. The pilot study was conducted before the main interview schedule in Velim and Navelim village of Salcete Taluka in order to identify the crucial components of the investigation. The socio- economic background data of eight respondents was gathered in this study .It included data such as duration of widowhood, age of the widow, and other demographic aspects.

This study helped the researcher to identify key areas and also to make necessary changes to the final interview schedule. It was very important to conduct this pilot study as it not only pinpointed relevant questions but it also added few more questions to the final interview schedule which provided more accurate data to the investigation.

2.8 TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

In social research, the accuracy and depth of findings heavily depend on the tools used for data collection. These tools serve as instruments to systematically gather relevant information from the participants and existing sources. Choosing the appropriate tools is crucial for ensuring the reliability and validity of the data. The selection of data collection tools is typically guided by the nature of the research problem, the objectives of the study, and the type of data required—qualitative, quantitative, or both.

In the present study, both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Primary data was collected using an interview schedule, which enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth responses directly from the participants. Secondary data was obtained from existing literature, including books, journals, census reports, and other published documents. Keeping in mind the research questions to be investigated, the following research tools were employed:

Primary Data

a) Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was developed and finalized after incorporating necessary changes based on a pilot study. It primarily included open-ended questions to encourage detailed and personal responses from the participants. This schedule served as the main tool for collecting primary data. Each respondent was personally interviewed in a setting that was comfortable and convenient for them, ensuring openness and trust during the conversation. The interview schedule was divided into five sections

1. Section one- Personal Information

The first section is a detail understanding of the respondent's demographic data. This section gathered information about the respondent's profile. This section obtained information about socio-economical background of the respondents. Information is collected about their age, caste, occupation, income and so on. This data is necessary for the determination of whether the respondents are representative sample of target population for generalization purposes.

2. The second section emphasises on the marriage and potential relations that the respondent had with her husband, her in-laws, and relatives. It helps the respondents to narrate their life before widowhood. This section explores the emotional, social, and cultural aspects of their married life. It also sheds light on the quality of spousal relationship, shared responsibilities, and familial expectations. Understanding this phase is essential to grasp the contrast and transformation that occurred post-widowhood.

3. Section three- Widowhood

The third section focuses on widowhood. This section covers sensitive data and detail information which is very important for the study. It covers the problems faced by the widows and elicits information about the rituals and beliefs that the respondents had to follow and comply with.

4. Section four- Community

The fourth section in the interview schedule is about the community's role in the life of the respondents. In this particular section information about how the community is helping the respondents, and what is expected from the community is obtained. This section includes questions like role of community, restrictions forced on the respondents by the community etc.

5. Section Five-Present Status of the widow(identity reconstruction)

This section deals with the present status of the respondents. It tries to obtain information about remarriage, the future plans of the respondents and how they plan their life with children. This section is important as it focuses more on the coping strategies and how the respondents have made an attempt to reconstruct their identity.

b) Observation Method

The objective of the study is to examine how the loss of a spouse impacts the identity of young Roman Catholic widows before and after widowhood, while also considering their socio-demographic backgrounds. In this context, the observation method served as a valuable tool to gather supplementary data that went beyond what interviews and formal discussions could capture. Observation allowed the researcher to witness firsthand the behaviours, interactions, and social cues that shaped the widows' everyday lives within their familial and community settings.

By engaging in both participant and non-participant observation, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of how widows navigated their roles in social, religious, and domestic spaces. This method helped uncover subtle aspects of identity reconstruction, such as shifts in dress, mannerisms, body language, and their level of participation in social or religious events. For instance, the reluctance of some widows to participate in public gatherings or religious rituals revealed internalized stigma and social withdrawal, which may not have been explicitly expressed in interviews.

Observation also revealed how family dynamics shifted after the death of the spouse, especially in terms of decision-making, financial responsibility, and parenting roles. It allowed for the assessment of support systems—who offers help, who distances themselves, and how widows respond emotionally and socially to these changes. Furthermore, it illuminated the disconnect between verbal responses during interviews and actual behaviours observed in natural settings, helping to validate or contrast stated experiences.

In studying the social construction of identity, observation offered insight into how widows viewed themselves and how they were perceived by others. This method added depth to the data collected and ensured a richer, more contextualized understanding of the widowhood experience. Ultimately, observation served as a bridge between spoken narratives and lived reality, thereby strengthening the overall credibility and authenticity of the research findings.

c) Case Study Method:

A case study is about depth, to probe into detail and get a grip on the rich experiences of any individual, family, community, group or an organization that one wants to explore. This allows a holistic understanding through prolonged engagement and the development of rapport and trust within a clearly defined and highly relevant context (O’Leary, 2011: 173-174). Thus, to simultaneously explore the various types of changes that are concomitant with young widowhood; case studies were conducted of certain respondents who were more open to speak about their experiences. Choice of respondents was made purposively to cover varied aspects of widowhood. In-depth case study analysis of the respondents was done by using the interview method, narratives and oral traditions to get deeper insight and understanding of the issue at hand. The researcher met the with

heads/In charges of institutions such as home for the aged, charitable organisations and orphanages, who directly or indirectly could provide data related to widows. Such kinds of discussions were held before, during and also after the completion of field work.

d) Secondary data

Secondary data is an indispensable part of any research. It consists of data that were collected for different purpose but can be repurposed for getting different perspectives and facts for the study. The secondary data used for this study was publicly available such as census data, research articles, books, journals, essays, discussions, newspaper headlines, media, historical documents, magazines, ezines, etc. The use of e-resources, N- LIST, National Digital Library in India., knowledge portals of libraries, as well institutional repositories like Shodhganga were used to collect secondary data. The secondary data, thus, collected helped the researcher to understand thoroughly the issues concerning widowhood, young widow in a multi-cultural society like the Goan society. Also, it enabled the researcher to identify the gaps in knowledge and accordingly frame the objectives of study.

2.9 TOOLS OF DATA ANALYSIS

2.9.1 Data Analysis

The data collected for the study is qualitative in nature, and keeping in mind the purpose of the study the data had to be analysed through content analysis. Content analysis is a qualitative as well as a quantitative research analysis technique that enables the researcher to interpret meaning from a body of text. Sources of data could be from interviews, open-ended questions, field research, notes, conversations, documents or images or literally any occurrence of communicative language such as books, speeches etc. A single study may analyse various forms of text in its analysis using this technique. This text or information is then coded into categories and themes. Categories and themes are different levels of summarizing the results of the analysis. Themes are a summary of categories and categories are a direct summary of the data that was analysed. Coding the data is the process of organizing the results in a comprehensible way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In terms of coding, there are two choices.

- Establish categories before beginning the analysis
- Allow the categories to emerge during analysis

The researcher has used the second category for analysis of the data. Several categories emerged during the in-depth interviews conducted.

Which category is best for content analysis depends on the research questions and context of the study. There are two forms of content i.e manifest content and latent content. Manifest content is evidence that is directly seen or heard such as the words in an interview. Latent content refers to the underlying meaning of content such as the interpretation of an interview. The difference between these two forms of content is the objective or subjective nature of them. Many studies include both forms as this provides a fuller picture of the central phenomenon. In this study the researcher has used the latent content.

2.9.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative research method used to systematically interpret and analyse verbal or written communication. It helps in identifying patterns, themes, and deeper meanings within the data. In this study, content analysis was applied to the responses gathered through the interview schedule. The personal narratives of the respondents were carefully examined to understand their experiences related to marriage, widowhood, emotional transitions, and identity. This method allowed the researcher to group similar ideas, highlight key concerns, and draw meaningful insights from the way respondents expressed themselves. Content analysis proved useful in understanding both the psychological and social dimensions of widowhood.

This approach enabled the researcher to move beyond surface-level responses and uncover underlying emotions, struggles, and coping strategies narrated by the widows. It also helped to explore the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in their words, such as how they made sense of rituals, relationships, and personal losses. Through this method, recurring expressions, significant memories, and life-changing moments were identified and explored in depth. It allowed for the development of themes that reflected the shared and unique experiences of the respondents. By carefully interpreting their communication, the study was able to present a nuanced understanding of their journey from being a wife

to a widow. Thus, content analysis served as a bridge between the raw data and the broader sociological understanding of widowhood.

2.10 FIELD EXPERIENCE

Field experience provides invaluable opportunities for first hand engagement, encouraging critical thinking and allowing the researcher to immerse deeply in the study environment. In this research, the collection of data involved meticulous planning and execution to ensure comprehensive and accurate capture of the experiences of young widows.

The following is a detailed account of the field-based experiences encountered during the study:

Brief demographic data was collected from all participants to describe the characteristics of the sample accurately. Immediately following each interview, brief notes were made to comment on observations of participants' behaviours, responses, and non-verbal communication. These were followed by more extensive field notes compiled as soon as possible after the interview.

The interviews were first conducted in Salcete Taluka, followed by three other talukas. The aim was to uncover accurate and complete descriptions of the essence of the lived experience of young widowhood. Interviews took place in both towns and villages of the selected talukas. Respondents were informed in advance about the date and time of the interview according to their convenience. Most interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes (in-laws' houses or their Natal home). Some interviews were conducted in other places convenient for the respondents, such as church premises, workplaces, relatives' houses, mothers' houses, and business centers. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. In some cases, follow-up interviews were necessary, allowing participants to reflect on and elaborate on experiences shared in their initial interviews, and enabling the researcher to supplement and clarify previously obtained information.

Prior consent forms were signed by all participants, assuring them of confidentiality. As participants had prior knowledge of the main purpose of the interview, obtaining information was generally not difficult. However, a few challenges arose. Some

respondents misunderstood the research's nature, thinking the researcher was a government official collecting data for financial or employment schemes.

The sensitive nature of some questions, particularly those regarding how respondents dealt with physical intimacy, posed a challenge. Some respondents were shy or preferred to ignore such questions. A few answered vaguely, requiring the researcher to infer the meaning. Additionally, some respondents refused to answer certain questions, such as those regarding the quality of their relationship with their husbands or in-laws. In some cases, the presence of in-laws in the house made respondents uncomfortable during the interview.

Another area of interest emerged while interviewing respondents from Velim and Verna in Salcete Taluka and from Quepem Taluka. These respondents belonged to the Catholic Gawda community and practiced some mourning rituals that, although they might seem outdated, continue to exist among them. The Gawda community, along with the Kunbis and Velips, forms part of the broader tribal identity in Goa.

The culture of the Gawdas is deeply rooted in traditions and customs that have been maintained over centuries, even in the face of significant historical challenges such as Portuguese colonization and religious conversions. During Portuguese rule, the Gawda community, like many other tribal groups in Goa, faced pressures to convert. This led to a complex interplay of cultural and religious identities. Some Gawdas converted to Christianity, while others either remained Hindu or reverted to Hinduism through movements like the Shuddhi or Shuddhikaran (Desouza, 2000).

Despite these religious shifts, the Gawda community has managed to preserve many of its cultural practices, which remain integral to their identity. Religion has historically been used to distinguish between the *Gawda* and *Kunbi* communities, although these distinctions can be fluid. For instance, Christian Gawdas are sometimes referred to as Kunbis, reflecting the blending of identities due to conversion. Even after converting to Hinduism, some families continue to use their Christian names and may refer to themselves interchangeably as 'Kunbi-Gawda' or 'Gawda-Kunbi' (Gomes, 1987, p. 79; Shirodkar, 2015). The Gawda, *Kunbi*, and *Velip* communities are collectively regarded as one Adivasi community in Goa (Albuquerque, 1989, p. 22).

A major challenge arose in March 2020, when the world was struck by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden imposition of lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing protocols brought all fieldwork and direct contact with respondents to an abrupt halt. The uncertainty, fear of infection, and strict government regulations created an environment where in-person interviews became nearly impossible. This unexpected situation significantly disrupted the research timeline and delayed the data collection process. Many respondents were also going through personal and financial hardships during this period, making it inappropriate and unsafe to approach them for interviews.

The researcher was compelled to pause the study temporarily and re-evaluate the methodology and timeline. Flexibility and patience became crucial during this phase, as maintaining the health and safety of both the researcher and respondents was of utmost priority. As restrictions began to ease gradually and people started adjusting to the 'new normal', the research activities resumed cautiously. Between March 2021 and June 2021, interviews were conducted while strictly following safety measures such as wearing masks, sanitizing, and maintaining physical distance.

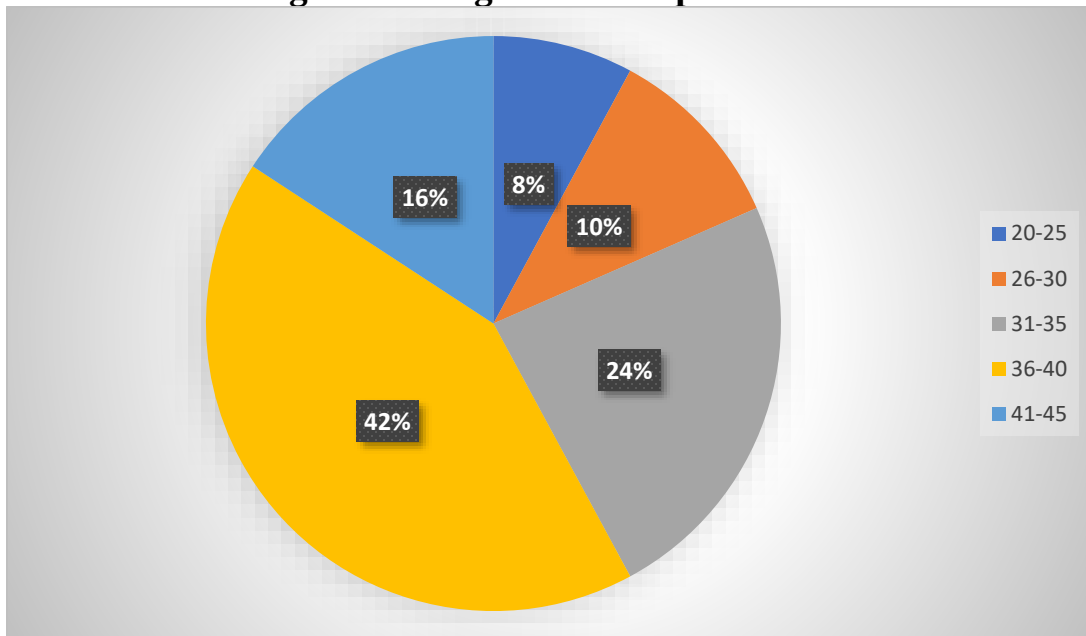
Some interviews were conducted outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces to reduce the risk of infection, while others were carried out through phone calls or virtual means when necessary. The researcher made extra efforts to rebuild trust and comfort with respondents, many of whom were still coping with the psychological aftermath of the pandemic. Despite these ongoing challenges, the interview phase was successfully completed.

CHAPTER III

SOCIO – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

This chapter presents a demographic profile of the respondents. The understanding of the socio demographic background of the respondents is inevitable for this study to analyse the other significant dimensions of young widowhood like bereavement, grief, identity, the problems faced, etc. The primary data collected through field work from young widows, is depicted in a graphical and descriptive form. The researcher has made an attempt to understand the socio-economic background of the respondents in the context of variables such as age of the respondents, caste, education, family, occupational income, age at marriage, duration of marital life and other characteristics.

Figure 3.1: Age of the Respondents



Source: Compiled from primary data

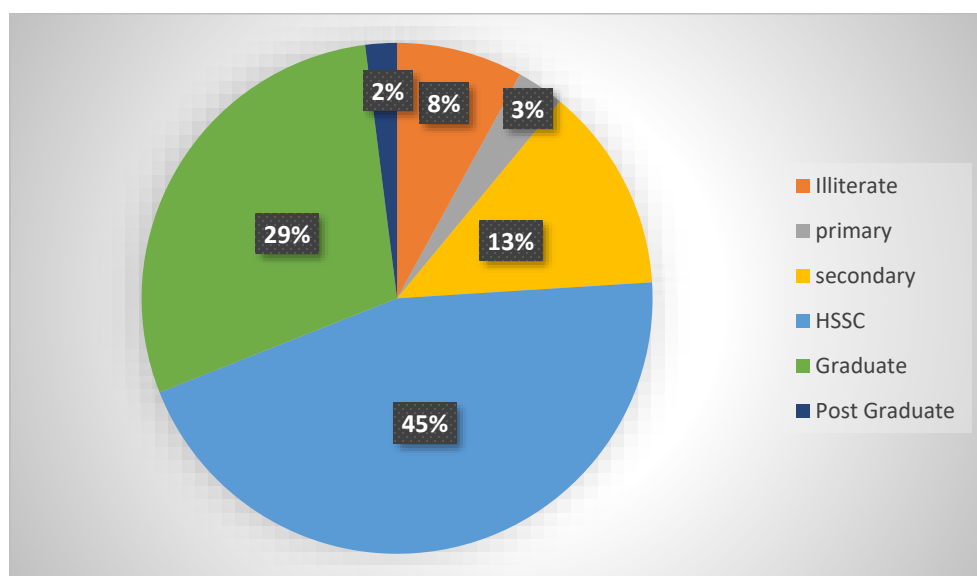
The age distribution of young widows in the study presents a significant deviation from the average age of widowhood, which typically falls within the 60-64 years range according to the Goa Marital Census 2011. The data indicates that a substantial proportion of the respondents are concentrated in younger age brackets, with the highest percentages in the 36-40 years (42%) and 31-35 years (24%) age groups. This suggests that the phenomenon

of widowhood is affecting women much earlier in life than the broader population average, highlighting a demographic shift that could have profound social, economic, and psychological implications.

The concentration of young widows in these age groups may point to several underlying factors, such as health issues, accidents, or other circumstances that lead to early widowhood. This early loss of a spouse places these women in a unique and vulnerable position, as they are likely to face challenges related to economic stability, social support, and identity reconstruction at a stage in life where they might still have young children to care for or career aspirations to fulfil.

Additionally, the presence of young widows in the 26-30 years (10%) and 20-25 years (8%) age groups, although smaller, is particularly concerning, as these women are experiencing widowhood at a time traditionally associated with starting families and building lives with their partners. This early widowhood can result in significant disruptions to life plans, leading to long-term impacts on their mental health and overall development.

Figure 3.2: Educational attainment of the respondents



Source: Compiled from primary data

The educational background of young widows plays a crucial role in their ability to

deal with the challenges of widowhood and reconstruct their identities. The data presented reveals a diverse range of educational attainment among the respondents, which significantly influences their experiences and strategies for coping with bereavement, societal expectations and a whole gamut of societal problems.

A substantial proportion of respondents have completed education up to the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) level. A significant number of widows (29%) have completed their undergraduate degrees. This educational level not only enhances their social status but also equips them with critical thinking skills and greater awareness of their rights and available support systems. Graduates are likely to have better access to resources, legal knowledge, and opportunities for economic independence, which can aid in their identity reconstruction and coping mechanisms. Around 13 percent respondents possess a moderate level of education (secondary school level) that may provide basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, this level of education might be insufficient for comprehensive awareness of legal rights and advanced societal resources. These individuals might face greater challenges in accessing support and opportunities compared to those with higher educational qualifications. A small percentage of respondents (3%) have completed primary school education. This level provides very basic skills and might not sufficiently equip individuals to deal with complex issues related to widowhood and identity reconstruction. These women might experience significant barriers in accessing information and resources, impacting their ability to assert their rights and manage their situation effectively.

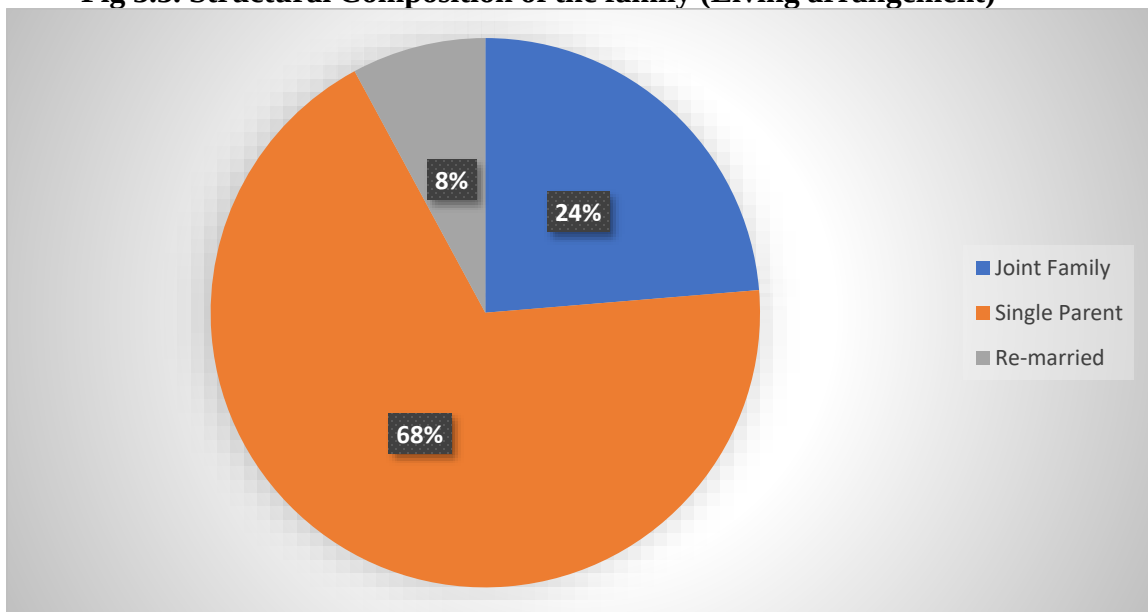
The very small percentage (2%) of postgraduates among the respondents highlights that a higher level of education is less common. Postgraduates are likely to have advanced knowledge and critical skills that can significantly enhance their ability to navigate widowhood, assert their rights, and achieve socio-economic stability. Their higher educational background might also contribute to a more robust process of identity reconstruction and greater opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The presence of illiterate individuals (8%) within the sample underscores the

significant challenges faced by those lacking basic literacy skills. Illiteracy severely limits access to information, legal rights, and support systems, exacerbating the difficulties of coping with widowhood. These women are likely to face the greatest barriers in terms of accessing support, asserting their rights, and achieving a positive identity reconstruction.

The diverse educational background of the respondents highlights the need for tailored support programs that address the varying levels of education and their associated challenges. For instance, programs aimed at improving literacy and providing vocational training could be crucial for those with lower educational attainment. Additionally, awareness campaigns and legal aid services can be particularly beneficial for those with moderate to low educational levels, ensuring that all widows have access to the necessary resources and support for effective identity reconstruction and coping.

Fig 3.3. Structural Composition of the family (Living arrangement)



Source: Compiled from primary data

Family is the basic and universal social structure of human society. According to Cooley, the sociologist, and Freud, the psychoanalyst, the most important element of society is the family. However, Marxist social analysts treat class as a basic personality-shaping group

force, stating that the family is but a part of the superstructure and is therefore itself shaped by the economic system (Marx and Engels, 1875). The forms and functions of the family have undergone adaptive changes, with changes in the technological and economic superstructure of society (Singh, 2006: 174). However, it still plays a vital role in one's socialization (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950: 145).

From a sociological perspective, the family serves as the primary unit of socialization, where individuals first learn societal norms, values, and roles. Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" emphasizes that one's self-identity is shaped through interpersonal interactions within the family. Marxist theory, however, posits that the family is not an isolated entity but part of the broader superstructure shaped by the economic base of society. This perspective suggests that familial roles and relationships are influenced by the prevailing economic conditions and class structures. For instance, the economic necessity of earning a livelihood might dictate family dynamics and roles, such as the prevalence of men seeking employment abroad, as observed in the Goan context.

The data in Figure 3.4 shows the structural composition of the family and sheds light on the present living arrangements of widows and their children in the absence of their spouse. A majority, i.e., 68 percent of widows, live in a single-parent family with children headed by herself, which was a nuclear family prior to widowhood. Another 24 percent live in an extended family along with the in-laws and other relatives. Nine percent of the total respondents in this study are remarried.

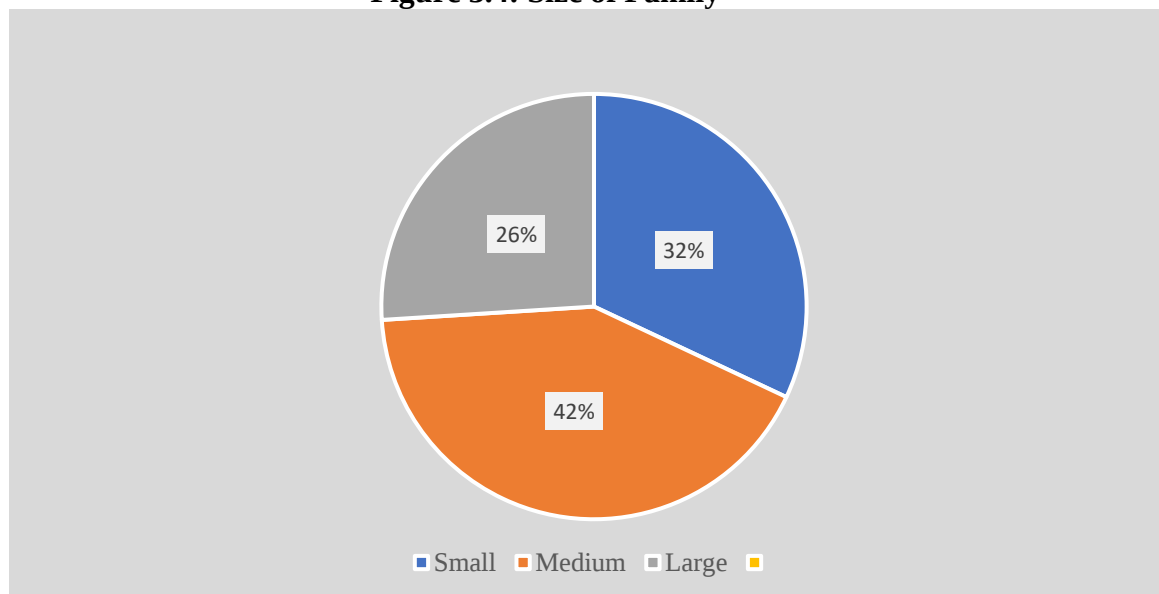
This data highlights the adaptive nature of family structures in response to changes in marital status. The shift from a nuclear family to a single-parent family indicates resilience and the reconfiguration of familial roles to ensure stability and support. The presence of extended families for 24 percent of widows suggests a reliance on broader kin networks for emotional and practical support.

There is a preference for a nuclear family in Goa, especially due to foreign remittances. There is a culture among Goan Catholic men to seek employment abroad, either in the Middle East or on cruise ships. The recent trend is working in the United Kingdom or the USA. This income facilitates buying a new apartment, bungalow, or building a separate house. This data is important as it determines the pattern of identity reconstruction.

The preference for nuclear family structures in Goa can be attributed to economic factors. Remittances from abroad enable families to achieve financial independence and housing stability, which in turn fosters the establishment of nuclear households. This economic capability allows families to transition from extended to nuclear structures, reflecting a modernization trend influenced by global labour migration.

The data on living arrangements is crucial in understanding identity reconstruction among widows. The shift to single-parent households or integration into extended families involves renegotiating roles and responsibilities, which is central to the process of identity reconstruction. Widows may redefine their self-identity in the context of their new familial roles, balancing between traditional expectations and contemporary economic realities.

Figure 3.4: Size of Family



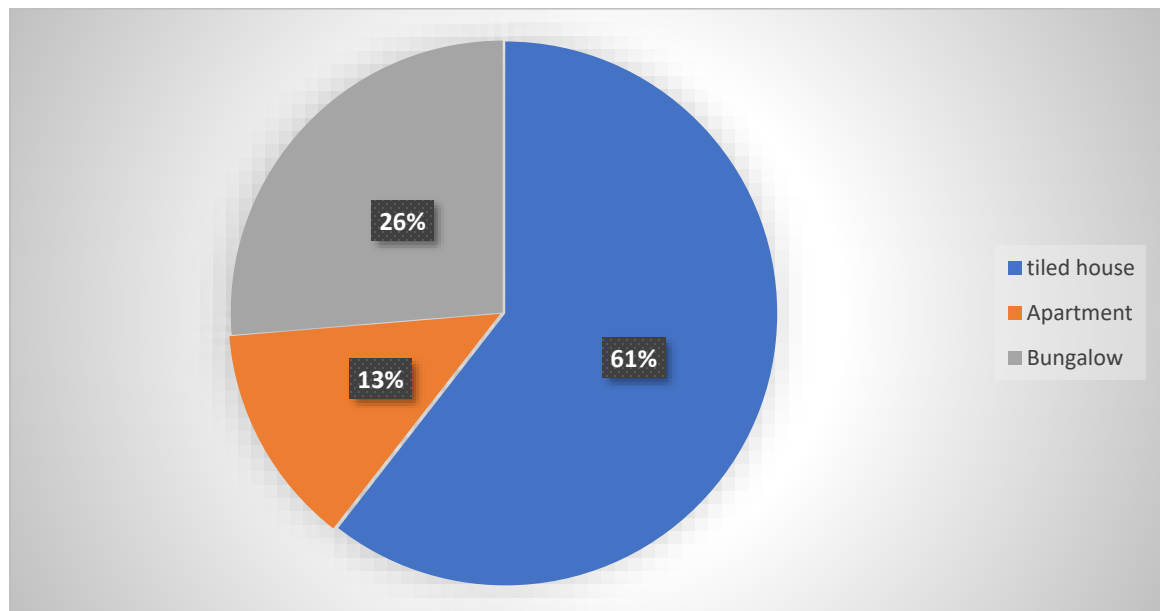
Source: Compiled from primary data

The above data shows the number of family members. This consists of dependent as well as independent members of the family. It is observed that 26 percent of the respondents have a family size of three and five family members respectively, this consist of their children, parents -in -laws, the widow's mother or some relative of the husband, like an unmarried brother-in-law or aunt or husband's cousin. While 16 percent have four family members comprising of the family, 24 percent households

consist of the widow and her two dependent children, while 8 percent of the respondents, lived alone with a single child. The data reveals that in general the family size is small.

Since at the time of marriage, the man establishes a separate nuclear family, his death results in further reduction in family size. Secondly, due to the pursuit of higher education, both boys and girls marry at a later stage, which reduces the reproductive span. Thirdly, many Catholic men work abroad, often in countries like the Gulf States, and may visit home only once every 9 months, a year, or even every 2 years. This extended absence naturally spaces the birth of children. Consequently, due to the untimely death of a spouse at a young age, a woman may be left with only one or two children. The size of the family has several implications; more members can offer protection and security, whereas living alone with children can pose challenges

Figure 3.5.Type of House/Dwelling

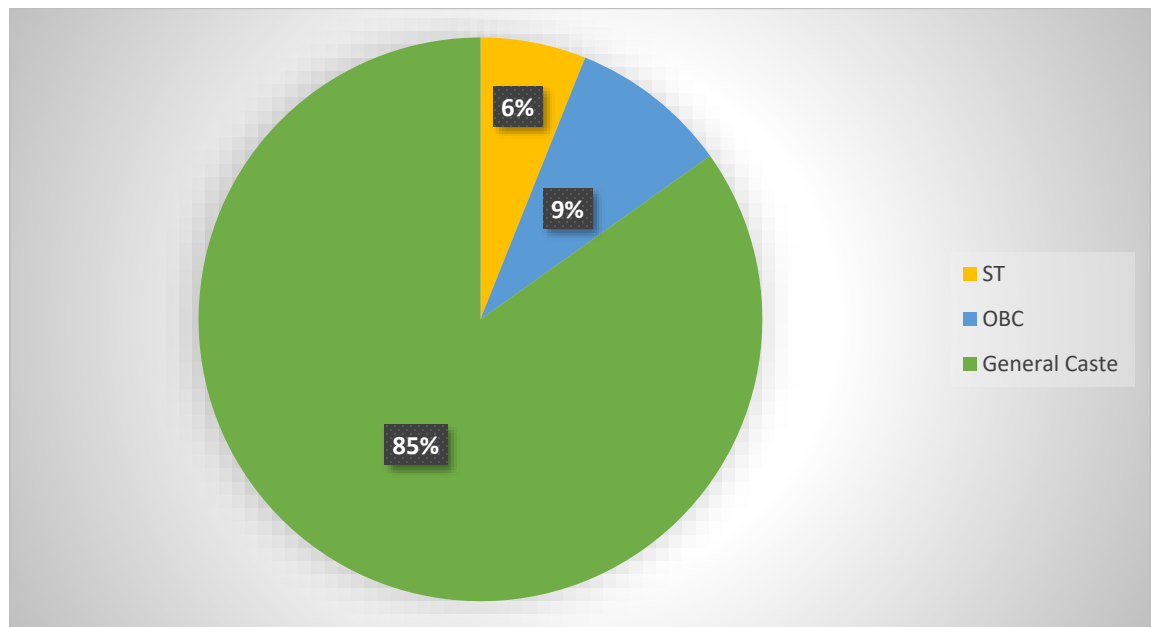


Source: Compiled from primary data

A dwelling is a bounded place of security and retreat. The home is considered to be of greatest personal significance. The type of house one owns can be understood as a particularly significant kind of place with which, and within which, we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments (Mallett, 2004). The information in Figure 3.6 shows that 61 percent respondents live in Goan style tiled homes having

both traditional and modern features combined. Another 26 percent live in Bungalows. Some are very impressive, having the latest style of architecture. The recent trend of apartments, increasing everywhere is also a telling feature; and a significant number i.e., 13 per cent are living in flats/apartments. Hence, it can be said that majority of respondents not only own a house but also have a decent standard of living with modern household appliances too. A proper house exercises a profound influence on people's health and develops character among the people. Hence, analysis of housing conditions assumes importance.

Figure 3.6: Caste background of the respondents



Source: Compiled from primary data

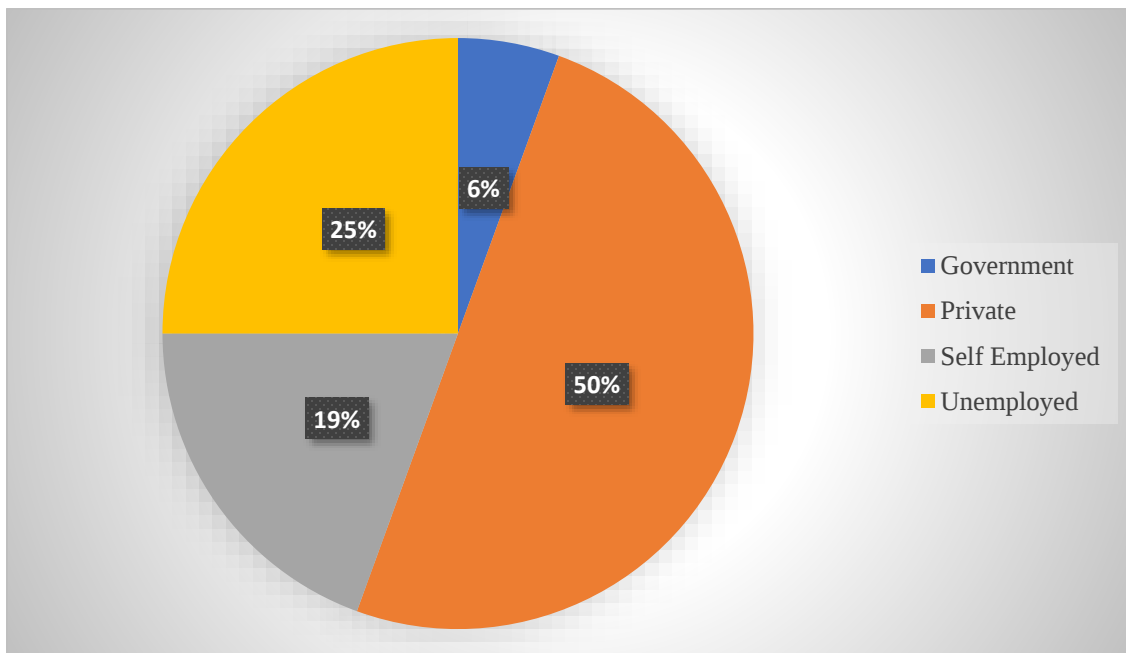
The caste system in India has been studied with three perspectives: Indo-logical, socio- anthropological and sociological. The Indologists have viewed caste from the spiritual point of view, socio-anthropologists from the cultural point of view, and sociologists from the stratification point of view.

In this study, 85 percent of the Roman Catholic Widows belong to the General Category, which consists of the Bammon, Chaddho and Sudhirs of Goa. The Portuguese

record of the early period refers to the upper castes of Hindus as Bamonn and Chaddho as being two advanced castes among the Hindus in Goa at that time. After conversion, they continued to attach their caste to their Christian names and surnames. The other castes and subcastes who did not get admitted into the above two, were indiscriminately put under the general label of the Christian caste of Sudir or Sudras. The Christian Sudir are of the stock of peasants and artisans. The Kunbis (ST) are the Christians of aboriginal stock, mainly landless labourers who work on the plantations of coconut trees, mango trees and other jobs on land and around houses of the landlords. There were very few (6 percent) who belong to the scheduled Tribe. 9 percent are OBC castes, that is Kharvi community, who are mostly found in Colva and Benaulim villages of Salcete Taluka of south Goa.

Goa is not an exception to the caste system. The deeply rooted caste system in Goan Society, continues to influence the converted Catholics in one or the other way for instance, certain rituals and cultural practices related to widows such as breaking bangles on the husband's coffin are found among Hindus as well as Catholics.

Figure 3.7: Occupational status of the respondents

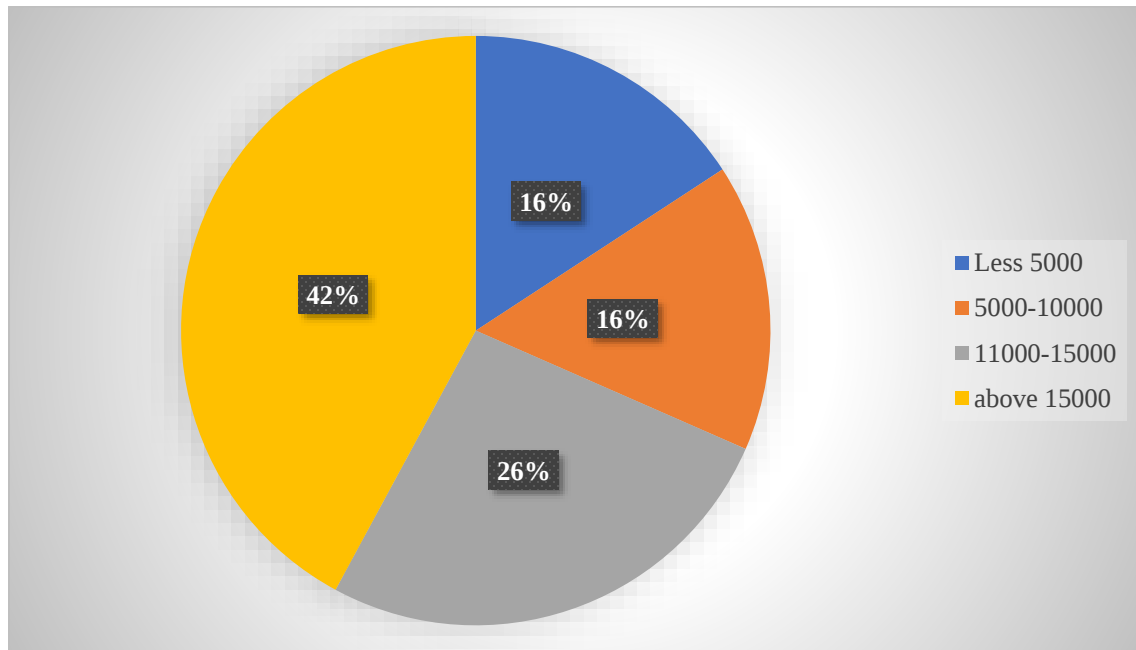


Source : Compiled from primary data

The employment status of widows plays a crucial role in determining their social and economic standing, as well as their process of identity reconstruction. In this study, it was found that 50 percent of the widows are employed in the private sector, highlighting their integration into the mainstream labour market. A significant portion, 25 percent, remain unemployed and are consequently dependent on family members, church organizations, and relatives for financial support, illustrating the economic vulnerabilities that accompany widowhood. Notably, 19 percent of the widows are self-employed, engaging in various entrepreneurial activities such as catering, tailoring, door-to-door sales, embroidery, knitting, tutoring, vegetable vending, and selling silt from riverbanks. These self-employed widows demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in generating income independently. Additionally, 6 percent are employed in the government sector, which often provides more stability and benefits. Interestingly, some respondents have sought employment abroad in countries like Dubai and Kuwait, driven by the financial insecurity and sudden loss that widowhood brings.

The occupation of an individual is a pivotal determinant of their social and economic status within a modern capitalist society. Consequently, a widow's employment status significantly impacts her social class and the reconstruction of her identity post-bereavement. Higher socio-economic positions, often achieved through stable and well-paying jobs, facilitate a smoother and more effective process of identity reconstruction. This underscores the critical link between economic stability and the ability to navigate the profound personal changes that widowhood entails. Thus, securing employment not only addresses the immediate financial needs of widows but also plays a fundamental role in their long-term social integration and identity rebuilding.

Figure 3.8: Monthly Income of the Family after widowhood



Source: Compiled from primary data

The data reveals a diverse income distribution among the respondents of this study with significant variations in their economic stability. A substantial 42 percent of respondents have a monthly income above Rs. 15,000, which indicates a relatively stable financial situation, allowing them to comfortably meet their basic expenses and possibly save or invest. In contrast, 26 percent earn between Rs. 11,000 and Rs. 15,000. While this group can manage their basic needs, their financial stability might be more vulnerable to economic fluctuations or unexpected expenses. The lower end of the spectrum, 16 percent of respondents earn between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000, suggesting they face more significant financial challenges, although they might still manage to meet their basic expenses with some difficulty. This group is likely more reliant on support from extended family or community resources. The remaining 16 percent, earning less than Rs. 5,000, face severe financial hardships, making it extremely difficult to support their families without substantial external aid.

The upper-income group (earning above Rs. 15,000) represents women who likely have better access to education, employment opportunities, and social capital. This economic stability allows them to participate more fully in societal activities and

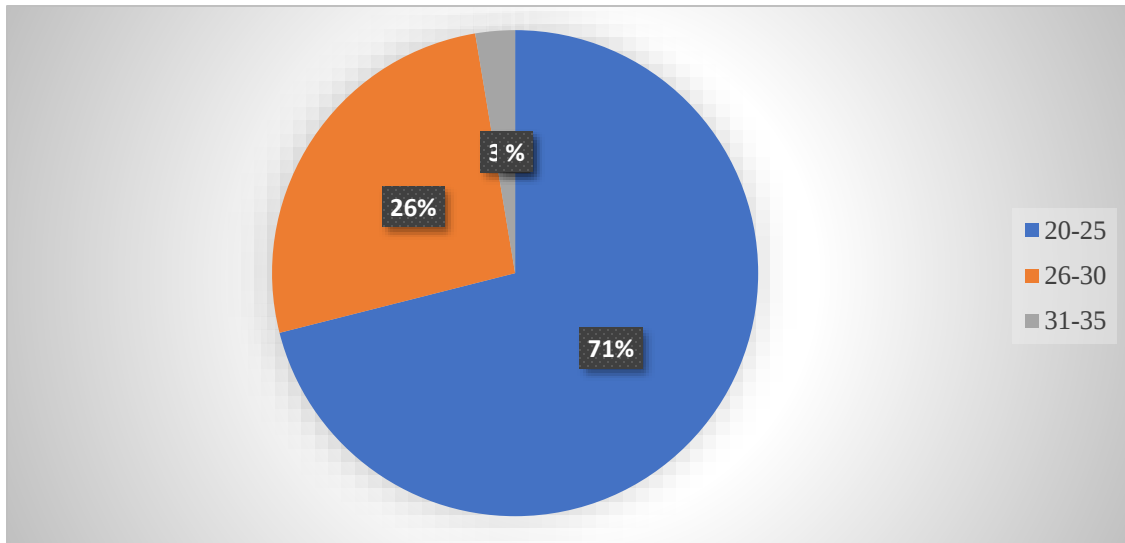
potentially influence community decisions. In contrast, the lower-income groups face constraints that limit their social mobility and exacerbate their dependence on external support. Community and institutional support play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges. An important support system in Goa is the association of churches, specifically St. Vincent de Paul. This organisation in Navelim village of Salcete Taluka identifies the needy within each ward of the village and provides monthly rations, including essential items such as rice, oil, dal, and sugar, along with cash assistance ranging from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,500 per month. Additionally, individuals with physical and mental disabilities and widows whose income is unstable receive a monthly stipend of Rs. 1,000. In areas like Navelim, this association is particularly effective in providing the necessary support to those struggling financially.

These support systems highlight the importance of collective action and community engagement in addressing poverty and supporting vulnerable populations. From a sociological standpoint, the role of organizations like St. Vincent de Paul is vital in reinforcing social cohesion and providing a safety net for the economically disadvantaged.

Such community-driven initiatives also reinforce social bonds and a sense of belonging among community members. They create a network of mutual aid and reciprocity, which is essential in fostering resilience in the face of economic challenges. The support provided by these organizations not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to the overall social integration and solidarity of the community.

Moreover, the reliance on community and institutional support underscores the gaps in formal welfare systems and highlights the need for more comprehensive social policies to address economic disparities. These support systems, while crucial, are often limited in scope and reach, emphasizing the necessity for broader systemic interventions to ensure long-term economic stability for all. This sociological analysis demonstrates how economic disparities among women in Goa are mitigated by community and institutional support, emphasizing the significance of collective action and social cohesion in addressing poverty and supporting vulnerable populations.

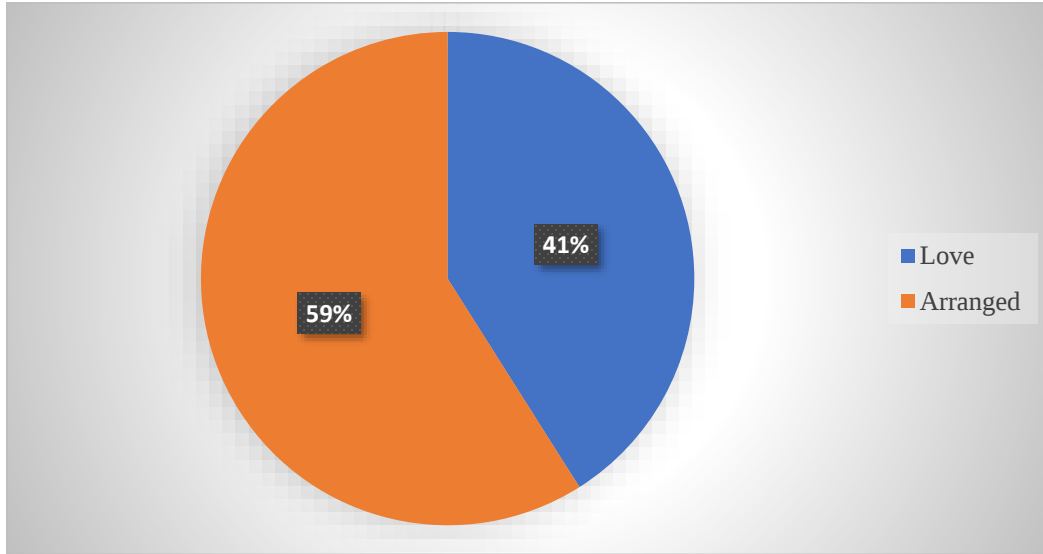
Figure 3.9: Age at Marriage



Source: Compiled from primary data

The above chart represents the age of the respondents at the time of marriage. As we see that -71 percent of the respondents got married at a young age i.e., 20-25 years, followed by 26 percent married between the age of 26-30 years and 3 percent between 31-35 years. The age at marriage, which used to be quite low for all the communities in Goa has come to be enhanced for both boys and girls. The reason cited for this is the pursuit of higher education of boys and girls alike. The marriageable age specially for girls in Goa is relatively high as compared to the practice found in most parts of India. Girls in Goa are encouraged to pursue higher education and early marriages are not a common occurrence. This gives them good maturity, knowledge and physical growth, which, in turn, helps them to deal with the unseen and sudden problems of life.

Figure 3.10: Mate Selection



Source: Compiled from primary data

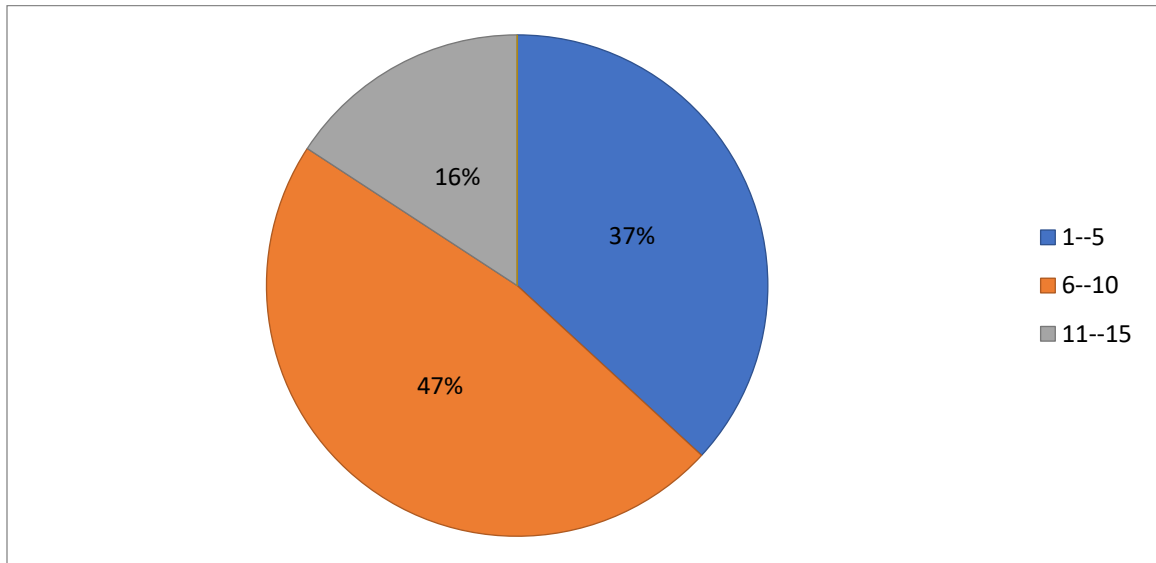
As seen in the above chart, 59 percent of the respondents had arranged marriages and 41 percent had love marriages.

The 450 years of Portuguese rule in Goa has had a tremendous influence on the catholic culture. The way of life and social dining gives enough scope for boys and girls to intermingle. The culture of weddings, parties and also co-educational institutions become a meeting ground for young couples. Further, the western ideas of liberal thinking do not put much restrictions on inter -caste or inter-religious marriages. However, the tradition of arranged marriages is also very popular. The determining factors for selection for boys include education, employment, religiosity and family background.

The main focus is on economic security, a separate house for the couple and a job abroad is still a preferred norm. Eligible bachelors working in the private sector in Goa or other parts in India are not given top priority unless the girls have a government job. As for the selection of the girl as a bride, prime consideration includes good looks, homeliness, cooking skills, caregiver for the in-laws, etc. There is very little stress on the employment of the girl. However, today, girls who are educated are in a better demanding position. So much so that a man who does not have a secure job is not

given priority or even outrightly rejected. Also, preference is given to the eligible bachelors who have a job abroad. The reasons cited for this are: high income and probability of joining the husband abroad.

Figure 3.11. Duration of Marriage



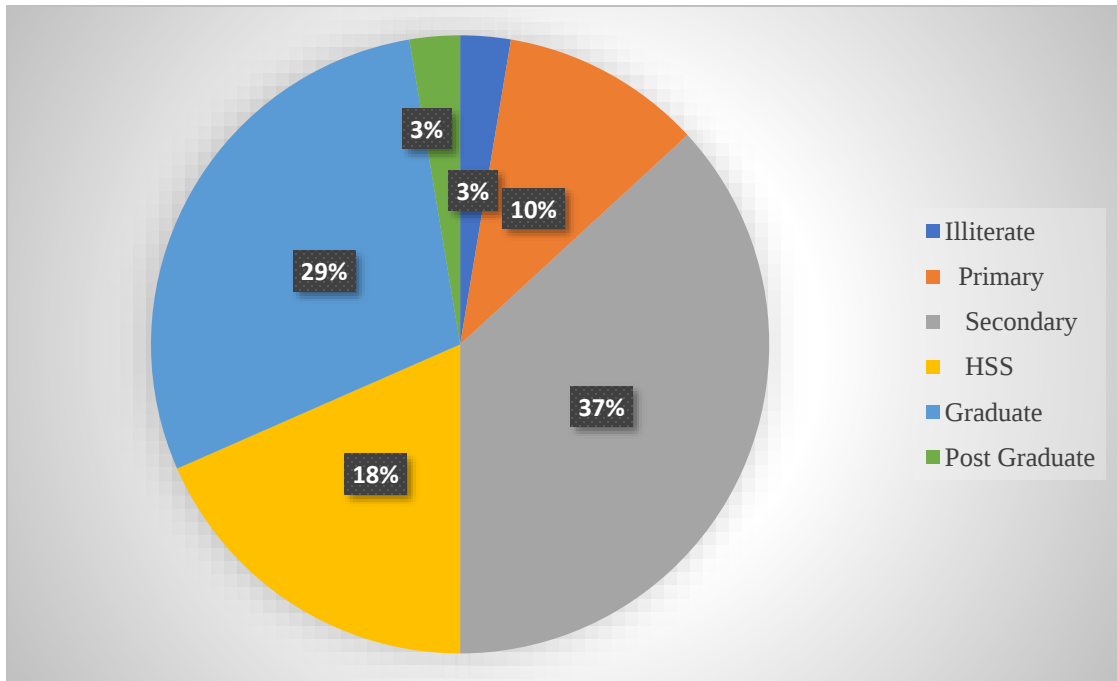
Source: Compiled from primary data

Figure 3.11 provides an insightful look into the duration of marriages among the widows studied, revealing significant patterns that are crucial for sociological analysis. It shows that 47 percent of the respondents were married for 6 to 10 years, representing the largest group. This duration typically encompasses key phases of marital life, including the establishment of shared routines, deeper emotional bonds, and potential parenting responsibilities, contributing to the development of a strong marital identity. Another substantial portion, 37 percent, had marriages lasting between 1 to 5 years, a period characterized by initial role socialization, spousal adjustment, and the development of joint life plans. The remaining 16 percent were married for 11 to 15 years, indicating a period where marriages generally achieve a level of stability and norm consolidation.

The selection criterion for this study, requiring respondents to have a minimum marriage duration of three to four years, is crucial. This is because the research focuses on identity construction post-widowhood, a process deeply influenced by the socialization and role internalization that occurs during marriage. The experiences of these women, shaped by their varying durations of marriage, provide a rich tapestry of narratives that can be analyzed to understand how the length and depth of their marital relationships influence their role transition through widowhood. The varied durations offer insights into different stages of marital life and their impact on the widow's identity reconstruction, including role exit from being a wife to navigating new social roles and statuses as widows.

The length of the marriage not only affects the depth of the emotional and social adjustments required post-loss but also shapes the widow's sense of self and her strategies for coping and rebuilding her life. By exploring these different durations, we can gain a nuanced understanding of the widowhood experience and the complex interplay between marital history and identity reconstruction. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how the social roles and identities formed during marriage influence the processes of role transition and identity renegotiation in widowhood.

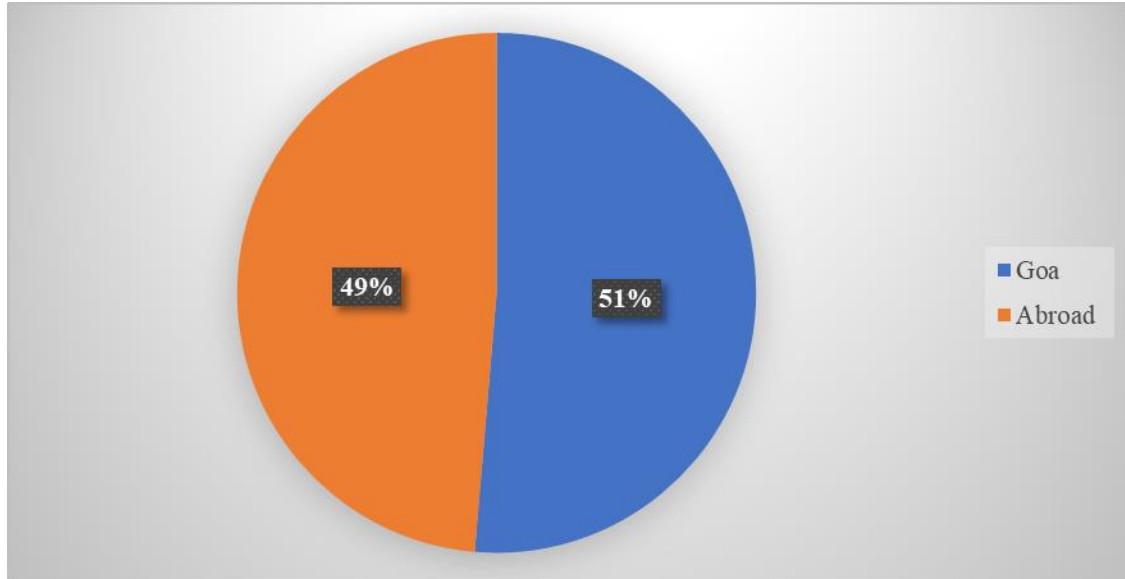
Figure 3.12: Educational Profile of the husband



Source: Compiled from primary data

The education of the spouse has a direct bearing on the economic and social wellbeing of the family. Fig 3.12 shows that 37 percent completed up to Secondary School education, 29 percent reported that their husbands completed graduation, 18 percent up to Higher Secondary School, 10 percent of the respondents' husbands studied up to primary level, followed by 3 percent whose husbands were post graduates. A small percentage i.e., 3 percent reported that their husbands were illiterate. The education of the husbands has a significant bearing on the social, economic and other aspects of life of the wives also. Hence, this information is important.

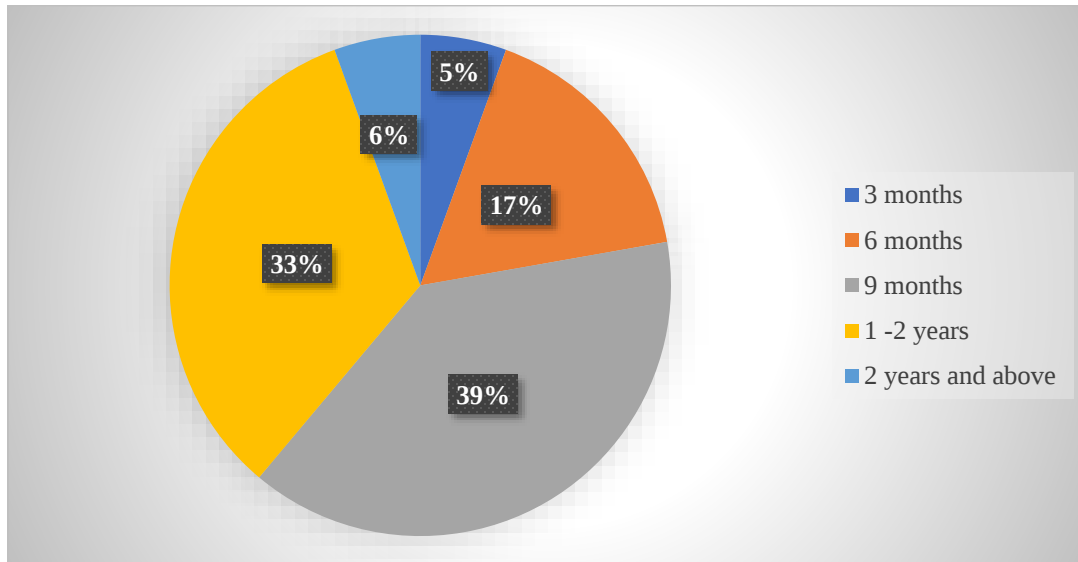
3.13: Place of work of the Husband



Source: Compiled from primary data

From the above chart 3.13 we see that 51% of the respondent's husbands were working in Goa. A sizable segment i.e. 49 percent were working abroad. The main destinations for the migrants are Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and even Saudi Arabia in the middle east, some work on cruise ships, and in the United Kingdom. The rise in consumption patterns and the lure of higher salaries, motivate Goan men, particularly catholic men, to pursue jobs abroad. Husbands working abroad make the wives more independent and help in developing management skills among them.

Fig 3.14. Frequency of husbands visit



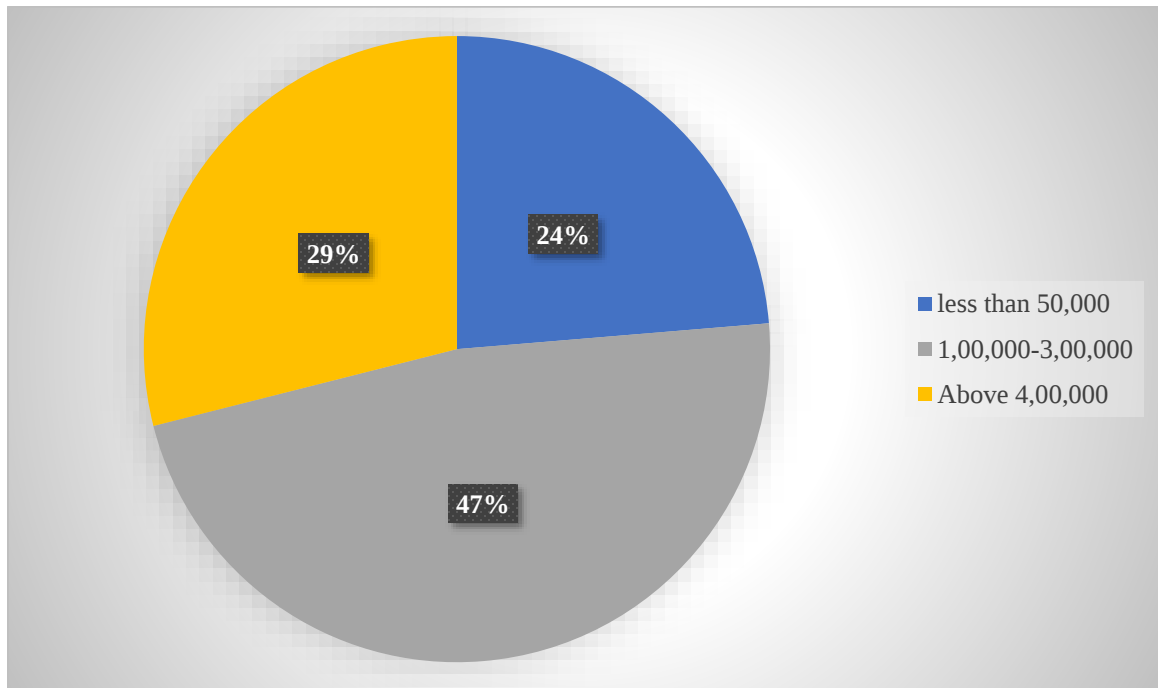
Source: Compiled from primary data

Generally, overseas migrants can visit home annually. Those sailing on cruise ships ie.39 percent of the respondents mentioned that their husbands would visit home in 9 months. In the case of 33 percent of the respondents had their husbands coming home for a vacation between 1-2 years, who were mostly working in the Middle east. This was followed by 17 percent of the respondents' husbands who got vacation every 6 months, especially those in high positions on ships; like engineers and officers. While 6 percent of them mentioned 2 years and more as period of being away from their husbands.

The duration of the vacation varied between one month to two months depending on the country, the terms and conditions of the contract and also the nature of the job. For instance, 5 percent could see their spouse every alternate month or every three months.

. These are men working on oil rigs who work for 14 to 16 hours per day and hence, get an off every alternate month. The home visit is mostly planned around major festivals or family weddings or some celebrations. In some cases, the respondents would visit the husband especially in countries like Dubai and Kuwait. These factors determine the level of intimacy and bonding between the husband and wife.

Fig 3.15. Husband's Annual Income



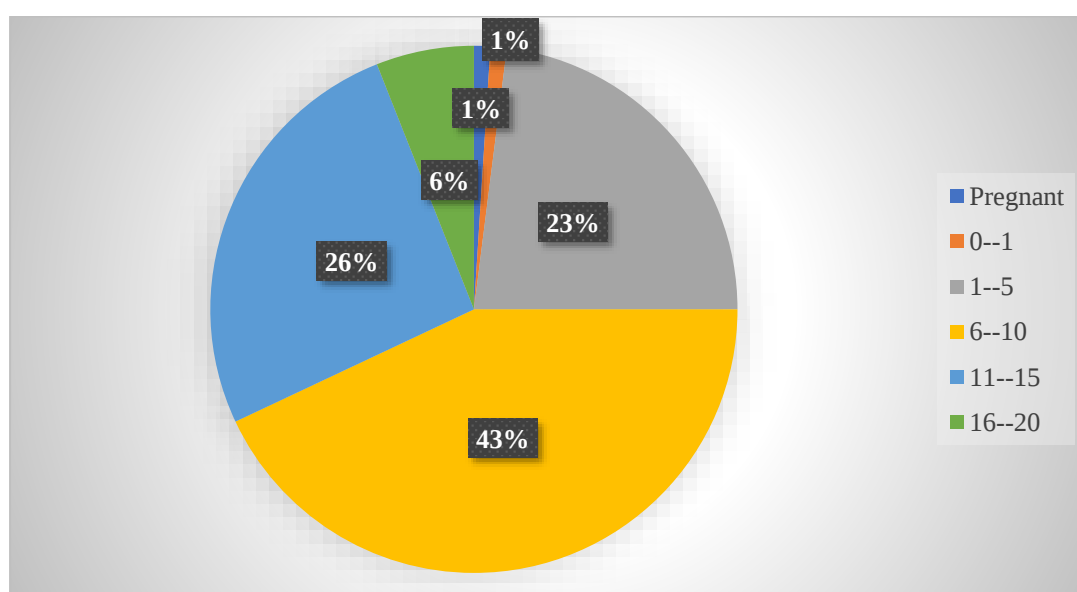
Source: Compiled from primary data

Annual income of the husband is shown in Fig. 3.15. The data shows a significant disparity in the income levels of husbands, which is indicative of social stratification within the community. The fact that 47% of respondents reported an annual income over Rs. 1,00,000, while 29% reported incomes above Rs. 4,00,000, suggests a considerable range of economic status among the households. The 24% of respondents whose husbands earned less than Rs. 50,000 annually highlight the presence of economic inequality.

These income levels can be seen as indicators of different social classes within the community. Higher-income groups (those earning above Rs. 4,00,000) may enjoy greater access to resources, education, and opportunities, while lower-income groups may face limitations in these areas. This stratification often leads to different life experiences and opportunities for the families involved, affecting their social mobility.

The income level of a husband is closely tied to the financial well-being of the family. Families in the higher income brackets may have better access to education, healthcare, and leisure activities, which in turn can lead to improved life chances for their children. Conversely, families in the lower income bracket might struggle with basic needs, leading to stress and potential conflicts within the household. Economic inequality can lead to varied experiences, shaping not only the material conditions of families but also their social status, roles, and self-perception.

Figure 3.16. Age of Children at widowhood



Source: Compiled from primary data

The data represented in Figure 3.16, which details the distribution of children's ages at the time of their father's death, highlights the multifaceted tasks faced by widows. The age of the child at the time of paternal loss has significant sociological implications, particularly in terms of dependency, socialisation, and emotional strain.

A substantial 43 percent of children fall within the 6–10-year age group. This age is critical as it marks the early stages of formal education, where children require extensive emotional and practical support. They are developmentally capable of understanding the concept of death, which necessitates the mother's additional emotional labour to explain the loss and help the child deal with their grief. This increased dependency can restrict the mother's ability to seek new employment, thereby exacerbating economic instability.

The second largest group, comprising 26 percent of children, falls within the 11–15-year age bracket. This period corresponds with adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by emotional turmoil and identity formation. The loss of a father figure during this critical period can profoundly impact the child's emotional and social development. For the widow, managing her own grief while addressing the complex emotional needs of an adolescent can be exceptionally challenging. The dual role of caregiver and emotional support system places significant strain on the mother, affecting her own process of grief and identity reconstruction.

Children aged 1-5 years represent a particularly vulnerable segment, heavily reliant on their mothers for all aspects of care. This dependency heightens the widow's caregiving responsibilities, limiting her ability to engage in employment or social activities that could facilitate economic and social mobility. The lack of a paternal figure during these formative years can impede the child's socialisation process, affecting their long-term emotional and psychological development.

The smallest group, children aged 16-20 years, constitutes 6 percent of the sample. While older children may exhibit greater independence, they still require parental guidance, especially as they go through significant life transitions such as completing education and entering the workforce. The absence of a father as a role model can impact their future aspirations and emotional stability especially for the male child, placing additional pressure on the widow to fulfill dual parental roles.

Extreme cases, such as a child being only three months old or the widow being pregnant at the time of her husband's death, highlight the severe emotional and financial strain faced by widows as sole caregivers from the onset. These scenarios emphasize the compounded difficulties in coping with grief while managing the immediate and intensive caregiving needs of very young children.

CHAPTER IV

BEREAVEMENT AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF YOUNG WIDOWHOOD

Death is a universal phenomenon that affects individuals and societies alike. As such, people are constantly confronted with the challenge of adjusting to the loss of a loved one, and this adjustment process involves various forms of bereavement behaviour. In order to understand the complex nature of mourning behaviour, sociologists examine the social factors that influence how people cope with death. These factors include cultural norms and values, as well as the meaning of the various factors present in the interaction system and the situational factors that shape the bereavement experience.

This chapter explores the phenomenon of bereavement and grief in the context of socio-cultural norms and practices. It offers an in-depth analysis of the cultural beliefs and rituals surrounding death, with a specific focus on the experience of widowhood. The chapter aims to provide an understanding of the psychological and social effects of these practices on individuals who are grieving. It also examines the variations in cultural practices related to death and dying.

In analysing mourning behaviour, sociologists aim to shed light on the underlying social processes that shape the bereavement experience. This involves examining the ways in which cultural norms and values influence the expression of grief, as well as the social expectations surrounding bereavement. Moreover, sociologists investigate the ways in which situational factors, such as the circumstances surrounding the death and the nature of the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, shape the grief response. By understanding these social factors, sociologists can provide valuable insights into the psychological and social impact of bereavement on individuals and communities.

According to Kastenbaum and Costa (1977), while bereavement is a personal experience, it is also a social one. The rules and regulations provided by a society's culture can provide varying degrees of specificity and expectations for mourning behaviour, which individuals may consult during the grieving process. Conjugal bereavement has been characterized as one of the most complex, challenging, and

stressful life events (Hardy, Concato, & Gill, 2004; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). It can be a source of distress not solely for one individual, or even a social network, but also for an entire community. Widows and widowers grieve not only for the loss of their spouse, but also for the loss of their identity as a married individual, their goals, futures that were jointly held with the deceased (e.g., raising children, growing old, or retiring together), and other factors associated with the adjustments in widowed status and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities (Gass-Sternas, 1994; Lopata, 1979; McEwen & Stellar, 1993; Worden & Silverman, 1993). Grief can be influenced by relationships, the setting, and the survivor's personal and social resources.

There are several theories around loss and bereavement such as John Bowlby's attachment theory(1969-80), Kubler Ross (1969), Colin Murray Parkes psycho-social elaborations (1972), Worden (1991), Silverman and Klass (1996), Stroebe and Schutt (1999).All these theorists are of the view that mourning is necessary. Grieving and mourning have been conceived as the processes whereby the bereaved person adjusts to the reality of their loss, enabling them to disengage from the deceased and reinvest in new relationships. However, culture and gender may also affect how a person grieves. There are different factors that affect the grieving process. Through, different mourning rituals and practices bereaved people adapt to their loss by working through the phases of grief. Kubler Ross(1969) identifies five stages of grief namely Loss, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. Kübler-Ross's stages of grief provide valuable insight into the emotional journey widows may undergo as they adjust to life without their spouse. While these stages offer a framework for understanding grief, it is crucial to recognize that the grieving process is highly individual. Factors such as culture, personality, and circumstances surrounding the loss can influence how a widow experiences and navigates these stages. Additionally, the stages are not experienced in a strict order, and individuals may revisit certain stages multiple times as they progress through their grief. Understanding these stages can help widows and those supporting them to navigate the complex emotions that accompany bereavement, ultimately leading to healing and growth.

The behaviour of human beings fascinates many observers, including Sociologists. There is no aspect of behaviour that is devoid of interest. Since living human beings are at the same time dying human beings, whether they like it or not, the death-related dimension of being human is no exception. From the moment of conception, the individual is aware of his or her mortality . Even after death, the

experiences which the living had with the deceased are usually not allowed to come to an abrupt halt. Rather, they are symbolically continued. This can be by offering flowers or lighting candles on the grave. These activities are terminated in a non-hasty manner with what are considered to be appropriate after death ceremonial behaviours.

People of all cultures are united by the fact that all of us will eventually die. However, cultures can vary in how they conceptualize death. These conceptions can greatly affect how the person sees the end of their life including their readiness to die, how much they fear death, and how their funeral rituals may end up looking like. At the end of their life, many people have death anxiety or the fear of death. This anxiety stems from the conflict between two thoughts; one thought being the instinctive drive to stay alive and the other being keenly aware of how death is inevitable and could happen at any moment. The contradictions between life and death make us fear the end. There is also the fear of having a prolonged or painful dying process among some people. This fear can manifest itself in many different ways but most often it appears as avoidance of the subject. For example, in the United States there exists a death-denying culture, where people have an aversion to the idea of dying. The death of the body is essentially the death of the self, which is an unpleasant thought. In comparison, eastern cultures like India often see death as a transition as many of their religious cultures have a belief in rebirth or the afterlife. Studies have shown that belief in the afterlife as a reward and not a punishment can decrease this death anxiety. However, if a person expects to encounter punishment instead of a reward in the afterlife, then they may have higher death anxiety than those who do not believe in an afterlife.

Across cultures, rituals serve as important markers of significant life events, such as birth, marriage, and death. Death, in particular, presents a unique challenge to societal structures and systems of meaning, as it disrupts the established moral order. According to Victor Turner's (1969) theory of liminality, death represents a moment of liminality, a period of transition during which individuals are neither fully a part of the living community nor the deceased. As a result, rituals associated with death often serve to reinforce cultural values and norms, as well as provide a sense of closure and resolution for the bereaved.

In the case of widows, Niemeyer (2006) is of the view that the mourning rituals serve the purpose of giving identity as a widow to the woman who has lost her husband or assists in her change of status to that of a widow. Other functions of rituals include

assisting the deceased on the way to the afterlife, thus, providing healing or therapy and purification to the mourners.

4.1 WIDOWHOOD RITES/PRACTICES ACROSS COUNTRIES

In some parts of the world, a husband's death brings his widow not only personal grief, but also a new life of extraordinary hardship, poverty, powerlessness, and abuse. This is further worsened by certain socio-cultural beliefs and practices which the widow has to adhere to in order to be socially accepted.

a) Korea

There are several harmful widowhood rituals that have been practiced in Korea, although many of them have declined or disappeared in modern times (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2011; Park & Oh, 2017). Some of these practices include forced remarriage (Kim, 2014), isolation (Lee, 2011), head-shaving (Lee, 2011), and self-harm (Kim, 2014). These practices were intended to show respect for the dead husband, but they also had the effect of stigmatizing and shaming the widow and making her vulnerable to abuse (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2011). While some of these practices are no longer common or legal in South Korea, they still occur in some isolated communities (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2011; Park & Oh, 2017).

b) China

In traditional Chinese culture, "widow chastity" was a highly valued practice (Li, 1998). The idea of widow chastity has a long history in China, dating back to the early Confucian period, but it was during the Song and Ming dynasties that the practice became more widespread and formalized (Ebrey, 1991; Li, 1998). During the Qing dynasty, widow chastity reached its peak as an ideal, with the government actively promoting it as a way of strengthening the family unit and social order (Ebrey, 1991; Li, 1998). However, the practice of widow chastity began to decline in the late Qing and Republican eras, as social and economic changes led to greater opportunities for women to participate in public life and pursue education and careers (Ebrey, 1991). By the mid-twentieth century, the practice had largely disappeared in urban areas, although it continued to be observed in some rural communities (Ebrey, 1991; Li, 1998). Overall, the practice of widow chastity in China reflected the cultural emphasis on family and social order, and the belief that women's virtue and morality were closely tied to their role as wives and mothers (Li, 1998).

c) Nepal

Women's attire is a vital aspect of a culture. Religious practices from birth are filled with red powdered and yellow liquid colours for women in any joyous celebration. Upon reaching marriage-hood, women are gifted with red tika bindi, sari, colourful bangles and necklaces and most importantly, *sindur* (also known as vermilion), a red powder decorated by the groom on the day of marriage in the bride's hair parting signify the partnership. In her daily life, the married woman incorporates a plethora of colours in her outfits. The significance of these items, like Bindi, Sindur, etc, are linked to patriarchy. However, the gross reality is when this woman becomes a widow these colourful items and colours are taken off from her and she lose the right to adorn in these colours.

When the husband dies, the women is forced to break her bangles an action that would have been considered bad luck while he was alive. She is forbidden from singing, dancing and sometimes forced to wash her *sindoor*, signifying the drought in her once flowing metaphorical river created by her hair parting filled with lucky, colourful and lively blood of the *sindur* now empty. Furthermore, she is forbidden from colours for the rest of her life. Along with the husband's family and close relatives, she is to abstain from salt for 13 days, pray, wear white seamless clothing and not touch anyone in the mourning period known as *kriya*. The only difference, the colourless life is permanent future for the widow.

In the conservative tradition and stigma bound Nepal, the widow suffers. Not only is she to follow irrational and restricting rules such as maintaining lifelong chastity, not wearing jewellery or make-up and even sustaining on a vegetarian diet, she faces legal oppression. From land inheritances rights, to finding work, to travel documents that require the male signature, she is challenged. It is worthy to mention that those already difficult challenges and their negative consequences are heightened due to Nepal's level of illiteracy, especially female illiteracy. Along with those obstacles, the widow must endure heinous social stigma surrounding her widowhood which includes her being barred from religious rituals and celebrations, being seen as bad omen which leads society to treat her as a sub-human being.

These disturbing changes that occur to a woman once her husband is gone showcases the characteristics of a patriarchal attitude that says - what other purpose could a woman have if not to serve her husband? While views on widowhood are slowly changing with movements like the Red Colour Movements and the Red Tika challenge, yet the widows in Nepal face terrible conditions, societal isolation, bigotry and prohibition of remarriage.

d) Africa

As observed by the World Health Organisation (1998), in Africa, some of the traditional mourning and burial rites involve harmful and degrading treatment of widows. It is claimed that there are degrading and painful trials that widows undergo and are forced into. This happens, it is alleged, particularly in countries where the concept of performing so-called crimes of 'honour' exists. In Ghana, for example, Mama Zimbi who is a television and radio host has begun something an awareness drive amongst women to create consciousness and end inhuman widowhood practices. For example, the practice wherein the widow have to spend the nights alone with their dead husbands' corpse, and sometimes as inhuman as even drinking a soup made of his fingernails and hair.

The WHO report (2000) claims that widows are coerced into participating in these rites through fear of losing their status and protection and also fear of not only eviction from the family, home, but also of having their children taken away from them. Certain rites of passage involve sexual activities. Some rites can be life-threatening as well as degrading such as the cleansing ritual through sex. According to traditional customs, in Zambia among the tribal community surviving widows are considered "unclean" and must undergo 'sexual cleansing' rituals by having sex with the relative of the deceased. In some countries, widows are even forced to drink the water in which their husband's corpses have been washed.

Widowhood entails the observance of certain rites by women that differ from culture to culture in Nigeria. Among the Igbo-speaking community in South-Eastern Nigeria, a woman is expected to wail and cry loudly at her husband's death, show a deep sense of grief, cry aloud morning and night, prove her innocence by drinking the water with which the corpse was washed, and allow being locked up with her husband's corpse. The hair of her head and body are compulsorily shaved off.

Arinze-Umobi&Anyogu (2011) stated that in some areas in Igbo land in Nigeria, it is demanded that she sleeps with the high priest of a deity to separate herself from the spirit of the dead husband as a mark of purification. The widow is made to sit at a place on the chair or on the floor from morning till evening. In some cultures, it's taboo for a widow to sleep in the afternoon. She is not allowed to shake hands, compulsorily undergoes twenty-eight days of seclusion without stepping out of her compound. Thereafter, she settles for additional two or five months of mourning depending on the particular cultural observances. The dress during this period is either black or white depending on the family and religious inclination. In some cultures, the widow is not allowed to see the corpse of her husband or eat the food cooked for the burial rites of her husband.

e) Europe

There is no evidence of harmful widowhood rituals being widely practiced in Europe. While there were certainly cultural and social expectations regarding the behaviour of widows, such as wearing mourning clothes and refraining from certain activities for a period of time after their husband's death, these were not typically harmful or oppressive in nature.

It is important to note that Europe is a diverse continent with many different cultures and traditions, so there may be some isolated instances of harmful widowhood practices in specific regions or communities. However, such practices would be the exception rather than the norm.

4.2 WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN INDIA

In India widowhood, in addition to being a personal status also exists as a social institution. Widows' deprivation and stigmatization are exacerbated by ritual and religious symbolism. Indian society, similar to all patriarchal societies, confers social status on a woman through a man. Hence, in the absence of a man, she becomes a non-entity, ultimately suffering a social death. Sati (widow burning) is the ultimate manifestation of this belief (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2000).

In medieval times, widows were often forced to commit "sati" – a suicide by burning – in order to join her husband in the after-life, since her life on earth no longer held any value. 'Sati' was eventually outlawed, however, the remnants of the attitude that encouraged such forced suicides still exists in pockets of India. Indeed, the widow is required to remain celibate until her own death as a testament of her devotion to her

departed husband. “A virtuous wife is one who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste and reaches heaven ” reads a piece of ancient Indian scripture. The widow is ‘uglified’ to deprive her of the core of her femininity. It is an act symbolic of castration. Widowhood and mourning practices also vary based on the different social levels, religions, and castes as in the case of India.

4.2.1 Factors Influencing Widowhood Practices

i) Male dominance and Patriarchal influence

Male dominance and patriarchy primarily influence the practices of widowhood and the inferior status of women in society. Men usually remarry shortly after the death of their wives while women mourn for months and are subjected to inhumane torture. Women are excluded from the decision-making process both in their parental and matrimonial home which has a great influence on the oppression of widows.

ii) Poverty

Women’s lack of economic freedom and inability to fend for themselves make them vulnerable to oppression and exploitation of in-laws, clans, village heads, or villagers. Often disguised under the guise of custom and traditions, these people subject women to unwholesome practices, which include demanding the late husband’s properties and, in most cases, selling off some in the name of raising funds for the burial of the deceased.

iii) Lack of Education

Lack of formal education not only hinders women from understanding their legal rights but also leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by family members and the community. This vulnerability is often compounded by deep-rooted patriarchal norms that dictate a widow’s fate, leaving her with little power to challenge unfair practices. Without the knowledge or confidence to seek legal or social support, many widows become victims of cultural expectations that strip them of their dignity and property. The absence of education also means they are less likely to be aware of existing support networks or resources that could help them navigate these difficult circumstances. This lack of empowerment perpetuates the cycle of poverty and dependence, reinforcing the very systems that marginalize widows. Additionally, the intersection of illiteracy with other factors such as economic dependency and social isolation further entrenches harmful widowhood practices, making it difficult for women to reclaim their autonomy and secure a stable future for themselves and their children

.iv) **Inferior Social Status**

With widowhood, many women lose their social status. Widowhood is a risk for transition into poverty. The imposition of restrictive and extensive mourning, seclusion, mandatory dress-codes have great implications on the socio-economic status of widows. Moreover, because of lack of income and financial security, widows are unable to provide for children's education, adequate food, secure accommodation, and maintain the household.

4.3 WIDOWHOOD RITUALS AND PRACTICES IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF GOA

In every society and community there are differential rituals with regard to marriage, birth, death and so on. Likewise, in Goan society, which comprises of people practising Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, also we find such rituals, customs, ceremonies and practices.

Before discussing specific rituals and practices pertaining to widowhood, an attempt is made to understand these concepts.

4.3.1 Rituals

Rituals are specific actions or ceremonies that are performed according to a prescribed set of rules or procedures. They are often designed to mark a particular occasion or event, such as a religious holiday, a rite of passage, or a significant life event. Rituals may involve symbolic actions, such as lighting candles or offering prayers, or physical actions, such as fasting or wearing specific clothing. Robert Merton, an American sociologist, defined a ritual as "a formalized mode of behaviour in which the members of a group or community regularly engage. Religion represents one of the main contexts in which rituals are practiced, but the scope of ritual behaviour extends well beyond religion" (Merton, 1963).

Mourning rituals, especially those for widows, have a long and deeply rooted history in many cultures. These practices, often steeped in tradition, reflect the values and beliefs of the societies in which they are observed. They are meant to honour the deceased and provide a framework for the living to express their grief. However, it is important to acknowledge that while these rituals hold significant cultural importance, they can also place a heavy burden on widows, both emotionally and physically. Recognizing this duality is essential in understanding the complex role that mourning rituals play in shaping the experiences of widows across different cultural contexts.

In many cultures, mourning rituals for widows involve specific customs and practices that are designed to honour the deceased and support the widow in her grieving process. For example, in some cultures, widows are expected to wear black or other dark colour clothes as a sign of mourning, and may be expected to refrain from certain activities or behaviours for a period of prescribed time. In some cases, widows may be expected to participate in specific rituals or ceremonies, such as lighting candles or offering prayers to honour the memory of their spouse and seek solace in their faith (Doka, 2016).

The significance of these mourning rituals is multifaceted. First, they provide a structured way for people to express their grief and emotions, which can be an important part of the healing process. By participating in rituals that are recognized and respected by their community, widows can feel validated in their mourning and gain support from those around them. Second, mourning rituals help to reinforce social bonds and provide a sense of community support during a difficult time. By coming together to mourn and support each other, communities can strengthen their connections and provide a sense of belonging to those who are grieving. Finally, mourning rituals can help individuals to come to terms with their loss and find a way to move forward. By engaging in rituals that are designed to honour and remember their loved one, widows can find comfort and closure in their grief and begin the process of rebuilding their lives (Doka, 2016).

In the religious sense, rituals are rules that govern how people behave in the presence of the sacred. These rules may take the form of instructions detailing the appropriate context for worship, the roles of various participants, acceptable dress, and the precise wording of chants, songs, and prayers. Participants must follow the instructions closely to achieve a specific goal, whether it be to purify the participant's body or soul, to commemorate an important person or event, or to transform profane items into sacred items.

According to Durkheim (1912), the primary significance of a ritual lies in its ability to bring individuals together as a community. Through shared rituals, participants collectively express and reinforce common values, beliefs, and sentiments. This communal engagement fosters a sense of belonging and helps individuals feel connected to something larger than themselves. Durkheim argues that rituals serve to strengthen social bonds and consolidate group identity. They act as a means of expressing collective consciousness and maintaining social order. Thus, the ritual's

effectiveness is measured by its capacity to evoke a sense of unity and shared purpose among its participants.

Rituals are not confined solely to religious contexts; they can also be observed in various social practices, such as sports rituals. These rituals and ceremonies, including social events like healing rituals, are believed to facilitate significant transformations. In contemporary sociology, the concept of ritual has expanded to encompass everyday patterned interactions, such as social etiquette and routine performances. As both symbolic and performative actions, rituals can be examined not only for their inherent meanings but also for their impacts on participants' lives (Ritzer, 2011; Turner, 1969). Despite this, defining what constitutes a ritual remains challenging, as it is a central theme within the study of religion and culture that affects many aspects of life.

Mourning rituals, such as lighting a candle or leaving flowers at a grave, serve as tangible acts of remembrance. For example, in many Catholic communities, lighting a candle during a memorial service symbolizes the presence of the deceased's spirit and provides a moment for personal reflection and prayer. This act helps survivors honour the memory of their loved one and provides a sense of continuity and connection. Similarly, Repeating rituals offers emotional security and comfort. The consistency of performing specific acts, such as attending annual memorial services or participating in traditional rites, provides a sense of stability in the face of loss. For instance, the practice of visiting a grave on the anniversary of a loved one's death allows mourners to reconnect with their grief and find solace in the ritual's predictability. Rituals also often involve communal participation, which helps individuals feel supported and less isolated. During funerals or wake services, the presence of family, friends, and community members provides emotional support and reinforces the social bonds that are crucial during times of grief. The shared experience of mourning helps individuals feel understood and supported, fostering a collective sense of consolation. Symbols used in mourning rituals, such as crosses, flowers, or special prayer cards, function as emotional anchors. For example, placing a bouquet of flowers on a grave can represent a gesture of love and respect, while the act of saying a prayer or lighting a candle can help individuals articulate their grief and seek spiritual comfort.

Mourning rituals vary across cultures but share the common goal of aiding in the grieving process. In some cultures, specific foods or clothing are associated with mourning, such as wearing black or preparing traditional dishes for a wake. These

practices not only honour cultural traditions but also provide a structured way for individuals to express their sorrow and find solace. Rituals also have Psychological and Emotional Benefits for example engaging in rituals can offer psychological benefits by providing a sense of control and purpose. For instance, organizing a memorial service or creating a personal tribute, such as a scrapbook or digital memorial, allows individuals to actively participate in the grieving process and channel their emotions into meaningful activities. Hence, mourning rituals and symbols are integral to coping with loss, offering both practical and emotional support. They provide structure, comfort, and a means to honour and remember the deceased, ultimately helping individuals overcome the process of grief.

4.3.2 Religious Practices

Religious practices, on the other hand, are the observable actions, behaviours, and customs that are associated with a particular religion. These practices may include prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, fasting, and other forms of worship. They are often designed to cultivate a sense of connection to the divine and to promote spiritual growth and well-being. This includes practices and observances such as attending worship services, wearing religious symbols, praying at prescribed times, displaying religious objects, adhering to certain dietary rules, refraining from certain activities, proselytizing, etc.

Religious beliefs encompass the ideas, concepts, and convictions held by individuals or communities regarding the divine, the afterlife, and the purpose of existence. These beliefs often derive from sacred texts, teachings, or traditions that have been handed down through generations, providing a framework through which adherents understand their world and their place within it. Sociologists examine religion both as a belief system and as a social institution. As a belief system, religion profoundly influences individuals' perceptions, shaping their worldview and guiding their understanding of life and its meaning. It dictates how people interpret experiences, make decisions, and interact with others. As a social institution, religion represents an organized pattern of social action centered around these beliefs. It encompasses established rituals, norms, and structures that facilitate collective worship and community life, thus answering fundamental questions about existence. This institutional aspect of religion persists across time and geography, fostering a sense of continuity and belonging among its members. While specific beliefs and practices may vary among different religions, the presence of religious systems is a universal aspect

of human societies, reflecting the diversity of human thought and culture. Religion's dual role as a belief system and an institutional force underscores its significance in shaping both individual lives and societal structures.

4.3.3 Ceremonies

Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live. Even the earliest societies on record show clear traces of religious symbols and ceremonies. Sociologists, Anthropologists and Linguists have long been interested in rituals and ceremonies for what they reveal about the religious, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of societies and cultures.

As with a Christian ceremony along with Birth ceremony, Communion ceremony and Marriage ceremony, the funeral ceremony is also one of the significant one. A funeral ceremony, also known as a Christian memorial service or a Christian burial service, is a religious service held to honour and remember a deceased person within the context of the Christian faith. It serves as an opportunity for family and friends to gather, express their grief, seek comfort, and offer prayers for the departed soul.

The specific elements and customs of a Christian funeral ceremony can vary depending on the denomination, cultural practices, and personal preferences. However, there are several common elements and significances found in many Christian funeral ceremonies:

1. **Gathering and Prayers:** The funeral service typically begins with the gathering of family, friends, and members of the church community. Prayers are offered to seek God's comfort, guidance, and strength during this time of loss.
2. **Scripture Readings:** Selected passages from the Bible, often focusing on themes of hope, comfort, and eternal life, are read during the ceremony. These readings may include verses from the Psalms, the Gospels, or other relevant biblical texts.
3. **Eulogy and Remembrances:** Family members or close friends may deliver a eulogy (a tribute or speech given in honour of the deceased person) usually delivered by a family member, friend or a person close to the deceased. It involves sharing personal memories, paying tribute to the life of the deceased. This provides an opportunity for attendees to remember and celebrate the person's life and accomplishments.

4. Hymns and Worship: Singing hymns or worship songs is a common practice in Christian funeral ceremonies. These songs may express themes of comfort, faith, and hope in God's presence and eternal life.
5. Sermon or Message: A pastor, priest, or clergy member often delivers a sermon or message, offering spiritual guidance and reflections on the deceased person's life, the reality of death, and the hope of resurrection or eternal life in Christ.
6. Commendation and Committal: The body of the deceased is often commended to God's care and buried or cremated during the ceremony. The committal is a moment where final prayers are offered, and the deceased is entrusted to God's care.
7. Comfort and Support: One of the significant aspects of a Christian funeral ceremony is providing comfort and support to the grieving family and friends. It allows the community to express condolences, offer prayers, and extend support during a time of mourning.

The significance of a Christian funeral ceremony lies in the belief that death is not the end but a transition into eternal life with God for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. The ceremony serves to provide comfort, hope, and assurance to the grieving by emphasizing God's love, the promise of resurrection, and the presence of the Christian community to offer support in times of loss.

4.3.4 Customs

According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology(1994) “customs are established ways of thinking and acting in societies”. Alex Inkeles (1965) defines Custom as “any standardised and more or less specialised set of actions, which is routinely carried out according to a generally accepted pattern in a group life” .In brief, it denotes established patterns of behaviour. It refers both to the routines of daily life and to the distinctive features which mark off one culture from another.

In the backdrop of above discussion, an attempt is made here to discuss and analyse the primary data with regard to socio-cultural dimensions of young widowhood. In this study, the focus is on death of a spouse, specifically death of the husband and the varied widowhood rites and practices. Various tribes and cultures have diverse ways of practicing rites pertaining to burial, but traditions are particularly hard on women. Culturally, widowhood burial rites involve varying degrees of physical hardship, deprivation, ritual contamination, emotional instability, socioeconomic and psychological trauma. Widowhood Practices in certain cultures involve dehumanizing

rites and rituals which women are mandated to follow. Thus, widowhood is often the beginning of a life-long oppression and misery for women.

4.3.5 Rituals and Customs Relating to Widows with Special Reference to Catholic Gawda Widows of Goa

There are, in each society, including that of the Roman Catholic Community of South Goa many, at times, tension creating, socio-cultural practices and mourning rituals. Most groups have ritual practices of some kind such as bangle breaking ritual, mourning clothes, restrictions on wearing jewellery, code of behaviour, restrictions on social mobility, and others. In this study an attempt is made to understand and analyse the rituals and practices followed by Roman Catholic young widows.

i) Social Constraints on Widow's Attire and Appearances

There are certain cultural norms and control mechanisms on widow's appearance as found in the study. The restrictions on widows' clothes is one of them. A widow is often expected to tone down her appearance to avoid drawing unwanted attention, while women who are not widowed are encouraged to adorn themselves with the finest jewellery and attire. These different ways of depriving the widow of dressing well indicate the control on her emotional wellbeing and sexual desires. They are expected to be role models of chastity and live a life of celibacy irrespective of the age and duration of the marriage. Young widows are expected to live a life of serenity to honour their marriage. There is a strong belief that if she continues wearing jewellery and colourful clothing, she would attract another man, and may marry him, thus not respecting her husband's memory. Though the Bible states that death alone can lead to dissolution of the marriage, still harsh social customs on this segment of the community.

Many conform to these expectations to mitigate conflict and preserve harmony within their familial and communal contexts. Other respondents also shared how close relatives had interfered to impart the moral 'code' of widowhood behaviour. They shared how they became the subject of gossip for wearing clothes deemed to be inappropriate. Apart from the above-mentioned rituals, practices and customs the widows are also the victims of several restrictions. They are socially and culturally forbidden to participate in and to perform certain rituals.

In the following paragraphs such prohibitions imposed on the widows by the society are discussed.

ii) Restrictions on widows at the Ros Ceremony:

In Goa there is a ceremony called *Ros*. This precedes the wedding day for both the bride and the groom at their respective residencies. It contains in applying coconut pulp juice ceremonially, after the initial prayers. It is accompanied by singing of special verses called *zonti*. This is mostly sung by women well versed in them. These verses are full of praise of the bride and the groom, with humorous exhortations on her / his future conduct with her / his relatives and close family members. In *Ros*' ritual, the bride and the groom are supposed to be anointed with pure coconut milk. Pouring coconut milk on the bride and the groom is supposed to purify the couple before the wedding and the ritual simply signifies a new life filled with happiness and prosperity.

This juice is applied on the head or a part of the body of the bride or groom, at his or her residence, by close relatives first, in proper order followed by friends and neighbours. This ceremony is performed in the main hall, where the oratory is also in full view. Before applying juice to the bride/groom the relatives put coins in the juice container or keep some cash as a blessing. The cash and the coins are then put in different bowls and are later given to the maids who helped in the wedding preparations. One restrictive custom involving widows was observed here. The person who assist in extracting this coconut juice should not be a widow.

One of the respondents narrated her experience. This particular respondent went to help her neighbours in extracting the coconut juice for their son's wedding *ros* ceremony. But was shocked when one of the neighbours told her that being a widow she cannot partake in this ritual as bad luck may befall on the bride. She stated that she felt ashamed to be treated as inauspicious.

iii) Restrictions on the widow during Trousseau(dowry)

Another cultural dimension related to weddings and widowhood is the ritual surrounding the bride's trousseau. In many Goan Catholic communities, it is customary for the bride's family to send the trousseau to the groom's house on the day before the wedding. This event is typically attended by female relatives and close friends, who ceremoniously carry the trousseau such as offering prayers at the bride's house and later at the groom's house.

The trousseau usually consists of personal items that the bride will take with her to her new home, such as clothes (including traditional and modern wear), linen, toiletries, kitchenware, religious items like rosaries or statues, and sometimes symbolic items that represent her preparedness for married life. The trousseau is more personal and practical in nature and is meant for the bride's use, unlike the dowry, which traditionally included larger items such as furniture, household appliances, land, cash, or jewellery, and was intended to benefit the groom's household.

While both the trousseau and dowry are linked to marriage customs, they differ significantly in meaning and intent. The dowry often involves financial transactions or assets that go to the groom's family, and has historically been associated with social pressures and gendered expectations. The trousseau, on the other hand, is more symbolic of the bride's transition and preparation for her new role in a marital home.

Despite the affectionate and celebratory nature of this ritual, One respondent, a 32-year-old widow at the time, shared a poignant experience related to her niece's wedding. She recalled:

"I was excited when my sister's daughter was getting married. The day before the wedding, all the women were preparing to take the trousseau to the groom's house. I offered to go with them, as I had helped pack everything. But my cousin quietly told me not to come. She said it wouldn't look good to have a widow in the group during such a 'sacred' event. I was hurt... deeply. I was only 32 and still part of the family, yet in that moment, I felt like an outsider."

This narrative highlights the stigmatization of widowhood, especially in culturally significant family events. Despite her enthusiasm and close involvement, the widow was barred from participating in a moment meant to signify joy and unity. Such instances reflect how widowhood, regardless of age, can become a marker of inauspiciousness, affecting a woman's inclusion in rituals and her sense of belonging within the community.

iv) Restrictions on Widows in Blessing Rituals

Yet another superstition that reflects the marginalization of Catholic widows is the restriction placed on them during the wedding blessings of their own children. In Goan Catholic traditions, it is customary for the parents—especially the mother—to bless the bride or groom just before they leave for the church to receive the Sacrament

of Matrimony. This moment is considered sacred and emotional, marking the parent's final gesture of love and protection before the child enters a new phase of life.

However, when the mother is a widow, she is often discouraged or even prohibited from being the first to bestow this blessing. In many families, other elders or relatives are invited to take her place. Sometimes, the widow herself withdraws voluntarily, fearing that her presence or blessing may be considered inauspicious or that her child might "inherit" the same misfortune of losing a spouse.

Such beliefs, while deeply entrenched, have no theological foundation. During fieldwork, when the researcher interacted with a local Catholic priest, he clearly stated that these practices are not rooted in scripture or Church doctrine. They are folk customs or "folkways", passed down through generations and shaped by cultural interpretations of widowhood.

Despite this clarification, widows often comply with these unwritten rules, not out of faith, but out of social fear—of being blamed, gossiped about, or ridiculed. As one widow expressed, “Even if I don’t believe it, I don’t want people saying something went wrong in the marriage because of my blessing.” This reveals the internalized stigma and societal pressure that compel widows to remain silent and invisible, even during significant family milestones.

This practice illustrates how widowhood, in cultural terms, is often equated with loss, misfortune, and bad luck—ideas that stand in stark contrast to the joy and hope associated with weddings. It also shows how women who have already endured the trauma of losing a spouse are further burdened by social exclusion, particularly during moments that should otherwise reinforce their roles as mothers and elders in the family.

v) Stigma Faced by Widows During Birth Rituals

A woman does not choose to become a widow—it is a life-changing event that occurs due to unforeseen and often tragic circumstances. However, in many Goan Catholic communities, a widow continues to be viewed through the lens of superstition and social stigma. She is frequently labelled as inauspicious, and this belief affects her participation in key family rituals—not only weddings, but even joyous occasions like the birth of a child.

There have been instances where relatives, including close family members, have avoided allowing a widow to be the first to see a newborn, fearing it might bring

misfortune or “evil” upon the child. This belief, though irrational and unsupported by religious doctrine, persists through oral traditions and community pressure.

vi) Social Avoidance and Superstitious Practices Against Widows

In some communities, superstitions surrounding widowhood are so deeply entrenched that they extend beyond family rituals and enter everyday social interactions. One of the most striking examples of this is the active avoidance of even seeing a widow, particularly in the morning hours, as it is believed to bring bad luck or misfortune for the day.

One such example comes from a respondent who recounted how her neighbours treated her differently solely because of her status as a widow.

As the monsoon season approached, the residents of her neighbourhood began pruning trees and clearing branches, a common practice to prevent damage from heavy rains. However, there was one large tree directly in front of her house—a tree that blocked the view of her home from the house opposite hers. While all other trees were carefully trimmed, this particular tree was left untouched.

“Every year they cut down branches before the rains. But this time, they left the biggest one—the one right in front of my house. Later I realised, it was deliberate. Someone told me, ‘They didn’t want to see you first thing in the morning. They believe it’s bad luck.’ That tree became a wall between me and them.”

This incident, though seemingly minor on the surface, reflects a deeper social attitude—one where the presence of a widow is perceived as ominous or undesirable.

vii) Haldi Kumkum

This refers to a traditional social gathering celebrated by married Hindu women during festive seasons in various parts of India. It is exclusively for “sumangalis,” defined as married women whose husbands are alive. Therefore, widows are not typically invited to participate in this ceremony. During an interview, one participant expressed her disappointment at not being invited to Haldi Kumkum after being included in previous years while married.

The researcher observed a shift in this tradition in some instances where widows are also invited but with modifications. Specifically, they are not included in the application of *haldi* (turmeric) and *kumkum* (red sacred powder) on the forehead, which are symbolic of married life and used in prayers for the husband's long life. This

adaptation reflects a blend of traditional and modified customs, allowing widows to participate without feeling stigmatized.

These bereavement rituals and practices raise pertinent sociological questions regarding the efficacy and impact of religious beliefs and practices on bereavement experiences. Specifically, do religious adjustment techniques intended to aid in the bereavement process actually achieve their intended outcomes? How manageable are these practices in modern-day life, and what significance do they hold in society?

The findings suggest that while traditional religious practices provide comfort and structure during bereavement, their rigid adherence may inadvertently hinder the grieving process for widows who are excluded from certain rituals. The modified inclusion of widows in *Haldi Kumkum* ceremonies demonstrates a shift towards inclusivity and adaptation to modern societal norms, allowing widows to participate in communal rituals without feeling marginalized or stigmatized.

4.3.6 Rituals specific to Catholic Gawdas in Goa

It is to be noted that some harsh and restrictive rituals of widowhood were observed specifically among the Gawda community in particular the catholic Gawda community which are discussed below

i) Ritual of bangle breaking

From a sociological perspective, mourning is not a universal or instinctive process determined by biological factors, even though biological reactions can be significant and intense. However, it has been noted in this study that the physical reaction, depends on the norm-role definitions which spell out the socially expected behaviour patterns considered appropriate for certain situations. The culture of the group among other things, included, specifications about how one is expected to react to death.

Christianity encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices, and local customs and traditions can influence the way funeral rites are conducted. Bangles symbolise the status of a married woman according to certain customs and traditions of earlier times. It signifies the long life of the husband. Therefore, breaking of a bangle when the husband is alive is considered a bad omen. However, there is a trifling ritual related to smashing of bangles after the husband's death which is prevalent among the Roman Catholic community although it is dying down. This is done just before the

casket is taken out of the house to proceed for the Eucharistic service in the church. A group of women take charge of the grieving woman and smash her bangles on the husband's body. These bangles are called '*chuddho*'.

When the marriage is fixed there is a practice to announce it in the church. It is called Reading of the banns (*Chitt Vachop*). In respect of the to-be- bride, the custom in Goa demands that a bride wears the best bangles that she can get from the bangle seller or *Kankonnkar* as he is called in Konkani the word derived from *kakon* means bangle. The special bangle wearing ceremony that is held once in her lifetime for the bride is known as Chuddo ceremony. The bangle ceremony, as happens elsewhere in the country symbolises married life for the bride. The *Chuddo* (*Chudda* in Hindi) among the upper castes in Goa includes wearing seven glass bangles on each wrist. Among the lower castes the bangles are chosen to represent the seven colours of the rainbow.

This ceremony is preferably performed at the house of the uncle of the bride (*Mama*) or at the house of some other close relative. The bride is bedecked in ceremonial dress with flowers and bangles are slid onto her wrist by the bangle seller. The close family and her friends and other relatives also participate in this ceremony. They offer money in some coin or notes as a token of blessing, which is placed in a tray set before the bangle seller. The bangle colour sometimes varies from region to region. For e.g., in south Goa it is multi-coloured, in North Goa it is red and white. The number of bangles can also vary from 12,14,16 or 21 of different colours.

During this ceremony, women who are adept at extemporaneous singing take part in performing traditional songs known as *Zoti*. These songs are characterized by their rich, metaphorical content and are a key element of the ritual. Similar to competitive song forms like the "Chand" in Punjabi culture or the "qawwali" in Urdu, the *Zoti* involves a form of competitive singing where women showcase their skill and creativity. They engage in a form of lyrical competition, each woman crafting and delivering vivid, often emotionally charged phrases to pay tribute to the closest relatives of the bride or groom. This performance not only honours the individuals involved but also demonstrates the singers' artistic prowess. While this practice is prominently observed among Christian communities, it is also found among Hindus, reflecting a broader cultural tradition of using music and song to mark significant life events and rituals.

After the wedding day, the bride removes these bangles and keeps them on the holy altar of the husband's house or in a special place made for this purpose in the wooden cupboard. Traditionally, a wooden cupboard is given to a bride as part of her trousseau. Upon the death of the husband, the widow is made to wear these bangles and break them into several pieces on the husband's coffin. In cases where the *Chuddo* bangles were not available or were not fitting, a new set of glass bangles was worn, and shattered.

Among the Christian Gawda community the mother, brother, or some other relative from her natal home, have to buy the bangles and flowers, which the widow has to wear at the funeral. This is a reminder of her natal attachments. One or two bangles are broken by the relatives and put in the coffin and the remaining are taken off, along with the flowers and placed in the coffin. In some instances, the widow is made to rip a part of her saree border wherein the bangles, flowers, sometimes a few hairs or an artificial hair bun and a special gold bead similar to *Muhuratmanni* in the *Mangal sutra* is tied to this saree piece and placed in the coffin. The Manni (gold bead) being valuable is preserved or sold. A Christian Gawda widow younger or older refrains from wearing glass bangles all her life. Although, after the first death anniversary, gold, metal or plastic bangles are allowed to be worn.

Some Christian widows (other than Gawda Community) in specific cultural or regional contexts may observe a bangle-breaking ritual as part of their mourning process. In this study, 10.55 percent of the widows had to perform this ritual. It was also observed that all the women who followed this belonged to the Scheduled Tribe category specifically from the Christian Gawda community. The Gawda community is primarily associated with the indigenous tribal population in certain parts of Goa, and their cultural practices may differ from those of mainstream Christian communities in the region. There are other caste groups who follow this ritual though it is not caste specific. However, among Gawda community it is an obligation.

The ritual of bangle breaking is not found in western society. It is also absent or unheard of among people in Goa living in urban areas. Some of the women from Gawda community though educated followed this practice as they believe that it has a religious connotation. Thus, indicating no co-relation between education and practice of rituals in this community.

According to a parish priest of the community, no such practice exists in the Bible and these were merely matters of custom. The practice of breaking bangles is

more predominant among the Hindu community. Since some of the catholic communities are converts from Hinduism, it is possible that the traces of the previous religious order reflect in their customs. There is no question of legality. These are socio-cultural practices. It also emphasizes how Hindu influence continued among the converts even after several decades or centuries. Such abominations decked up in the finery of rites are an assault on the holy scriptures of the Catholics and it is the duty of the enlightened minds to protect its subjects was the reply of the priest. The primary data also revealed that some of the respondents, mostly educated and in good jobs, did not wear glass bangles before and after marriages. So, the question of breaking them did not arise nor did they see the relevance of this practice.

Cultural practices often play a significant role in shaping the ways in which individuals express and cope with their emotions. The act of breaking something dear, such as bangles, can serve as a cathartic release of pain, anger, and frustration that arises from the loss of a spouse, particularly if it is a sudden or untimely death. It can be a way for widows to convey their profound sense of loss and the impact it has had on their lives.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the bangle-breaking ritual may have varying effects on individuals, depending on their personal experiences and emotional state. While some widows may find solace or a sense of release through this practice, others may find it distressing or psychologically burdensome. Forced participation in such rituals can indeed exacerbate grief and have a profound psychological impact on the individual.

Culture plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and expectations, including how grief and widowhood are understood and expressed. It is essential to approach these practices with sensitivity, recognizing that individuals within the community may have different reactions and experiences. Providing support, understanding, and space for individuals to express their grief in a manner that feels meaningful and comfortable to them is crucial.

Ultimately, it's important to approach cultural practices with an open mind and respect for individual experiences, acknowledging that the impact and meaning of rituals can vary from person to person. Some of the reasons and cultural significance behind the bangle-breaking ritual among young widows in the Gawda community in Goa. Breaking the bangles to symbolize the end of the coupled identity and honour of being a wife indicates the transformation in the widow's status and role after the loss of

her spouse. It signifies a transition from a married woman to a widow, highlighting the change in her societal position and responsibilities.

The association of the red colour of the bangles with sexuality and the act of breaking them symbolizing the beginning of a life of celibacy demonstrates the cultural belief in the cessation of marital relations and a commitment to widowhood as a state of abstinence. Additionally, the ritual of breaking bangles can serve as a way to publicly acknowledge and mourn the death of the husband. It reinforces the social belief that the death of a husband signifies the death of the better half, emphasizing the profound impact of the loss on the widow's life. The fear of social boycott and the need to adhere to socially accepted grieving practices influences the widows' participation in the ritual. The social consequences and pressure to conform to established customs may deter widows from rebelling against these traditions.

Furthermore, the distinction between rural and urban communities in the practice of bangle-breaking highlights how cultural customs can vary based on geographical and sociocultural factors. It suggests that the ritual is more prevalent and adhered to in the village community compared to the urban setting. These insights provide a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dynamics surrounding the bangle-breaking ritual among young widows in the Gawda community in Goa. They highlight the complex interplay between cultural beliefs, societal expectations, and personal experiences within this specific context.

ii) Bodily adornment practices

The cultural practices and norms surrounding mourning and bereavement have long dictated specific behaviours and attire within different communities. Among Christian funerals, the customary dress code for both men and women has traditionally been black or white, with a preference for formal or semi-formal attire. This study investigates the underlying reasons behind this practice and seeks to shed light on the changing dynamics of bodily adornment in mourning rituals. Women attending funeral ceremonies typically adhere to simple dressing norms. However, when it comes to the funeral of a husband, widows are expected to dress in their finest clothes, which may include vibrant colours like red or orange, and to adorn themselves with heavy jewellery. One participant recounted her experience of being made to wear a red dress for her husband's funeral. She expressed a sense of unease and emotional turmoil associated with wearing such a colour on such a sorrowful occasion. Despite her

personal discomfort, she complied with the customs, believing that not doing so might invite negative omens into her life.

Conversely, another respondent disregarded the instruction to wear colourful attire and chose to wear black colour clothes instead, suggesting a diminishing influence of traditional customs. This trend could be attributed to factors such as a more rational outlook, increased education, and individualistic attitudes and personalities, all contributing to the weakening of informal social control. The peculiar way in which widows dress during their spouse's funeral ceremony can be explained by various factors. The rationale behind wearing bright colours is to dress her best in the final journey together as husband and wife. However, following this occasion, she is then required to relinquish the adornments and live a subdued life. This transformation signifies the dissolution of her identity as a wife, as evidenced by the act of wearing red on a sorrowful occasion like a funeral.

The implications of these customs for widows in society are profound. Firstly, the act of dressing in vibrant colours for the funeral may create a sense of internal conflict and distress, as it goes against the widow's natural inclination to express her grief. This can lead to a feeling of alienation and emotional strain during an already challenging time. Secondly, the requirement to shift from vibrant attire to subdued clothing symbolizes the widow's transition from a married woman to one who must navigate life without her spouse. This can affect her social identity and status, as she may be seen differently within her community.

Furthermore, the pressure to adhere to traditional mourning rituals can reinforce gender norms and expectations, limiting the widow's ability to express her grief in a manner that feels authentic to her. On the other hand, the gradual shift towards more individualistic expressions of mourning, as seen in the respondent who chose to wear black, indicates a potential transformation in societal attitudes. This shift can empower widows to reclaim their identity and make choices that align with their personal beliefs and comfort, rather than being bound by rigid customs.

iii) Ritual of a widow's first visit to her natal home after widowhood

There are certain customary ways provided for the alleviation of culturally constructed fears, shock, and frustrations, as Hallowell (1938) has pointed out with reference to death behaviour. The individual is not completely bereft of options.

Through the use of institutionalised protections, she obtains some respite and reassurance. Visit to the mother's house after her husband's death is one of them .

A peculiar ritual is observed among the catholic Gawda Community .On the third day, the widows other, along with other relatives and neighbours from her natal home, pays her a visit. There is a ritual of applying oil on her head as well as on her children's heads. The reason for this is not clear, but it is seen as a way of sharing in her pain. The visiting relatives are not allowed to eat or accept water during this visit.All respondents reported being invited to their parents' place after the death of their husband. This visit must take place before the 9th day, with some choosing to visit on the 7th day. In many cases, a mass service is held for the deceased on the 7th day or after a month, after which the widow is believed to be purified and can step out of her house.

During this visit, she is given new mourning garments, gifts, and money. This practice symbolizes support and solidarity from her natal family, helping her transition into her new status as a widow and providing her with the necessary resources to cope with her loss. The money offered usually ranged from Rs.500 to Rs.10000. This sum varies based on the nature of the siblings' relationship, the family's socio-economic condition, and the circumstances of the husband's death, whether by suicide, accident, or long-term sickness. In one case, the widow and her two minor children relocated from her husband's residence to her parents' house on the fourth day of his death to live with them.

Among the Gawdas, there is a unique custom involving sweets. Some sweets like cake, dosh, and bebinca are given to the widow, but one specific tradition involves the preparation of a sweet dish called *Patoleo*. Typically prepared during certain festivals, *Patoleo* consists of stuffed turmeric leaf wraps with a filling made from grated coconut, rice, and jaggery, cooked by wrapping and steaming in turmeric leaves. However, in this case, *Patoleo* is prepared with only rice stuffing(no sugar or jaggery is used) and uses simple leaves from a plant called "*Pongro*" instead of turmeric leaves. The widow is then required to distribute these sweets among her kin and neighbours at her husband's place. The Gawda widows in earlier times, there were restrictions that prevented them from attending their husband's funeral service. However, these restrictions are no longer in place today.

In the context of a widow's visit to her natal house, a highly unique ritual was observed in two of the villages studied. In this community, it is customary for the

brother to invite his widowed sister for dinner on the 7th or 9th day after her spouse's death. This ritual has several notable features. First, the widow must be accompanied by another elderly widow, which may serve as a form of social support and solidarity. Second, they must depart from their house after nightfall to visit her brother, symbolizing the liminal phase they are in during their mourning period. Upon reaching the maternal house, there is usually no one to receive them, signifying their temporary marginality within the family structure. The food is served separately to both widows, highlighting their distinct social status as mourners.

After having dinner, they are required to dispose of all the remaining food and leave the brother's residence before daylight, reinforcing their transient position and the completion of this ritualistic act. All the gifts, money, and clothes are kept in the dining room, which can be seen as material support provided by the natal family to aid the widow in her reintegration into society. The belief behind the visit at night is that the widowed woman's misfortune should not descend on the young girls of the village. This practice is mostly prevalent among the Christian Gawdas and is not found among all Catholics. However, the practice is so deeply rooted among some that they follow it scrupulously. There are instances of widows denying the invitation from their maternal side to visit during the daytime with their children, as such widows do not want to break the social norms.

iv) *Pagushe* (a type of traditional head scarf worn by widowed women) as a mourning attire

The attire worn by members of the Catholic community for mourning reflects both religious tradition and cultural norms. Mourning attire in the Catholic tradition is often sombre and respectful, symbolizing grief and reverence for the deceased. While practices may vary slightly depending on cultural and regional differences within the Catholic Church, certain common elements are typically observed. Black is the traditional colour associated with mourning in many Catholic cultures, representing sorrow and solemnity. However, variations in dark shades like blue, purple, or grey may also be deemed appropriate.

In addition to attire, Catholics often observe specific etiquette during mourning periods, such as refraining from loud or jovial behaviour, speaking softly, and offering condolences to the bereaved family members. Mourning attire customs can vary significantly across different Catholic cultures and regions. While some communities adhere strictly to traditional black attire, others may incorporate cultural elements or

personal preferences into their mourning dress. Overall, mourning attire in the Catholic community serves as a visible expression of grief, solidarity, and respect for the deceased and their loved ones. It reflects the solemnity of the occasion and the reverence with which Catholics approach the process of mourning and remembrance.

In respect to mourning attire of a catholic widow along with traditional wearing of black colour clothing, a peculiar type of accessory called *Pagushe* was found. It is a unique mourning costume worn by widows belonging only to the Christian Gawda community. It refers to a black colour cotton stole or head covering garment worn over the clothing. This serves as a visible symbol of widowhood. The widow receives the *Pagushe* during her first visit post-widowhood, typically after the fourth or seventh day. It is bestowed by her mother, who places it on her head as a veil, symbolizing her transition to a new status and role. Following this visit, the widow begins wearing black attire.

The *Pagushe* is sometimes worn as a head veil covering the head and partly the face, known as *Bonth*. However, some widows modify it to wear as a scarf around the neck. Additionally, widows refrain from wearing glass bangles and other jewellery, as glass bangles symbolize a married woman. This new identity is to be maintained for at least a year. Primary data also revealed that this *Pagushe* should not be worn after twilight. The researcher tried to get a more in depth understanding of this timing. What could be gathered is a belief that Catholics have two main prayers to be recited at seven in the evening called *Aimori* and another recitation of prayers called *Ters* at 8 o'clock. The respondents believe that during these prayers the widow need not cover herself in misery but open herself to pray and that would please Mother Mary because both these prayers are in veneration of Mother Mary, the mother of Jesus.

v) Wearing of fresh flowers in the hair on the funeral day

The practice of a widow wearing fresh flowers in her hair on the funeral day of her spouse is a tradition observed in some cultures and communities, including certain Catholic communities. While not universal across all Catholic traditions, it is a poignant symbol of mourning, remembrance, and respect for the deceased spouse.

Another ritual followed among some Christian communities is to adorn the widow's hair with fresh flowers on the day of her husband's funeral ceremony. This was particularly found among two communities. One was the Christian Gawdas and secondly, the fishing community of Goa (*Kharvi* Community). Widow is forbidden

from wearing fresh flowers once she is widowed. Furthermore, widows are expected to permanently refrain from wearing flowers in their hair for the following reason.

On the second day of their wedding, various rituals are performed to celebrate the union and signify the bride's new status. The groom brings fresh flowers, often of the Xivtiimor Abolim variety, to adorn the bride's hair. This gesture not only enhances her beauty but also symbolizes the freshness and vitality of the new phase of her life. Alongside the flowers, a new saree, typically in red or a bright colour, is purchased for the bride to wear. This garment represents the vibrant beginning of her married life and is meant to be auspicious and celebratory.

In addition to the saree and flowers, a significant ritual involves the invitation of a bangle seller who adorns the bride and five other married women—who are not widows—with red glass bangles. These bangles are imbued with deep cultural meaning, symbolizing auspiciousness, warmth, sexuality, fertility, and the status of being a married woman. The vibrant red colour of the bangles serves to highlight the bride's new role and the celebratory nature of the occasion.

In the evening of the second day, the newly-wed couple visits the bride's natal home, marking a traditional part of the wedding celebrations. However, the cultural norms surrounding these rituals change drastically in the event of the husband's death. Whether the husband dies young or old, it is believed that the widow's marital adornments, including her glass bangles and fresh flowers, are taken away or rendered obsolete. This signifies the end of her marital status and her transition into widowhood.

Widows are expected to refrain from wearing flowers in their hair after the loss of their husbands. This practice is rooted in the belief that flowers could evoke sexual desires, given their historical association with romantic and intimate gestures. The exchange of flowers has long been used as a symbol of intimacy and affection between couples. Therefore, by avoiding flower garlands, widows reinforce their bereavement and align with cultural norms designed to de-sexualize their appearance. The removal of such adornments and the avoidance of flowers serve not only as a mark of respect for the deceased but also as a way to symbolize the widow's transition from a state of marital joy to one of mourning and detachment. This practice underscores the profound impact of cultural beliefs and rituals on the way individuals navigate significant life changes and societal expectations.

vi) Norms in Mourning Behaviour: Societal Expectations and Practices

The social norms regarding mourning behaviour reflect deeply ingrained cultural practices within the Catholic community. Wearing black clothing as a sign of mourning is a tradition observed in many cultures worldwide, signifying respect for the deceased and the grieving process. The duration of wearing black, typically up to a year followed by lighter colours for an additional two years, provides a visible signal to others of the mourner's ongoing grief and allows for a gradual return to regular social activities. The prohibition on wearing certain accessories, such as earrings and heavy jewellery, for widows is another aspect of mourning etiquette within this community. This practice likely stems from the idea of modesty and solemnity associated with widowhood. By refraining from wearing flashy or elaborate accessories, widows may signal their continued devotion to their deceased spouse and their commitment to mourning.

However, the observation that widows in the study continued to wear earrings despite this taboo highlights the complexity of navigating traditional customs in contemporary society. It suggests that while certain norms may persist, individuals may choose to adapt or reinterpret them according to personal beliefs, comfort, or practicality. Additionally, changes in societal attitudes over time may also influence the adherence to such customs.

Widows in this study were cautious of looking overdressed and attractive. A participant narrated how she wore a red colour dress after three years of widowhood for a function at home during which one of her guests commented that she looked like a bride. This meant that she failed to dress up as a widow. In another incident, the respondent narrated.... how her widowed mother re-socialised her for widowhood behaviour. The widowed daughter was told to sacrifice heavy jewellery, dangling earrings, and colourful clothing and follow a simple lifestyle. Her main role and goal now in life was only to fulfil her duty as a mother. She was heartbroken and shocked as it came from her mother. She describes it as adding insult to injury.

vii) Discriminatory Practices in Widow's Funeral Rites

Funeral ceremonies often reflect a community's values, beliefs, and the status they attribute to the deceased. In the case of widows, particularly among the Christian Gawda community in Goa, discriminatory practices continue to mark the final rites,

subtly yet powerfully reinforcing the marginalization that follows a woman through widowhood—even in death.

Primary data revealed that widows are given comparatively simpler funerals than their married or unmarried counterparts. One notable feature is the clothing in which the deceased widow is dressed. Traditionally, she is not adorned in white or ceremonial attire, but instead clothed in plain, subdued colours such as black or navy blue, locally referred to as *Azul*. This colour choice symbolizes mourning and solemnity, but in the case of a widow, it also reflects her perceived social invisibility and diminished status.

Furthermore, rituals that are considered expressions of honour and affection—such as offering wreaths and floral tributes—are often withheld from the widow. The rationale behind this practice is rooted in the belief that a widow's life, having ended without a husband, is somehow less worthy of celebration or remembrance. While such customs are not universally practiced today, they still persist in pockets of the community, especially in rural or more conservative areas.

These practices serve as a final act of exclusion, where even in death, the widow is not granted the full dignity of community rituals. Her funeral becomes a symbol of her social isolation, reflecting a lifetime of being treated as an outsider after the loss of her spouse. Although some of these customs are slowly changing—particularly with younger generations and under the influence of the Church, which does not endorse any discrimination in funeral rites—the deep-seated cultural attitudes still linger. These practices point to a larger issue where widowhood is not just a personal loss, but a socially constructed identity marked by deprivation, silence, and symbolic erasure.

Mitras(1947) analysis of mourning customs in Bengal, reflects the changing dynamics between traditional cultural norms and modern lifestyles. The traditional mores surrounding mourning customs, while deeply ingrained in Bengali culture, can often become a source of personal inconvenience and emotional strain for individuals in contemporary Bengal. This is due to the evolving mode of daily life, which may lead to conflicts between traditional practices and personal beliefs. The insights provided by Sumner and Keller in 1927 further support this analysis. They noted that many traditional practices are survivals from a "remote stage" and may not align with present interpretations or societal norms. This discrepancy can lead to a sense of dissonance or ambiguity in how individuals approach mourning customs in contemporary Bengal.

Mourning customs, by their nature, often carry a negative connotation as they are associated with loss and grief. The bereaved may experience mixed or ambivalent emotions during this period, which can manifest in behaviours that may not accurately express their true feelings. For example, traditional practices like bodily adornment, which are usually the direct opposite of normal day-to-day practices, may feel incongruent or forced for some individuals.

Just as Mitras observed conflicting behaviours in mourning customs in Bengal, this study similarly reveals a diverse spectrum of responses among widows navigating their grief. Mitras' research highlighted how traditional mourning customs in Bengal often elicited varying reactions among individuals, revealing the tension between cultural expectations and personal experiences. For some, adherence to traditional practices, such as specific attire or designated mourning periods, was seen as a crucial aspect of honouring the deceased and fulfilling cultural obligations. These widows maintained strict adherence to customs, even when these practices caused emotional distress or practical difficulties. Conversely, Mitras also identified cases where traditional mourning customs were perceived as conflicting with modern values or personal beliefs. In such instances, individuals questioned the relevance of certain practices and sought to adapt or modify them to better align with their contemporary lifestyles and personal convictions. This might involve altering traditional rituals to make them more compatible with modern sensibilities or replacing them with alternative forms of mourning that offer greater emotional support and personal resonance.

The study's findings echo Mitras' observations, illustrating that mourning customs are not monolithic but are subject to personal interpretation and adaptation. Just as in Bengal, where the interplay between tradition and individual response created a mosaic of mourning practices, this study underscores the complexity of how widows manage their grief in the face of entrenched cultural norms. The diverse responses observed in this study reflect a broader pattern of negotiation between preserving cultural heritage and accommodating personal and societal changes. In applying these insights, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of how the respondents of this study navigate mourning customs and rituals in the context of changing societal dynamics, cultural norms, and personal beliefs. This can inform discussions on the relevance, adaptation, or evolution of traditional practices in supporting widows' grieving processes in contemporary society.

The following chapter titled *Widowed Young: Issues and Concerns* will delve into the various approaches and strategies that young widows adopt to navigate the complexities of widowhood within their specific cultural and religious context. This chapter will examine how these women, often confronting both emotional and societal challenges, employ different coping mechanisms to reconstruct their lives after the loss of their spouses. Key areas of focus will include the impact of religious teachings and community expectations on their grieving process, and how these widows balance personal grief with societal roles. The chapter will also explore practical strategies such as seeking support from religious or community groups, engaging in rituals and traditions that offer solace, and pursuing personal empowerment through education or employment. Additionally, it will address the broader social and cultural pressures these widows face, such as dealing with stigma and maintaining their social status within the Roman Catholic community. By highlighting the diverse strategies and resilience of these young widows, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and the ways in which they navigate the intersection of grief, identity, and community expectations.

CHAPTER V

WIDOWED YOUNG: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Widowhood is a significant social reality that affects millions of women worldwide, with a particularly high prevalence in South Asia. In India alone, the number of widows has been recorded at 33 million, accounting for 10% of the female population—far exceeding the 3% of men who experience widowhood (Chen, 2000). This number continues to rise due to factors such as HIV/AIDS, civil conflicts, and other socio-economic challenges.

Given this magnitude and proportion of widows, this chapter, seeks to explore the specific issues and concerns that shape their lived experiences. The data presented in this chapter is derived from fieldwork conducted through an interview schedule, providing empirical accounts of how young widows cope with their spouse's death and rebuild their lives in the face of multiple adversities.

The problems of widows especially young widows are not only immense but also unique. Widowhood is also different from other marital statuses like never married, divorced, or separated. It is an unchosen situation. In this study, the respondents shared their reactions to becoming a widow due to the untimely loss of their spouse, their experiences as single parents, the issues and concerns related to different aspects of their new status, and also in raising dependent children.

They are classified under different heads such as the Psychological and Emotional Impact of widowhood, Physical and Sexual health Concerns, Social and Relationship Challenges, Parenting Bereaved children, the burden of Compounded and Secondary losses

5.1 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF WIDOWHOOD

The psychological and emotional impact of widowhood is profound, affecting widows in multiple ways. The loss of a spouse brings intense grief, requiring significant emotional and lifestyle adjustments. Research suggests that widowed individuals experience higher rates of mental health issues compared to their married counterparts, with widows reporting more severe symptoms of traumatic grief, depression, and anxiety than widowers. Many widows go through a range of emotional reactions,

including confusion, shock, fear, uncertainty, numbness, and low self-esteem. Feelings of intense loneliness, despair, and helplessness are also common, often accompanied by prolonged sadness, frequent crying spells, sleep disturbances, and changes in appetite. Some widows even report a loss of taste and smell, with overwhelming anxiety about the future affecting their ability to sleep and eat properly. These physical manifestations of grief reflect the deep psychological stress associated with widowhood.

Cognitive difficulties, such as impaired concentration and memory, are also frequently reported, making it challenging for widows to carry out daily tasks or make decisions. Additionally, many experience feelings of guilt or self-blame, believing they could have done something to prevent their spouse's death. Guilt may also arise during significant life events, such as anniversaries or their children's milestones, when the absence of their spouse feels particularly painful. Widows often struggle to find joy in celebrations, experiencing life as a process of survival rather than fulfilment. Social and cultural expectations further complicate the emotional burden of widowhood. Many widows feel pressured to conform to prescribed mourning behaviours and may judge themselves harshly if they fail to meet these expectations. For instance, some have been criticized for wearing clothing perceived as inappropriate for mourning, such as sleeveless blouses or colourful attire, leading them to become more self-conscious and withdrawn. In some cases, financial limitations prevent widows from adhering to traditional mourning customs, yet they still face judgment from society. The fear of being perceived as moving on too soon can also contribute to prolonged self-blame, as widows may feel guilty for experiencing moments of happiness. These social pressures and internal conflicts add to the already overwhelming emotional challenges of widowhood.

5.1.1 Shock and Disbelief

This was one of the first reaction experienced by most widows which occurs upon learning of the spouse's death. The most common and difficult emotional reaction was initial shock. Some were left completely numb after hearing about the death of the husband. The widows in this study described the incidence of death and grief, especially in the case of sudden death, as a roller coaster experience. This contrasts with the experience of death due to a long-term illness of their spouse wherein, they were slowly

preparing for the perceived loss. Some were able to express their feelings, while others feel numb.

As in the case of a respondent who experienced deep shock as her husband committed suicide, she also suffers from flashbacks of the two nights before he went missing to finally find his dead body in an abandoned well. Some others described the initial days wherein they felt themselves as a robot. They went about doing all their household routines and were not able to process the loss and its impact. They described how at this time they received support from in-laws, their parents especially the mother. In the case of four respondents their mother came to stay over with them for a month. This helped them greatly. In the initial days or few weeks, the neighbours and friends helped with household tasks, some helped in running errands or help came in the form of dropping children to school.

5.1.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a common psychological response to stressful life events, including spousal bereavement. The unexpected loss of a partner can disrupt the expected course of life, leading to high levels of anxiety, nervousness, worry, and uneasiness, as well as a different type of stress not normally associated or expected during this stage of life. This is particularly true for young women, who may be at a stage in their lives where they are starting their families and may not have anticipated or prepared for the generative role of a widow or widower. The fear of not being able to provide basic needs for their children, of providing love and affection, and emotional security is a reflection of the societal expectations placed on mothers to be the primary caregivers and emotional anchors for their children. This can create additional pressures and anxieties for women who have lost their partners.

In addition to the social expectations placed on women, spousal bereavement can also lead to a sense of abandonment and social isolation. Living alone with their children can further exacerbate this feeling, leading to sleepless nights, restlessness, and a sense of being overwhelmed. The phrase "*Mhoji sokot pavona hea bhurgeak vaddounk ani samballunk*" reflects the sense that the women's sole energy and mental strength is not sufficient to protect their children, highlighting the importance of social support in coping with spousal bereavement.

From a sociological perspective, anxiety and other psychological responses to spousal bereavement are not only individual experiences but also social ones, shaped

by cultural beliefs, norms, and expectations. Understanding the social and cultural factors that contribute to anxiety and other psychological responses to spousal bereavement can help inform interventions and support systems for those who are struggling with this challenging life event.

Overall, the experience of spousal bereavement can be a significant source of anxiety and stress, particularly for young women who are not yet prepared for the generative role of a widow or widower. This experience is shaped by social and cultural expectations, as well as the individual experiences of loss and grief. By understanding the social and cultural factors that contribute to anxiety and other psychological responses to spousal bereavement, we can better support those who are struggling with this challenging life event.

5.1.3 Anger

This is another significant issue faced by respondents. The loss of a spouse and the fear of future losses can lead to various emotional reactions, including anger outbursts, as illustrated by the following examples. One widow described her inability to manage her teenage son. Any misbehaviour from him would trigger a hyper-reactive response. For instance, she recalled a moment when, over a trivial matter, she flung her mobile phone at him. In that instant, she neither considered nor cared about the consequences. She felt overwhelmed by anger and a sense of incapacity. She experienced a profound sense of abandonment by her husband in the responsibility of child-rearing. This episode was later followed by feelings of guilt and shame, as her children became unintended victims of her sudden anger outbursts.

In a similar incident, another widow described how she would threaten her children, saying she would desert them and disappear. One day, feeling overwhelmed by her solitude, she left home. After wandering through the market, buying some things for herself, and spending time at a church, she felt somewhat relieved. However, by twilight, she became restless and anxious, rushing back home to find her two minor children with her ailing mother-in-law. This incident underscores the magnitude of the emotional turmoil these women endure. The episode left her feeling sad and guilty upon seeing her children with the elderly mother-in-law. This narrative highlights the intense emotional pain and the complex dynamics of anger and guilt experienced by these women.

Most respondents agreed that the initial years post loss were extremely tough and threatening physically, emotionally, and socially . They experienced anger due to the restriction on their social mobility and social activities. Some could not attend weddings, parties till the end of one year. There were restrictions on their clothing and accessories. Those interviewed after few years of widowhood were trying to cope while new widows feel overwhelmed by the grief, and found it difficult or impossible to resume normal life activities.

5.1.4 Depression

Young widowhood, especially during pivotal life transitions such as pregnancy, can have devastating psychological effects. Research has shown that young widows often experience more intense grief reactions, higher rates of depression, and lower morale than their older counterparts (Blanchard & Becker, 1976; Zisook & Schuchter, 1991, cited in Niemeyer, 2006; Morgan, 1976). The emotional toll is amplified when the loss coincides with expectations of shared parenthood and future-building. One respondent in the study lost her husband while she was pregnant with their first child. The shock and disbelief were so overwhelming that even months after the event, she found herself emotionally paralysed, unable to accept the reality of her loss.

Her grief manifested not only as sadness but as clinical depression that required medical attention. She began experiencing panic attacks, insomnia, loss of appetite, and feelings of emptiness that affected her ability to function. As a result, she had to seek professional counselling and was prescribed medication to cope with her mental health challenges. The dual role of grieving widow and expectant mother became unbearable at times, creating a conflicting emotional space where joy and sorrow coexisted painfully. She often expressed feeling guilty about being unable to fully embrace motherhood while still mourning her husband.

Her story highlights the compounded vulnerability of young widows who are thrust into single parenthood while still reeling from profound emotional trauma. The lack of emotional and social support often deepens their sense of isolation, making recovery an uphill battle. This case illustrates that young widows are not only mourning a life lost but also a future that will never be.

5.1.5 Loss of Interest in Food and Other Activities

Widows frequently reported a loss of interest in food. This signals a potential manifestation of depression and diminished pleasure in once-enjoyable activities. This psychological aspect highlights the intricate interplay between emotional well-being and dietary choices. From a sociological perspective, eating habits are not just individual behaviours but are also shaped by social norms, expectations, and cultural beliefs. The loss of a spouse can disrupt the social norms and expectations related to food and mealtimes, particularly in cultures where meals are viewed as a shared and social activity. The experience of spousal bereavement can have a significant impact on various aspects of life, including eating habits.

This study conducted among widows revealed that changes in eating habits were among the most commonly reported changes following the loss of a spouse. Respondents reported changes not only in their eating patterns but also in their general activity levels and sleeping habits. For many respondents, mealtimes lost their cultural significance as they no longer held the same social bonding and sharing experiences without their spouse. This reflects the societal belief that meals extend beyond nourishment and serve as a cornerstone for interpersonal connections and cultural identity. For many respondents, mealtimes no longer felt the same without their spouse, and the joy of sharing food was gone. This reflects the cultural belief that meals are not just about sustenance but are also about social bonding and sharing. They also lost interest in celebrating occasions.

In addition to the social and cultural factors, changes in eating habits can also be a reflection of the individual's psychological state. Respondents reported losing their zest for food, which could be an indication of depression and loss of interest in pleasurable activities. Some also reported overspending and excessive eating as a form of escape from the stressful situation, which could be a coping mechanism for dealing with grief. This coping mechanism provides insight into the complex relationship between emotional distress and dietary behaviours.

5.1.6 Sleep patterns and other Disturbances

The sudden loss of a spouse can lead to significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of the remaining partner, including the role of a parent. This can have a significant impact on the sleep patterns of widows, as observed in this study. From a

sociological perspective, sleep patterns are not just individual behaviours but are also shaped by social norms, expectations, and cultural beliefs.

The experience of spousal bereavement can disrupt these social norms and expectations related to sleep. Widows struggle to maintain regular sleep patterns due to the emotional turmoil caused by the loss of their spouse. This can lead to a range of sleep disorders, including hypersomnia and insomnia, as observed in this study. The respondents when asked about their sleep patterns said that 'it is no longer the same, and life completely changed'. When asked about their sleep patterns, respondents said that "it is no longer the same, and life has completely changed." They described various changes in sleeping arrangements before and after his demise. For instance, some widows reported the couple sharing the same bed with their children, while one respondent mentioned having a separate bed for her two children in the same room.

The death of a spouse significantly altered these sleeping arrangements, adversely affecting their sleep quality. For most respondents, bedtime had previously been a time to unwind and reflect on the day. However, there were exceptions. One respondent, whose husband suffered from alcohol abuse, mentioned that "the night and day did not matter," yet she held onto hope for a better future. Another participant fondly recalled how her husband would cuddle her to sleep regardless of the day's challenges, describing it as "the most beautiful memory." Now, she finds it difficult to adjust to sleeping alone. Her grown-up children occupy separate rooms and refuse to share her bedroom, citing reasons related to schoolwork, which adds to her sense of loneliness and emotional pain.

5.2 PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL HEALTH CONCERNS

5.2.1 Impact on Physical Health

Another aspect of widowhood issues was physical health. Several authors have linked young widowhood with both physical and psychological health problems following bereavement (Blanchard et al., 1976; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Pearlin, 1982; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). The physical health of widows can be significantly affected by their bereavement. This study shows that widows often experience increased physical health problems following the loss of their spouse. The most common health issue was hypertension, which are often exacerbated by the stress and emotional toll

of grief. The respondents also suffer from sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, and a weakened immune system, fatigue, panic attacks making them more nervous and anxious about their health.

They complain of a lack of motivation and energy that often accompanies the grief. This can result in other related health problems. Some widows neglect their own health needs due to overwhelming emotional pain and a sense of hopelessness and challenge of rearing their children.

5.2.2 Physical longing and Unmet Needs

Marriage is a union of two people physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Physical intimacy is an essential part of marriage whether it is for procreation or companionship. This bonding between the couple provides a base for the continuity and satisfaction of married life. Unfortunately, the death of a spouse puts an abrupt end to this intimate gratification, sometimes till death of the widow herself especially in the Indian society. There is a nagging need that plagues many men and women who outlive their sexual partners. Dr. Radosh, a neuropsychologist calls it "sexual bereavement," which she defines as grief associated with losing sexual intimacy with a long-term partner. The result, of this loss, is "disenfranchised grief, a grief that is not openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned and publicly shared."

While the question on how do you cope with the absence of physical intimacy was posed to the respondents 90% were shy to answer it. The most common response was prayer and God as ways to deal with the physical absence of man. Prayer and other forms of devotion and worship help them to accept this as God's plan and they will be taken care by some spiritual being. Some said that the memories and recollection of happy days helped to cope. Some others said children are his "gift "and loving them is as good as fulfilling the role of loving your husband.

Discussing sexual intimacy during widowhood is often viewed as a betrayal of one's late husband. In Indian society, the bond between husband and wife is considered sacred, making even the thought of such matters in the husband's absence seem sinful. "It's a grief that no one talks about," one participant in this study remarked. She also added, "But if you can't overcome it, it can damage your physical and emotional health, leaving you unprepared for another relationship, should the opportunity arise."

Unfortunately, in our society, physical intimacy, dating, and sex outside of marriage hold little to no place in the life of a widow.

A respondent's response to a question; why they never think or discuss sexual intimacy with friends, family, or even professionals is interesting. They say "it's like cheating on your husband and there is a feeling of guilt when you think about such thoughts with someone else". They think, 'How it can be thought of ?' By doing that they think they are casting aspersion on the love of the lost partner. This feeling of being faithful to one's spouse is deeply ingrained during the process of socialisation, so much so to cite an example, a young girl lost her boyfriend in an accident, till today (after 12 years of this incident) she has remained unmarried and yet she finds fulfilment in the thought that she is devoted to him and has remained loyal to his love.

A few younger respondents confided that had male friends such as schoolmates, relatives, college mates, colleagues and husbands' friends who provide support and male companionship and help with masculine roles and tasks. They also meet new people on social media like Facebook and Instagram which helps to have male friendship and company though it does not compensate for the loss of their spouse.

Another lamented that losing a spouse was a painful realization that the person who would ease your sorrow is no longer present and this recognition becomes a turning point for her to rely on herself and other sources of support. The longing for the touch of a man is not the same as your family hugging you. Being human, the absence of spousal intimacy leaves a huge void in one's life. The absence of physical intimacy following the death of a spouse creates a profound void in the lives of those who experience it, particularly in the context of Indian society where marriage is regarded as a holistic union encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual facets. This loss of intimacy, often referred to as "sexual bereavement," constitutes a form of disenfranchised grief, a grief that remains largely unspoken and unrecognized by society.

In this context, respondents revealed a range of coping mechanisms employed to deal with the absence of physical intimacy. Many turned to spirituality and prayer, viewing their situation as part of a divine plan. This spiritual approach helped them find solace in the belief that they would be taken care of by a higher power. Memories of

happier times with their spouse also played a pivotal role in coping and serving as a source of comfort and emotional support.

A prevailing sentiment among the respondents was the notion that children were a gift and loving them filled the void left by the absence of spousal intimacy. In a society where the relationship between husband and wife is considered sacred, this perspective reflects a deep-seated cultural belief in the sanctity of motherhood and family bonds. However, the issue of sexual intimacy during widowhood remains largely a taboo and stigmatized topic in Indian society. The cultural and social norms around fidelity to one's spouse, even after their passing, weigh heavily on the minds of widows. The fear of being perceived as unfaithful or disloyal to their deceased partner often deters individuals from discussing their needs and desires for physical intimacy with friends, family, or professionals.

This enduring fidelity to the memory of the deceased spouse is a testament to the power of socialization in shaping individual beliefs and behaviours. The example of a young woman who remains unmarried for over a decade as a gesture of devotion to her late boyfriend illustrates the deep-seated nature of this fidelity, which can transcend the bounds of marriage. In some cases, younger respondents have sought male companionship and support from sources such as schoolmates, relatives, and colleagues. They find solace in the camaraderie and assistance provided by these individuals, even if it does not fully compensate for the loss of their spouse. The need for companionship and the longing for the touch of a partner highlight the fundamental human desire for connection and intimacy.

To sum up, the absence of spousal intimacy following the death of a spouse is a deeply felt void that transcends physicality. It impacts emotional well-being, social interactions, and the individual's sense of self. Within the cultural context of India, where fidelity and devotion to one's spouse are deeply ingrained, navigating the complexities of widowhood and the longing for physical intimacy is a multifaceted and deeply personal journey. Understanding the sociological nuances of this experience is crucial for offering support and empathy to those who grapple with the challenges of sexual bereavement.

5.2.3 Sexualised Violence and Exploitation

Another issue that young widows are vulnerable to is sexual forms of violence also called Sexualized violence which includes a wide range of unacceptable behaviours. *It refers to any non-consensual, unwanted, actual, attempted, or threatened act or behaviour that is carried out through sexual means or by targeting a person's sex, sexual identity, or gender identity or expression.* Sexualized violence can take many forms and may or may not involve direct physical contact. This means that sexualized violence can occur verbally, physically, or online.

In addition, sexualized violence may also include unwanted sexualized attention received in person or via text, phone, email as well as chat, social media, and dating apps, among other mediums. This kind of unwanted sexualized attention may include behaviour that includes:

- catcalls
- sexist remarks or jokes
- leering
- persistent and/or aggressive enticements
- sending unwanted and unsolicited images or videos
- voyeurism

In response to the question, "*How does society see you now? Has your status changed?*", many widows expressed that their status had not improved. They reported experiencing low self-esteem, a loss of confidence, and a diminished sense of empowerment. The protection and security they once had while their husbands were alive shielded them from unwanted advances. In widowhood, however, they often feel vulnerable and threatened, even by close male relatives such as their father-in-law, brother-in-law, neighbours, colleagues, and even the godfather of their child. Some of the respondents revealed that they felt sexually insecure or conscious in their own homes. One respondent mentioned that her father-in-law takes responsibility for her and her child, but she said that it 'comes with a price', indirectly hinting at his behaviour .

Another respondent felt completely unsafe every time her son's godfather came by to see them. She says though he takes time out to visit them often and brings goodies and gifts for children she feels insecure. She senses his intentions, his lecherous looks, and

chances he takes to touch/ hug her in inappropriate ways on birthdays and festivals. Yet she has to tolerate such behaviour as it is done in such a subtle manner and under the guise of being a nice and caring person.

Yet another Through careful analysis of the respondents' narratives, the researcher was able to uncover the subtle yet distressing forms of harassment and power dynamics that some widows face within their immediate social environment. One respondent revealed the oppressive behavior of her married brother-in-law, who sought to control her mobility and autonomy. He not only issued threats to her children—warning of being thrown out of the family home—but also made inappropriate and sexually suggestive gestures. Although the respondent did not express overt resistance, her responses reflected a deep sense of fear, entrapment, and powerlessness within the extended family system. The researcher interpreted this silence and restraint as a coping mechanism shaped by her vulnerable socio-economic position and the need to maintain a fragile form of security for herself and her children.

In another case, a widow described the disturbing behavior of her married neighbour, who regularly sent her lewd messages and inappropriate videos. While her words appeared calm and tactful, her descriptions pointed to a constant sense of discomfort and moral distress. The respondent handled the situation with extreme caution, not out of acceptance, but due to the fear of losing whatever limited emotional and financial support she received from her in-laws. There was also a palpable fear of being misjudged by the community, which often holds widows to strict moral standards. The researcher derived that these experiences reflect the precarious position widows often occupy, where asserting boundaries can lead to social alienation or further victimization. Such responses reveal the layered vulnerabilities of widowhood, where women must navigate threats to both their physical safety and social dignity while maintaining a sense of composure and conformity to gendered expectations.

5.2.4 'Exchange sex' or 'Survival sex'

This often arises in the wake of the sudden and unexpected death of a spouse, placing widows in a situation they did not choose. This situation becomes even more precarious when the widow lacks financial resources. In such circumstances, the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter become uncertain. Devoid of financial means

or viable employment opportunities, many widows find themselves compelled to use their bodies as their only remaining asset. Survival sex, thus, refers to the act of exchanging one's body for essential subsistence needs, such as food, clothing, and sometimes additional allowances. This phenomenon is a sociological manifestation of lives dictated by profound social and economic disenfranchisement. Survival sex becomes an integral part of an almost imperceptible world where the human body is reduced to the primary currency for survival.

The phenomena of 'exchange sex' presents a complex and troubling aspect of widowhood, particularly among those who are economically and emotionally vulnerable. Widows who find themselves in dire financial straits and emotional turmoil may fall prey to the manipulative tactics of wealthy men, including married men, who exploit their vulnerable circumstances. These men often present themselves as benefactors, offering the widow material support and the promise of a more secure and comfortable life, especially for her children, in exchange for sexual favours. This dynamic can be understood within a broader sociological framework as a form of transactional relationship where power imbalances are starkly evident. The widow, deprived of financial resources and emotional support, is lured into these arrangements with the hope of securing basic necessities or improving her living conditions. However, these relationships are typically short-term and lack genuine emotional connection, often leaving the widow feeling more confused and emotionally drained than before.

In the primary data collected for this study, a few respondents acknowledged that they had entered into certain relationships out of sheer necessity. These women shared those financial constraints and the urgent need to provide for their children left them with limited options, compelling them to engage in transactional or emotionally one-sided relationships. As the interviews progressed, the researcher observed not only a sense of compulsion in their narratives but also underlying feelings of regret and emotional discomfort. Their tone, choice of words, and reflective pauses suggested that these relationships were not pursued willingly, but were rather a response to survival pressures. In the context of identity reconstruction, 'exchange sex' complicates the widow's journey toward reclaiming her autonomy and sense of self. These relationships not only reinforce her economic dependency but also undermine her self-worth, as her body becomes commodified in the exchange. The transactional nature of these

interactions further distorts her identity, shifting it from that of a grieving widow seeking stability to a commodified individual whose worth is measured by the material goods she can secure in return for sexual compliance. This situation can also exacerbate the widow's emotional and psychological struggles. The constant manipulation and lack of genuine care in these relationships can lead to a deepened sense of isolation and self-doubt. Moreover, the temporary nature of these exchanges prevents the widow from forming meaningful connections, which are crucial for her emotional healing and the reconstruction of her identity.

Sociologically, 'exchange sex' underscores the intersection of gender, economic vulnerability, and power. It reveals how widowhood, particularly when compounded by financial hardship, can lead to exploitative situations that further marginalize women. This dynamic also highlights the critical need for support systems that can provide widows with the financial and emotional resources they need to avoid such predatory relationships and to empower them in their journey towards identity reconstruction.

5.3 SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

5.3.1 Loneliness and Isolation

Though the problems each widow experiences varies, there seems to be one common difficulty among them -- that of loneliness. Loneliness covers a broad range of different experiences. It was found that widows were lonely for their husbands as an object of love, the person making them an object of love, a partner or companion in activities, an escort in couple-companionate relationships, someone with whom to talk, a partner in a division of labour within the home or tying her to the economic and social world, someone around whom work and time are organized and someone around the house.

The most lonely and frustrated widows seemed to be the ones who expected someone to take over the relational or task duties previously performed by the husband, and who are without much help. The least frustrated widows appeared to be those who had some sort of social network available to them or relationships developed since the

husband's death. The availability of a social network seemed to allow the widow to redistribute some of the rights, duties and sentiments previously focused on the husband and/or served as more than substitutes for their past life styles.

Balkwell (1981) describes loneliness as a developmental task many widows will face as they navigate through their grief. Studies show that loneliness was more among the widowed than among those who have never married. This was true among all the respondents. They experience those moments, when they wake up in the morning and realise the loss of their husband. He is not going to come back to her or the children. There is also deep sadness about his absence in the home which in many cases, they build together with a lot of sweat, money, and sometimes tears.

There is also a loss of physical security that results from being alone at night or traveling alone. Because your spouse or partner was such a major part of your daily life, their loss is usually felt more immediately and for a longer length of time. Regardless of the tenure of one's marriage or relationship, this is the person one made long-term plans and chose to spend their life with.

The respondents shared a range of reflections on what they missed most about their husbands. Some expressed missing everything about their spouse, while others specifically longed for his intellect or charm. For some, it was his humour or unique qualities like kindness or strength that left a deep void. Others missed the intimacy and the everyday routines they shared as a couple. Widowhood, for many, was described as an intensely isolating experience. The depth of their loss led some to prefer isolation, even when others did not exclude them. They chose solitude, finding it more fulfilling than socializing or going out. A sense of diminished self-worth often accompanied this preference for isolation, as they felt that no one could replace the connection they had with their spouse. None of their friendships provided the same sense of closeness or fulfilment they once experienced with their partner.

5.3.2 Loss of couple friends and Social Circles

For many participants, relationships with couple friends shifted significantly, leaving them feeling out of place and disconnected, as if they no longer shared common ground with their married friends. Witnessing coupling behaviour and going home alone, while their friends went home together was also distressing and proved to be a stark reminder of their loss. They expressed that socialising after the loss of the spouse

is never the same. It brings some awkwardness. Their friends still invite them but the same enthusiasm of going out as a couple or as an individual is no longer the same. They find it more peaceful to be by themselves or alone in their homes. They felt uncomfortable to go out without male escorts. Some felt that going out to dinner, going to wedding receptions and Christmas parties, taking a vacation were reserved for their spouse or partner. Non-participation in any merriment, was labelled as 'being arrogant' and 'proud' or 'self-imposed fetters by relatives, neighbours, and colleagues'. Thus, failing to recognise the depth and intensity of her loss.

5.3.3 Relationship with In-laws

Another aspect of widowhood is maintaining a relationship with in-laws and sometimes one's parents. In this study, 24 percent of the respondents lived with their in-laws. When asked about the quality of their relationship with the in-laws, 80 percent said not satisfactory, 16 percent said satisfactory and two respondents said they had very good relationships with the in-laws even after the loss of their son. In some cases, in-laws blamed the widow for the death of their son. One respondent narrated her experience regarding finances. Her in-laws withdrew money from an account designated in their son's name: money that would have at least partially been allocated to the widow had a court been involved. She did not pursue any legal action, as this would not give her much time for her job and her two minor children at that time. It was found that most of the respondents felt their relationship with their in-laws as the most challenging aspect of their loss experience and still each appeared to be struggling to reconcile the negative feelings regarding their in-laws. One expressed a great deal of anger with her in-laws, part disbelief that they would behave so poorly, but she was also hurt and felt rejected by them. It represented another loss and was difficult to reconcile.

There was another instance wherein the widow had to face financial crisis. The widow's husband had taken a loan of Rs. 2060000, which her in-laws were not aware. Upon his sudden death, this particular widow had to reveal it to them hoping for support and compassion. Instead, she was blamed for keeping this a secret and was told they would not have allowed it to pile up. She was told to seek monetary help from her maternal family as this issue was also concerning their daughter. They also took back a part of the business which was given to her husband and gave it to their married daughter who was not so financially needy as much as her. She laments as she shares

about her poor mental condition at that time with two children aged 3 years and 7 years respectively. She too did not seek legal action but confided in family, friends and even sought counselling. She managed to close the loans after nine years by selling her husband's assets, and a death insurance. Though she is free from loans, she feels sad about this behaviour of her in-laws and still continues to live with them as she cannot afford a separate dwelling for herself and her children and neither does, she has strong support from her parent and siblings to bring her out of this situation.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, some participants enjoyed a closer relationship with their in-laws and perceived them to be a great support in addition to being a connection to their husbands. One respondent describes in the following words the comfort she feels maintaining a relationship: “The most helpful thing for me has been staying in touch with his side of the family, she felt most comfortable to talk to them about her husband and about the situation surrounding his death.

Another respondent feels similarly regarding her in-laws and feels particularly close with her mother-in-law. To explain in her words "I became very close with his mother. What we share in common is that we do not get tired of the same stories . And that has been an unbelievable blessing. We all feel the same way, a family is a family. I did not cease being family when my husband died but became more integrated into their family than ever before”.

Some participants expressed that their relationships with their in-laws had strengthened and they relied on their in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law, for emotional support. Still for others relationships with in-laws were more ambiguous. They found themselves maintaining distant connections. while they did not rely on their in-laws for support, they did not feel as if their in-laws challenged them as in the earlier examples.

5.3.4 Relationships with parents

One respondent experienced mixed emotions towards her mother. On one hand, she acknowledges her mother's love and support. On the other hand, she felt frustrated by her mother's protective behaviour. After the respondent became widowed, her mother started treating her similarly to when she was a child. This regression can be seen as a mother's instinct to nurture and protect her child, especially in times of perceived vulnerability. The respondent felt that her status as an independent adult was diminished after her husband's death. As a married person, she was seen as a capable

adult. However, becoming a widow seems to have altered her mother's perception, leading her to believe that her daughter now needs more care and protection. The respondent recognizes that her mother's actions stem from a desire to protect and make life better for her. This insight helps mitigate some of the frustration, as she understands the reasoning behind her mother's behaviour. She goes on to say “Despite the conflicts and frustrations, the mother remains a crucial source of support”. This duality of conflict and support reflects the complex nature of familial relationships in the context of loss and grief.

This dynamic is particularly common among younger widows, who may find that their parents or other family members start to overstep boundaries in their efforts to provide support. While well-intentioned, this shift can blur the lines between assistance and autonomy, creating tension within the family. The reversion of familial roles, where parents, especially mothers, begin to treat their adult children as though they are once again in need of parental care, can be both empowering and problematic. On one hand, the support can be a vital source of strength, offering the widow a safety net during a vulnerable time. On the other hand, it can also lead to conflicts, as the widow strives to assert her independence and redefine her identity in the wake of her loss. This situation underscores the importance of clear communication and the establishment of boundaries to maintain a healthy balance between accepting help and preserving personal autonomy. Navigating this delicate balance requires a nuanced approach, where both the widow and her family must adapt to the changing dynamics of their relationships.

In this study, two of the widows have moved back to their parents' house. After the fourth day of her husband's demise, her brother decided to take her back to the maternal house. It has been 8 months that she and her two sons aged 8 years and 13 years are looked after by their maternal uncle. They feel secure and happy. Another respondent also shifted to her parent's place after widowhood with her two-year-old daughter but later migrated to Dubai for a job and her daughter has also joined her.

5.3.5 Parenting expectations from society

The loss of a spouse is a deeply personal and emotional experience, compelling widows to navigate a complex landscape of grief and adaptation. Widows in this study recounted how they are frequently subjected to unsolicited advice on parenting. They

often receive recommendations to be more understanding and forgiving towards their children, who are also grieving. Although this advice is well-intentioned, it can exacerbate feelings of guilt and inadequacy among widows.

Many widows reported feeling overwhelmed by the dual burden of managing their own grief while also supporting their children's emotional needs. The pressure to maintain a life of normalcy and stability for their children can be immense. One respondent described feeling constantly judged by others, who often fail to understand the depth of her emotional and logistical challenges. She shared, "People tell me to be strong for my children, but sometimes I feel like I am failing them because I am struggling myself."

Additionally, societal expectations often place an unfair burden on widows to seamlessly transition into the role of both parents. This can be particularly challenging when dealing with teenagers or young children who may express their grief through behavioural changes or academic difficulties. Another respondent highlighted the difficulty in finding a balance between providing discipline and showing empathy. She stated, "It's hard to know when to be firm and when to be lenient. Every decision feel like it could either help them or hurt them."

The pressure to adhere to societal norms and the constant influx of unsolicited advice can leave widows feeling isolated and unsupported. One widow recounted an instance where a well-meaning relative blamed the widow for her teenage son failing his Std X exam, suggesting she should be stricter with him. Another respondent narrated how she became the subject of gossip for allegedly neglecting her children because her son appeared very lean and weak. This criticism made her feel guilty while she was already struggling to manage her full-time job.

5.3.6 Social implications of unsolicited advice and comments on young widows

There are several social implications for young widows. Many young widows find that their family, friends, and community members cannot relate to their situation. Interestingly, they are often eager to offer unsolicited advice or suggestions and make comments that come off as intrusive. The comments such as : “you are crying too much” or “too little”. One respondent stated that after a few days following her husband's death she was told by her mother-in-law that “people had noted at the funeral that the

wife was not looking aggrieved and that probably she was seeing someone already” such statements affect them psychologically.

Widows are often advised to maintain amicable relationships with their deceased spouse's family, particularly the mother-in-law, who has also suffered a loss. This advice can inadvertently place additional emotional and social burdens on widows, compromising their emotional well-being.

The social implications stemming from unsolicited advice and intrusive comments directed at young widows unveil a nuanced interplay between societal expectations, emotional well-being, and interpersonal dynamics. In the aftermath of spousal loss, young widows often grapple with a unique set of challenges, where their grief is intersected by misguided attempts at support from family, friends, and community members. Societal norms and ingrained expectations can lead individuals to offer unsolicited advice, which, though well-intentioned, might fail to acknowledge the complexity of the widow's emotional journey. In parallel, intrusive comments like those exemplified, which presuppose the widow's emotional state and personal life choices, perpetuate stigma and undermine the widow's autonomy. These societally mediated interactions have a profound psychological impact on young widows, intensifying their emotional turmoil, instigating feelings of isolation, and potentially hindering their pursuit of effective coping strategies.

From a sociological perspective, these interactions underscore the power dynamics inherent in interpersonal relationships. Symbolic interactionism highlights how individuals engage in interactions based on shared meanings and interpretations. Unsolicited advice and intrusive comments reflect a larger societal narrative that seeks to categorize grief experiences and normalize behaviours. Such attempts to enforce normative responses unintentionally marginalize young widows' unique experiences, resulting in feelings of alienation. Furthermore, the sociology of emotions emphasizes how societal norms regulate the display and management of emotions. Young widows navigating grief are not only contending with their personal emotional processes but are also confronted with external judgments that dictate what emotions are deemed acceptable or appropriate. This emotional policing can perpetuate a cycle of emotional distress and hinder the widow's journey toward healing.

Thus, the social implications of unsolicited advice and intrusive comments on young widows exemplify the intricate interplay between societal norms, emotional experiences, and interpersonal dynamics. Recognizing the importance of sensitive communication, empathetic understanding, and the validation of individual grief journeys is pivotal. By fostering a social environment that respects the autonomy of young widows and acknowledges the diversity of emotional responses, society can contribute to their emotional well-being and facilitate their integration into social networks. This sociological examination highlights the necessity of considering broader societal dynamics when addressing the emotional needs of young widows and underscores the imperative of empathetic communication in supporting their healing process.

5.4 ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL STRUGGLES

Moreover, widows often face financial hardships that further complicate their parenting role. The loss of a spouse can mean a significant reduction in household income, leading to stress over providing for their children's needs. This financial strain can make it difficult for widows to meet both their children's material and emotional needs, compounding their feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

When the death of a spouse comes suddenly and unexpectedly, the surviving partner is often left unprepared. Sossou (2002) is of the view that the effects of widowhood are associated with the economic challenges that include the loss of the breadwinner or co-bread winner. Sometimes it is the loss of primary income and the sole income that the wife counted on to raise kids, pay bills and prepare for retirement years. This creates a loss of financial security resulting in health challenges associated with poor nutrition, inadequate or no shelter, lack of access to health care, and vulnerability to violence and poverty. In context to poverty, one of the respondents had to allow her neighbours to 'adopt' her daughter of 2 years after she lost her husband. In another case, the respondent sent her two boys aged 8 years and 10 years to a boarding school. The expenses of one child were borne by her brother-in-law. By sending the two children at boarding school she could take up a job outside the home. The third son was 14 years and she did not want to change his school as he was in Std IX and being a little older she could depend on him for support.

Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007) indicate how the economic context shapes grieving practices, as many do not have the time to grieve. As a coping mechanism for widows, grief and loss are pushed aside as people try to find meaningful ways of surviving. As one respondent describes her experience " on the ninth day of her husband's death she had to resume work .This was against the customary practice of a widow remaining indoors up to first month after which a mass is offered and prayers are held on the grave. Then the widow and family members are free to resume their normal activities.

5.5 PARENTING BEREAVED CHILDREN

5.5.1 Emotional Needs of Bereaved Children

Understanding and addressing the grief of bereaved children is a fundamental aspect of parenting while widowed. It involves acknowledging their emotions, creating a supportive environment for emotional expression, and, when necessary, seeking professional assistance. This highlights the sociological concept of intergenerational transmission of grief and coping mechanisms within families. Despite these challenges, widows and widowers often display remarkable resilience as they adapt to their new roles as single parents. Their ability to navigate the complexities of grief while providing emotional stability and support for their children underscores the sociological concept of family adaptation in response to significant life changes. In conclusion, parenting bereaved children within the context of widowhood underscores the intricate interplay between individual experiences and broader societal dynamics, highlighting the need for a comprehensive sociological understanding of these challenges.

Researchers have found that younger widows and widowers tended to have worse physical and psychological outcomes than their older counterparts (Ball, 1976), and those outcomes tend to be exaggerated for widowed parents raising dependent children (Maddison & Viola, 1968; Worden & Silverman, 1993).

In this study, 43 percent of the children were between the age group of 6-10, followed by 26 percent of them between 11-15 years at the time of their father's demise. While six percent of the children were between 1-5 years, another six percent had children between 16 to 20 years. It was found that these young widowed mothers feigned strength and stability to care for their children. Widows with dependent children continue in their role as parents while adapting to widowhood. However, bereaved

parents and children have been found to mourn at different rates (Hagan et al., 2011). For children, death and the loss of a parent may be difficult to understand (Bonoti, Leonardi, & Mastora, 2013; Mahon, 1999).

Younger children comprehend neither the abstract nature of death nor the euphemistic descriptions of heaven or an afterlife, while older children may struggle with the permanence of death and the perceived loss of opportunities or plans now that the parent is gone. When explaining death to their children, widows often face the delicate challenge of balancing truth with comfort. The narratives they choose to convey to their children not only reflect their own coping mechanisms but also contribute to the ongoing process of identity reconstruction within the family unit. This process is particularly significant in the context of widowhood, as the mother assumes dual roles in the absence of a spouse.

In dealing with the issue of parenting bereaved children it was found that widows use narratives and metaphors to explain death to their minor children. For instance, in some cases the researcher found that widows tell their children that the deceased has become a "star in the sky" or an "angel in heaven." These metaphors serve as accessible and comforting ways to describe death. A "star in the sky" suggests that the loved one is still present in a visible and permanent way, albeit distant. It provides children with a tangible representation of their loved one that they can look up to and feel connected with, especially during difficult moments. Similarly, describing the deceased as an "angel in heaven" implies that they have taken on a protective and benevolent role, watching over the family. This can be particularly comforting for children, as it suggests that the deceased parent continues to care for and protect them, even in their absence.

These narratives are not just about comforting the child; they also reflect the widow's own coping mechanisms. By framing the deceased in a way that emphasizes ongoing presence and protection, the widow reinforces her own connection to the deceased, helping to sustain a sense of continuity in the family despite the loss. The explanation that the deceased has "gone to heaven," a place where they will be "happy forever," often reflects religious beliefs that promise an afterlife. This narrative serves multiple purposes: it offers hope that the loved one is in a better place, free from pain and suffering, and it provides a sense of closure, suggesting that death is not an end but a transition to a new, more peaceful existence.

From a sociological perspective, these explanations are deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions that help individuals and families cope with loss. For many, the idea of heaven is not just a comforting story but a fundamental belief that provides structure and meaning to life and death. By passing these beliefs on to their children, widows ensure that their family's values and traditions are preserved, even as they navigate the challenges of loss and grief.

5.5.2 Single Parenting Challenges

This presents a variety of dynamically difficult challenges in adaptation to widowhood. The period of early to middle adulthood is a time when married couples commonly start their families. Most parents do not anticipate or prepare for this role as a widow or widower. Parenting while bereaved can have its own set of challenges. Parenting bereaved children within the context of widowhood presents a complex array of sociological challenges. The transition from the role of spouse to single parent, often unexpected and unprepared for, underscores the fluidity of familial roles within society. It highlights how individuals must adapt to new responsibilities and expectations within the family structure. Grief, a central aspect of widowhood, significantly impacts parenting abilities. The emotional turmoil following the loss of a spouse can impede a parent's capacity to provide emotional stability and support for their children. This illustrates the intimate connection between emotional well-being and effective parenting within the family unit.

Financial strain often accompanies the loss of a spouse, resulting from the sudden loss of income. It can also be due to increased costs associated with single parenthood. These financial difficulties underscore broader societal challenges regarding economic support for single-parent households. The absence of a co-parent can also lead to feelings of social isolation, emphasizing the vital role of extended family and community networks in providing assistance and emotional support to bereaved parents and their children. Societal expectations and cultural norms about parenthood can add to the challenges. Widowed parents may feel pressured to conform to traditional family structures that may not align with their individual experiences and needs.

5.6. COMPOUNDED LOSSES IN WIDOWHOOD

Young widows often find that losing their spouse snowballs into losses large and small that spread through their lives, adding to their grief. You are accustomed to someone's continued presence, from a greeting when you come home to having someone to share your daily life with. The little negotiations over who will do this or that...suddenly they are missing. These may seem like minor losses but they add to the grief. Because the spouse was a daily presence, widows now find themselves preoccupied with thoughts and dreams of them at least a few weeks after their death. Some respondents keep re-experiencing the circumstances or events around their partner's death. As one respondent said it was very difficult to unlearn many routine things such as picking up the phone to call him or opening the door for him after his late-night work shifts. Another respondent misses preparing snacks in the morning which her husband would later sell at their bar and restaurant. While these are minor losses, some of the major losses include loss of identity from 'wife' to 'widow' to single again which will be discussed in the following chapters.

5.7 SECONDARY LOSSES IN WIDOWHOOD

5.7.1 Loss of Co-parent

The loss of a co-parent is a significant aspect of the experiences shared by respondents in this study. They describe how routine tasks were once divided between them and their spouse, but now they must handle everything on their own or seek support from others. For instance, attending parent meetings becomes a sole responsibility, and the unique energy and disciplinary style of the absent parent, especially with boys, are deeply missed and irreplaceable. Every aspect of life undergoes a transformation, from the checkboxes on forms where "married" might change to "widowed," to the newfound responsibilities that now fall solely on one person in the household. For example, a widow who used to share carpooling duties with her spouse now has to manage transportation for their children independently. Another example is the absence of the co-parent's input and guidance in decision-making regarding children's education or extracurricular activities, leading to a heavier burden on the surviving parent. A respondent lamented about her inability to register her children in a private school

which was the wish of her spouse. Due to high fees and no financial security, she registered them in a government aided school .

Furthermore, the emotional support and love that the co-parent provided, especially with regard to the unique dynamics between fathers and sons, are profoundly missed. A widow might recall how her husband had a special way of connecting with their sons, providing them with a sense of security and guidance that is now absent. This loss can be particularly challenging during significant life events or milestones, such as graduations or birthdays, where the absence of the co-parent's presence is deeply felt.

5.7.2 Loss of Youth

The loss of youth is a profound and often overlooked consequence of young widowhood, as illustrated by the poignant reflection of a widow who, shortly after the untimely death of her husband, expressed, "I felt like I aged a few decades. I went from a mother of young kids to a widow, the same age in years but decades older in life experience." This statement encapsulates the accelerated transition from youth to an altered state of maturity that many young widows experience, a transformation that is as emotional and psychological as it is physical.

For young widows, the abrupt shift from a life filled with the prospects of growth, family building, and shared aspirations, to one marked by grief, loss, and sudden responsibility, can feel like an overwhelming leap in life experience. The responsibilities of raising children, managing household affairs, and navigating financial challenges alone often impose a rapid and forced maturation that belies their chronological age. In a matter of days or even hours, they find themselves thrust into a role that demands resilience, strength, and an emotional fortitude that is often associated with much older individuals.

This perceived aging is not merely a matter of feeling older; it signifies a loss of the youthful identity that once defined their lives. The vibrant, hopeful person who once imagined a future filled with shared dreams and ambitions is replaced by someone who must now navigate the complexities of life alone. This loss is particularly acute for young widows, as it occurs at a time when they are still in the midst of defining their adult identity and exploring their place in the world.

Moreover, this rapid aging is compounded by the isolation young widows often feel. Their peers may still be engaged in the pursuits of youth—building careers, raising

families, and nurturing romantic relationships—while they are grappling with the weight of widowhood, a burden that sets them apart from those in their age group. This isolation can intensify the sense of having aged prematurely, as they struggle to relate to the life stages of their contemporaries, who may not fully understand the depth of their loss. This loss of youth underscores how widowhood, particularly at a young age, disrupts the natural progression of life stages, forcing individuals into roles and responsibilities that are typically reserved for much later in life. This premature aging has significant implications for how young widows reconstruct their identities. They must reconcile the loss of their youthful self with the new realities of their lives, often seeking ways to integrate their past experiences with their present circumstances in a manner that allows them to move forward.

5.7.3 Loss of Routine

The loss of routine is one of the most profound and disorienting aspects of young widowhood, fundamentally altering the daily lives of those who experience it. For many young widows, the death of a spouse is not just the loss of a life partner but also the abrupt end of simple, everyday activities—such as seeing their husband off to work each morning, preparing lunchbox, handling home maintenance tasks together on the weekends, or enjoying family drives to church on Sundays—suddenly disappear, leaving a void that can feel impossible to fill. These routines, while seemingly mundane, are deeply intertwined with a sense of security and normalcy. They represent the shared life that the couple had built together. When a spouse dies, these routines are shattered, leaving the widow not only grieving the loss of her husband but also the loss of the life they had constructed together. At a stage in life where they are often still establishing their identities, careers, and family dynamics, the sudden absence of these routines can lead to a deep sense of disorientation. The loss of these daily interactions transform what were once comforting rituals into painful reminders of what has been lost.

The impact of losing these routines extends beyond the emotional and psychological. It often forces young widows into new roles and responsibilities, many of which they may not have been prepared for. Tasks that were once shared or managed by their spouse—such as home maintenance, financial management, or driving the family—now fall entirely on their shoulders. This shift not can add to the widow's burden .The absence of these routines can lead to feelings of isolation, as the widow ay

find it difficult to relate to others who continue to live within the security of their own established routines.

5.7.4 Loss of Tradition

The experience of young widows is often marked by the poignant loss of cherished traditions and milestones that once provided structure and joy to their lives. One respondent reflected on the deep loss associated with the end of the annual pilgrimage to Our Lady of Vailankini Church at Madras. For many, these mark the end of meaningful rituals that shaped their familial and social life and can never be replicated. Similarly, for those whose husbands worked abroad they looked forward to their husbands return which was marked by special planning around key family events, such as children's birthdays or the couples wedding anniversary. The husband homecoming was not just a physical reunion but and also included going out, attending parties and functions as a couple.

5.7.5 Loss of Shared Past and Expected Future

The loss of a shared past and an anticipated future is a particularly profound aspect of young widowhood. Some of the respondents reminisced about the time they met through high school, then college, and how they supported each other through exams and social gatherings. One respondent shared how her then-boyfriend now husband, encouraged and supported her for further education, leading her successful completion of studies. Some shared milestones including the joy of pregnancy, the birth of their children, the joyful celebrations of milestones like children's confirmations or family reunions, and the challenges of parenting. Some spoke about facing various health challenges and surgeries, each requiring emotional and practical support from the other. These experiences were not just moments of hardship but also opportunities for deepening their commitment and care for one another. One respondent recounted a poignant memory from their first wedding anniversary when their premature baby needed a blood transfusion. Despite the severity of the situation, her husband managed to bring her a gift, and she had arranged for a friend to get him a gift as well. This shared moment of care and support was a bright spot amidst the crisis. Hence, the sudden loss was too much to bear. Most respondents said they often found solace in prayer and

communal support from their church community. The anticipation of a future together, including dreams of retirement, seeing their children married, becoming grandparents and growing old side by side, was woven into their daily lives. The sudden absence of this partner shatters both the continuity of their shared history and the hopes for future experiences.

5.7.6 Loss of Children's Innocence

The loss of a parent, particularly in the context of widowhood, leads to profound changes not only for the widow but also for the children. Children, especially those who are older, may experience role strain as they are forced to take on new responsibilities that conflict with their developmental stage. For example, one respondent shared that her minor son expressed his desire to take on the financial burden once he finds employment, insisting that she should no longer work but rather rest. Another respondent recounted how, during a bout of fever, her 10-year-old daughter reassured her that she needed to take care of her health since the children were old enough to manage on their own. While these remarks touched the mothers deeply, they also felt a sense of guilt, recognizing the pressure on their children to mature prematurely. This shift can lead to role conflict, where the new responsibilities imposed on the child interfere with their need to engage in age-appropriate activities such as play and socialization.

Additionally, the process of socialization, where children learn and internalize the norms, values, and behaviours appropriate for their age and society, is disrupted. A child's premature exposure to adult roles can lead to unhealthy socialisation process. This can manifest as the child adopting adult-like behaviour too soon, such as becoming overly responsible or emotionally guarded, which can hinder their psychological and social development. The process of resocialization, which involves adapting to new norms and values when one's social environment changes drastically, becomes necessary for children who have lost a parent. These children must negotiate significant changes in family structure and dynamics, requiring them to adapt to new roles, expectations, and the absence of a parent. This process can be emotionally demanding. In some communities, widowhood can carry a stigma that affects not only the widow but also her children. The absence of a father figure might place the children in a vulnerable position. One respondent shared an instance where her teenage son became

the target of ridicule after the neighbours noticed him consuming alcohol. Rather than alerting the mother, the neighbours chose to mock the boy and make derogatory remarks about his deceased father. This provoked the son to confront the neighbour, seeking the support of a friend to defend his reputation in his father's absence. The situation escalated, with the neighbour threatening the boy with accusations of trespassing and warning the widow to control her son to prevent further conflict. This scenario was highly stressful for both the child and the mother, emphasizing the increased burden on single parents to safeguard their children while simultaneously fulfilling dual parental roles. Such experiences can have a profound impact on the child's social identity development.

The loss of a spouse extends beyond the immediate emotional pain; it encompasses the grief over shared dreams and plans that can no longer be realized. For many widows, the death of a husband also signifies the death of a future that was jointly envisioned—a future that included everything from daily routines to long-term aspiration. When a widow expresses that "every spoken and unspoken plan died with him," she is mourning not just the person but the life they had planned together. This grief can manifest in various from daily routines to short term plans to long term dreams. As one respondent said they had aspirations to educate their two children in a Central Board School after they finish elementary school but on account on his death , this particular woman had to educate her children in the local government run school. Another respondent shared how her husband had the dream of constructing a house and how he slogged night and day working on his business but before the house got completed, he died of a heart attack. The realization that these dreams will never be fulfilled can be a profound source of grief, as they represent not just lost opportunities but also the deep connection and shared vision that the couple once had. When a husband dies, these plans are abruptly halted, leaving the widow to navigate these challenges alone. The grief over these losses is complex because it involves not just mourning the past but also the future that will never be. Rebuilding after such a loss often requires the widow to re-envision her life, find new goals, and create a future that, while different from what was originally planned, can still be meaningful and fulfilling.

5.7.7 Loss of his Strength

The loss of a husband's strength—both emotional and physical—is a profound and multifaceted grief that many widows experience. This strength, which once served as a

cornerstone of the marriage and family life, leaves an irreplaceable void when it is gone. Widows often reflect on how their husband's presence contributed to their lives in ways that are now glaringly absent. This kind of support is irreplaceable because it is built on years of shared experiences and mutual trust. Many widows miss having someone who knew them inside and out, who could listen without judgment and offer comfort in times of distress. For example, one widow might recall how her husband always knew when she was worried about something, even before she said a word. He would reassure her with a simple touch or a few kind words, instantly easing her anxiety.

Many widows feel the absence of their husband's unique approach to parenting, whether it was his ability to handle difficult situations with the children, his role as a disciplinarian, or simply the joy he brought to family activities. For example, a widow might now miss how her husband could effortlessly calm their children during a tantrum. Another respondent recalls how her husband would not hesitate to use physical punishment to discipline their son who was seven years old at that time. She reflects on how the same child who once received physical discipline for tantrums is now beyond her control, leaving her feeling helpless and sad. Although she never liked the idea of her husband using physical punishment for lying or throwing tantrums, she now acknowledges that such actions might sometimes be necessary.

A more subtle but equally painful loss is that of shared humour, especially the "inside jokes" that couples build over the years. These jokes are often based on shared experiences or mutual understanding that no one else can fully appreciate. Many widows miss the private language they had with their husband, the jokes that only they understood. One widow reminisces about how her husband could make her laugh with just a single word or look. She recalls how he would sometimes sing to her the lyrics of the song "You Say It Best When You Say Nothing at All," which would initially make her angry but eventually bring laughter. He often did this when he noticed she was overwhelmed and on the verge of tears. This kind of humour was not just a source of joy but a reminder of their deep connection. Another widow shared how her husband would insist that she stop everything and pray before the main altar of the house, something that used to annoy her but that she now misses for the courage it symbolised. In all these examples, the loss of a husband's strengths is not just about missing the individual qualities he brought to the relationship. It's also about the realisation that these strengths were integral to the fabric of their life together, and without them,

everything feels different—less secure, less joyful, and more challenging. The process of mourning these losses is deeply personal and involves not just remembering what was but also finding ways to cope with what is now absent.

5.8 SOCIETAL STIGMA AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD

The quality and availability of social support and intimate attachments also have a bearing on the daily activities of the widow's life. They are the most important moderators of grief symptoms (Fry, 2001; House, Landis, &Umberson, 1988; Levy et al., 1993; Picton et al., 2001; Sttoebe&Abakoumkin, 1999 as cited in Moore, 2003). Social support is positively associated with physical and mental health and can buffer the adverse health impacts of stressful life events and chronic strains (Christakis & Iwashyna, cited in Moore, 2003). If a widow perceives that support is unavailable or unattainable, that perception can have a profound impact on the coping strategy adopted by the widow in question and may contribute to her inability to adjust to her loss (Goodkin et al., 2001; Rando, 1993; Sanders, 1988 cited in Moore, 2003).

The widows in this study described their experiences with regards to the social network of kins and friends and well-wishers. Some found that people disappeared immediately, while others have gradually faded out of their life. Many young widows found that people they expected to offer support do not do so, while people they did not expect to offer support do so. Lost friends and strained family relationships can add a layer of grief, as one mourns the loss of friends they had together or of cherished family traditions that have been impossible to maintain. There are several ways that this can manifest itself, but here are common ways that young widows find they lose family and friends after the death of their spouse:

As one respondent said “Friends see you as a threat to their marriage and avoid inviting you to events where their spouse will be present”. Young widows often find that their friends and family, even the ones who are supportive and stay around fail to understand their grief and are not able to relate to the practical challenges of being a solo parent and sometimes a sole breadwinner.

We noted the peculiar hardships and challenges that young widows experience as they begin to carry on with their lives after the demise of their husbands. Major

generalisation that can be derived from the above discussion is that while for some it is difficult to adjust to life without the husband who was a soul-mate, confidante, and partner, for many it is not only the former but the added difficulty of adjusting to a change in relationships with the in-laws, parents, friends, relatives and even the children. Financial difficulties are the biggest challenge, especially for those whose husbands were the sole breadwinner, the daunting task of taking up a job and providing for the well-being of the family is extremely stressful and takes a toll on the young widow's health and overall functioning. The next chapter will bring in some approaches and strategies adopted by these young widows to negotiate widowhood.

CHAPTER VI

NEGOTIATING WIDOWHOOD THROUGH IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

Death is an inevitable stage of life which one normally expects to occur at the end of one's natural lifespan. However, when the untimely demise occurs, particularly of a husband at a younger than anticipated age, it poses a complex and challenging situation. The premature death has profound implications on his young widow especially on her current identity. This chapter attempts to understand the phenomena of early widowhood and how the identity of the respondents of this study was reconstructed after the spousal death.

In this study two critical aspects are important. One is the timing of death and second is the duration of widowhood. This study focuses on the death of the husband that has occurred at a premature age. When the death occurs at a younger age, along with other challenges, the widow is challenged due to the prolonged period of widowhood, until remarriage. The other aspect is the duration of widowhood. The duration of widowhood, especially for younger widows, is a significant factor influencing their experiences and coping strategies. Younger widows face unique challenges compared to older widows in terms of the timing and duration of widowhood. Research by Lloyd and Smith (2019) highlights that the timing of death, especially when it occurs at a younger-than-expected age, significantly impacts the experience of widowhood. Younger widows often have a longer period of widowhood ahead of them compared to women widowed at an older stage of their life. This comparison stresses on the importance of considering age-related factors in understanding the dynamics of widowhood experiences.

Widowhood is difficult at any age, but young widows and widowers often find themselves in a more complex and complicated situation. The issues related to early widowhood are multifaceted and unique. In Erickson's life span theory (1982), the stage of young adulthood is marked by the development of intimacy versus isolation. During this stage, couples typically engage in various activities together as they build their lives and relationships. As per life span development stages, this is a phase where couples are in the midst of buying or decorating their own house. In one of the interviews the

young widow was interviewed in her house which was under construction. Although, she was living with her in laws, she preferred to answer the interview in the under-construction structure as this meant it was their dream they held together. She preferred a separate place could also be to avoid interference of in-laws and thus seek privacy. She was worrying about completing it and closing the loan they had procured from the bank for the same purpose.

In another instance a socioeconomically disadvantaged widow resided in a single-room dwelling lacking essential amenities such as wall plastering and proper window fixtures (she used an old shutter as a makeshift shade). She said with two dependent children and a modest income of her husband they were hoping to build a small house of their own. She narrated about the constant family discord between her husband and his siblings. So much so, she attributed his excessive alcohol abuse and eventual suicidal death as a consequence of such a tension filled family environment in which they lived jointly. Though she finds solace in her current independent living arrangement, she expressed a sense of fragility and apprehension about sustaining it, thus highlighting the psycho-social impact of her past experiences.

This is also a stage where couples decide to start a family. Many couples decide to have children during this phase, actively participating in the joys and challenges of parenting together. They are involved in building a social circle together, attending gatherings, parties, and events as a couple. They are involved in and nurturing friendships which are important for social connectedness and support. In general, building a life with their spouses. They are also always looking forward for sharing a long life together. There is also a daunting prospect of living another 30, 40, or 50 years with the spouse by your side.

The relationships with the spouses are often a cornerstone of one's own identity. Overtime, the spouse's needs, wants and dreams are intertwined with our own. Many married pairs share couples dreams. They invest a lot of time, energy and finances to achieve their dreams. In the midst of all this losing one's spouse means incurring several other losses. The first and foremost thing the wife loses is the identity as a wife. The widow's identity shifts from coupled identity to single identity. This is followed by the dilemma of living a life where she is in a confused state of mind. Her role as a wife now ceases to exist. The situation is also difficult because young widows between 25 to 45,

years as per the primary data, do not normally have anyone in their existing social circle, who have experienced a similar loss. Thus, they feel alienated from their peers.

This chapter, thus, provides an account of the various dilemmas and apprehensions the new widow encounters in her day-to-day life. The Negotiations employed by these widowed spouses (wife) in her coping and moving ahead in her journey from coupled identity to being single again are studied. Responses revealed that all the young widows were actively engaged in making meaning of their experience. This chapter deals with the themes that emerged from the analysis of primary data and a description of these women's identity and meaning reconstruction process.

The following four principal themes emerged from the analysis of the in-depth interviews with the respondents

1. Loss and Grief : This theme stresses on the profound sense of loss and bereavement experienced by these young widows, encompassing the emotional and psychological dimensions of their grief.

2. Impact on their world view: This theme delves into how the untimely death of their spouses reshaped the world views of these women, altering their perspectives on life, love, and the future.

3. Navigating Relationships: This theme explores the challenges and adaptations in their interpersonal relationships following the loss of their spouses, including family, friends, and potential future relationships.

4. Identity Crisis faced by widows: This theme addresses the transition from their prior identities as wives to their current roles as widows and examines the multifaceted shifts in self-perception and societal roles.

These themes collectively illuminates the intricate process of meaning reconstruction and negotiations undertaken by young widows in the wake of their husbands' premature deaths.

6.1 LOSS AND GRIEF

The theme of "Loss and Grief" constitutes the central focus of this study. While grief is a universal human experience, it is essential to recognize that each individual's encounter with grief is distinctly unique. In the context of this study, young widows shared their personal accounts of grieving. These insights pertained to the experiences of loneliness, physical longing, maintaining a connection, a prevalent sense of "mental fatigue" and reconfiguring symbols among the participants.

These young widows adopted several coping strategies in due course of time . After the initial days, weeks or months of mourning it was found that these widows were now prepared to "externalize" this heavy experience of grief in different ways. Some of the coping strategies are as follows:

6.1.1 Reconfiguring symbols like wedding ring as part of coping with grief

Participants also reconstructed meaning in their lives by reconfiguring the symbols that represented their marriages and their husbands. Rings were main symbols representing identity. The widow's journey toward redefining her identity involves the completion of certain tasks. The widow must complete certain tasks which can also have direct implications for the shift and transformation of her identity. These tasks may seem insignificant like disposal of the personal belongings and the dilemma of wearing the wedding ring but they hold enormous emotion because of the attachment to the deceased. Saunders (1981) defines these as "Pivotal Identity Tasks".

The symbolic meaning embedded in the wedding ring signifies one's marital status. The dilemma of wearing or not wearing the wedding ring also poses great distress for young widows. The symbolic meaning of the ring indicates that one is married. A few widows articulated concerns that refraining from wearing the ring may invite disapproval, suggesting either a lack of grief for the deceased husband or an absence of missing him.

Paradoxically, wearing the ring raises questions about the widow's marital status, despite her no longer occupying the role of a wife in practical terms. This quandary underscores the absence of established social protocols guiding widows on how to navigate such symbolic and emotional territory. Nevertheless, these pivotal identity tasks represent the initial steps in the internal transformation of identity for the young widow.

The participants in this study have employed various strategies to reconfigure their relationship with the wedding ring. Notably, 73 percent continue to wear the wedding ring as they feel it is a way of honouring their marriage. They feel a continued bond with their late spouse, perceiving their identities as inextricably intertwined as a couple. For some, economic constraints have compelled them to sell the ring. A few respondents do not wear the ring for the practical reason that it does not fit but they have treasured it in a secure place.

Yet another feels it is like a crutch and reminds her of her forced singlehood identity. One participant has chosen to modify the ring. This way she feels she finds her own identity as an independent woman as well as the identity of a wife of the deceased spouse. Consequently, the diverse approaches taken to reconfigure the wedding band symbolize processes of moving forward, letting go, holding on, and embracing significant moments in the widows' lives.

6. 1.2 Disposition of personal belongings of the husband

Disposition of the deceased husband's personal belongings constitutes a significant aspect of the widow's post-loss experience. As for disposal of personal belongings most widows allow themselves time to decide on their disposal. It was found that some factors complicate this task. The family members interfered or requested for certain things. For instance, in one case the husband's sister asked for his two-wheeler vehicle as the memory of her brother. The children of the deceased were very small, so she felt it was not worth keeping it. At the time of the interview, she lamented about giving it away as now her son is grown up and questions her about the decision. Notably, A majority of widows in this study sorted and disposed off their husband's personal belongings as early as three to five months after the death. The ability to embark on this task is deemed as the commencement of the process of disentangling their identities from that of their late spouses.

A widow in this study stated "*Aizun pasun haven techeo soglleo vostu dovorleat, kitem korchem somzona*"(I still got all of my husband's suits and shirts(after almost three years) I even have his socks. I don't know what to do with them." She further says "*Ani hanv teo tosoch dovortolim*" She further remarks, "And I'm not doing anything with them at the moment." Conversely, others have parted with most things. They donated clothing to charitable causes. Some preferred to burn old clothes as they

deemed it ethically inappropriate to give it to others to use them. A particular instance highlighted the aversion people have toward items associated with death. One young widow tried to give her husband's good pair of clothes to her less fortunate Hindu colleague but he refused by saying "we do not accept it, as he is no more". This came as a crude reminder to her that he is no more and people are not comfortable to use clothing of the deceased.

People avoid wearing clothing of the deceased for various cultural, psychological, and practical reasons. It can be due to various cultural beliefs for instance the belief in ritual purity. In some cultures, there are beliefs about ritual purity that dictate not using the possessions of the deceased. These practices are meant to ensure that the living are not tainted by death, which is often seen as ritually impure. Another reason could be due to superstitions about the dead., It is believed that the clothing of the deceased carries their spirit or essence. Wearing these clothes might be seen as inviting bad luck or misfortune. Some traditions hold that the deceased's belongings should be burned or buried with them to ensure their spirit moves on peacefully. Conversely, some kins might choose to keep and even wear items belonging to the deceased as a way of feeling close to them or honouring their memory. In one instance, a widow shared that her son, who was seven years old at the time of his father's death and is now a teenager, prefers to wear some of his father's clothes, even though they don't fit him well. He has also kept his father's cupboard drawer in a very sacred state. The drawer is filled with his father's belongings, including bank credit cards, a bunch of keys, some notepads, bike gloves (as his father loved riding), his wallet, and some cash.

Various personal possessions of the deceased have been cherished like watches, wallets, keys, letters, photo albums, work related materials, and mementos. In some cases, the young widow has even retained old vehicles, despite their nonfunctional condition. For some widows ,specific items served as cherished keepsakes, including wedding suits watches, sunglasses, jackets, shoes, keychains and other gifts. These are held in a particular drawer that remains unopened out of a sense of reverence for the deceased. Such objects embody sentiments of attachments and remembrance. Some have not even opened a particular drawer used by the deceased and have no courage to sort out things. These are some of the sentiments expressed regarding personal belongings.

Furthermore, the level of attachment to these material possessions appears to be influenced by the quality of the marital relationship. It was found that those who experienced a satisfactory marriage found it more challenging in parting with the material possessions of their husband as there was no immediate need, nor financial constraints and sometimes no space limitations. These objects serve as conduits for integrating past memories with the present.

Some had to sell the valuable things immediately due to financial constraints specially to pay off debts and loans. As one young widow said “*Amkam chodd Rinn aslem, kallzacher fator dovrin maka tacheo vastu vikpak poddleo. Bhurgim mhozo guneav korta pun hanv ani Dev zana koslim poristhiti asleim tem, ho vaite vell fatti udoupakk khub avgodd zalem*”. (In the wake of my spouse's passing, I faced the arduous decision to liquidate several valuable assets, including vehicles and gold, to address the substantial debts he left behind. Despite my children's objections and the emotional burden this placed upon me, these actions were necessary to achieve financial stability. Although my children currently express disapproval and guilt regarding these decisions, I trust that with time, they will come to understand the complexities and exigencies that influenced my actions). It was also found that those who had a satisfactory marriage had more difficulty in parting with the material possessions of their husband. This also implied that there was no urgent need to part with them as they did not face shortage of space nor finances. These symbols helped to integrate the past with the present. They served as memories these young widows could cherish. On the contrary, those who were facing financial difficulties due to husband's long-term illness, alcoholism, gambling habits etc. had no option than to clear and sort out things as early as possible hoping to put things in order and move on to make a better future for themselves and the children.

6.1.3 Reconfiguring Pictures of the Husband

Pictures of the deceased spouse also helped in the meaning reconstruction process. Participants were careful while dealing with photos of the spouse. However, what exactly to do with it varied from one respondent to another. For many widows in this study, the most difficult task of early bereavement was sorting through and deciding what to do with their husbands' personal belongings including photos. The photographs of spouses are displayed in the living room, where the primary altar is situated. They are adorned with artificial garlands. This reflects the values and beliefs regarding death,

remembrance, and the afterlife, providing a culturally appropriate way to cope with loss. During their respective birthdays or anniversaries, fresh floral garlands were ceremoniously displayed in this space. This practice generated a sense of connection and provided a momentary but soothing experiential effect for these individuals. Displaying these photographs prominently in the living room, where visitors can see them, reinforces the social identity and memory of the deceased within the community. It allows family and friends to share memories and stories, contributing to a collective remembrance.

One respondent chose to prominently display a photograph of her deceased husband seated on his favourite motorcycle within the living room, in a somewhat discreet manner. This unconventional place of putting a photo prompted a comment from a neighbour who regarded it as an inappropriate image and location for the departed individual. However, the young widow found deep meaning in this choice of photo, asserting that it resonated with her late husband's passion for motorcycling and the fact that this was his beloved activity.

The photographs of deceased loved ones, as evidenced by these diverse responses, hold multifaceted significance for individuals. For some, it represents a conventional practice of paying homage to the departed, fostering a sense of comfort and reassurance through the notion of their continued presence. Furthermore, these photographs serve as a means to aid children in recollecting their departed parent. In some cases, they also serve as sources of inspiration and fortitude, encapsulating the enduring impact of the deceased's life. In fact, certain respondents initiate their daily routines with prayers before these photographs, seeking not only a connection but also the blessings and guidance of their departed loved ones. The sociological significance of deceased photographs lies in their ability to serve as a focal point for memory, ritual, emotional connection, and cultural expression.

6.1.4 Maintaining a Connection with the Deceased

There are two other aspects involved in reconstructing meanings for some of these young widows. One was dreams or communicating with them and secondly relying on spiritual or religious beliefs. They indicated that they continued to feel connected to their deceased husband in these ways. As one said "he is still with us in spirit; he is protecting us and bringing us luck". In previous models of grief work, maintaining a connection with the deceased was viewed as pathological. Hagman (2001), however,

points out that there is a context for the attachment to the deceased person in the survivor's life and that exploring this attachment is a valuable process.

Some of the participants in this study shared meaningful dreams and stories about signs from their husbands. Signs, however, seemed to provide comfort and even motivation to keep on going. Two participants received a directive to go on living during crucial times. For example, one said she was crying because her in-laws were upsetting her by saying all sorts of things. Then on the same day, she had a dream where her deceased husband told her that he heard everything. She heard him begging her not to leave their home and the children. He even mentioned that he will always protect them no matter what.

Some respondents recounted experiencing signs or symbols, which provided them with a sense of hope and a feeling of connection. For instance, one respondent shared her experience that occurred on Christmas night, the first year after her husband's death. Her husband, who was a businessman managing a bar and restaurant, typically returned home late at night. However, on Christmas and New Year's Eve, he always made a point to be with her and their children at midnight to welcome these events together.

The year of his passing, she lay awake in bed, missing those moments. As the clock approached midnight, she felt something gripping her finger, which alarmed her. To her surprise, she saw an insect resting on her finger for a minute before flying off. This experience significantly comforted her, and she strongly believed it was a manifestation of her husband. Despite the five years that have passed since this incident, she remains content with that thought, finding solace in this symbolic connection.

Another respondent believes that he appears in the form of a bird who keeps tapping on her bedroom glass window. Many narrated their experiences about their husbands' appearing in dreams especially when children are sick or when there is a crisis in the family. This provides them solace and comfort.

Participants in this study expressed a desire to remain connected to their husbands as it helps them in their coping. This desire emerged as a drive almost, something innately part of the grieving process which stems from a need to find their loved one. Communicating or maintaining a connection with their husbands for these participants proved to be an experience of comfort.

6.1.5 Seeking employment or “taking up a job”

Employment emerged as one of the sources of coping and the main sources of economic support. In this study, one third of the widows were employed. Out of which 19 percent took up self-employment only after their spousal death. Three of the respondents went abroad in search of employment after losing their spouses. Six percent were already employed in government sectors before marriage while 25 percent were unemployed.

Half of the participants expressed that working contributed to a sense of a routine, efficiency, and accomplishment other than monetary benefits. They generally described their workplace as a supportive environment. However, many of them referred to the difficulty in concentrating, problem-solving, and generally forgetting things. This is referred to as ‘mental fatigue’(Clark, 2001) and is defined as ‘the temporary loss of concentration and memory losses, as grieving proceeds. Work also gave them a normalcy and helped to add more structure in their life which is necessary for creating a sense of stability and balance.

6.2. IMPACT ON THEIR WORLD VIEW

6.2.1 Crisis of Faith and Spiritual Transformation

Grief has the potential to affect the whole person and every aspect of an individual’s existence (Hyrkas, 1997). The loss of a spouse profoundly impacts a widow’s internal world, including her assumptions about life, philosophical outlook, and religious beliefs. In this study, all participants belonged to the Roman Catholic community. However, their spouse’s death shook their fundamental beliefs about an ideal life and, in many cases, led to a crisis of faith. Some widows expressed feelings of abandonment—not only by society but even by God.

Despite initial doubts, most respondents eventually experienced a deepening of their faith. The church emerged as a significant source of support, helping them process their grief and psychological trauma. Many widows derived their strength from religious beliefs, often relying on prayer as a coping mechanism. One respondent shared: *"By the grace of the Lord, I have survived in this situation. My strength is in the Lord."* Another stated, *"The only thing that keeps me going is prayer. I pray a lot."*

However, some widows felt isolated by the very religious principles meant to guide them. While the church acknowledges the harsh customs imposed on widows by society, it does not actively intervene to challenge or eliminate them. This lack of institutional support left some feeling further alienated.

6.2.2 Spiritual Coping Strategies and a Renewed Perspective on Life

Many widows reported that faith-based practices provided them with emotional relief. Some described an increase in feelings of peace and hope, believing that there is a greater purpose beyond their suffering. A few viewed God as their "*husband*" and the "*father of their children*," while others strongly believed that "*Jesus provides*."

To cope with their loss, widows engaged in various spiritual practices, such as:

- Attending Mass regularly
- Participating in online retreats
- Sending petitions to prayer groups
- Reading scriptures and subscribing to church bulletins
- Purchasing novena booklets and reciting the rosary with deep devotion

For many, these spiritual habits eased their anxiety and helped them find acceptance. Additionally, the loss of a spouse led some widows to develop greater empathy for others. Several reported gaining a new perspective, recognizing that many people face even greater hardships. This awareness inspired them to extend kindness and support to others in need. They expressed a newfound appreciation for life and a determination to stay strong—particularly for the sake of their dependent children.

6.3. NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS

The next major theme that emerged was the experience of navigating relationships. Raphael and Nunn (1988) argue that support from family and friends plays a vital role in the widow's grief process, while a lack of support increases stress, leaving the widow more isolated and vulnerable.

Participants expressed gratitude for the people who stood by them during difficult times. Support took different forms, including emotional encouragement, financial aid, and guidance in decision-making. Many widows found comfort in having someone who

simply listened without judgment or provided advice when needed. These various forms of support played a crucial role in addressing different aspects of their challenges.

6.3.1 Support from Family, Friends, and Social Circles

While some widows faced difficulties in their relationships with in-laws, parents, relatives, neighbours, and friends, others acknowledged that without the support of their close social circles, they would not have made it through. Many found emotional reassurance through regular phone calls from friends or family members, which provided a sense of connection and care. One respondent shared how a friend living in the same town checked in on her daily for a full year after her husband's death. Such consistent support reassured widows that help and care were always available. Some participants received financial help from family members, close friends, or well-wishers. For example, two respondents had siblings sending them monthly remittances from abroad, which significantly contributed to their financial well-being over the past few years. This support ranged from occasional assistance during crises to consistent monthly remittances, alleviating financial stress and maintaining stability.

In addition to financial support, some received occasional assistance based on specific needs or emergencies. Even those without consistent aid had at least one person in their known social circle they could reach out to during difficult times. Some participants maintained relationships with their husbands' colleagues and friends, while others chose to distance themselves from these connections. A few preferred to build entirely new friendships, as these new acquaintances were unfamiliar with their past and provided a fresh start, easing their transformation process.

6.3.2 Unexpected Support and Challenges with In-Laws

For some widows, the people they had relied on for support either did not help or became indifferent, leaving them feeling abandoned. On the other hand, many received help from unexpected sources—distant relatives, acquaintances, or even their husband's friends and colleagues.

Several respondents found immense support from their parents and siblings, strengthening their familial bonds. Their parents' homes became a place of security, and their siblings played an active role in their well-being. Some in-laws provided

substantial support by taking care of the widow's children, enabling the widow to seek employment. In certain cases, the maternal uncle (*mama*) assumed financial and caregiving responsibilities for the children.

However, not all in-law relationships were supportive. Some respondents faced significant conflicts over property disputes, family businesses, and their husband's pension. Many were cheated out of their rightful claims and told to fight for their entitlements in court. Disputes between the widow's in-laws and her parents often arose over financial settlements, adding further stress to an already grief-stricken widow who was also raising dependent children.

6.3.3 Emotional and Legal Struggles in Relationships

For many widows, navigating relationships was not just about emotional and financial support but also about dealing with betrayals, tensions, and legal complications. Conflicts with in-laws over property and financial matters were a common source of distress. The struggle to secure their late husband's pension or inheritance often placed widows in legal battles that drained their emotional and financial resources.

At the same time, widows had to manage their emotional well-being amid strained relationships. The pain of realizing that some trusted friends and family members were unwilling to help—or even actively working against them—added to their grief. On the contrary, receiving unexpected support from distant acquaintances or lesser-known family members brought relief and gratitude.

Despite these challenges, many widows found ways to rebuild their relationships, whether by maintaining strong connections with their birth families, forming new friendships, or relying on unexpected sources of support. These experiences highlight the complex and unpredictable nature of social relationships after widowhood.

6.4. IDENTITY CRISIS FACED BY WIDOWS

Most widows feel the loss of identity as the most tragic of all the consequences. The loss of the bread winner, religious taboos and loss of status makes them feel humiliated. The Patriarchal nature of society keeps this woman in a supplementary role. The material resources are never at her command and disposition. Further, customary traditions gives her no right in her natal home. With the death of the husband, her right in the marital home is questioned. Religious conventions, social and caste customs, lack of education, lack of employment and dependency due to inability to earn makes them

feel inferior. While economic deprivation makes the living difficult. It is religious and social conventions that are responsible for the loss of self-esteem.

Here are some instances of how their current identity gets affected. More dehumanizing than anything else was the 'oppressive discriminative expressions that are used to describe a widow 'lamented one of the respondents in this study. Many of them found it difficult to accept the term 'widow'. Further, especially the use of the Konkani term '*Rand*'. The word '*rand*' means a widow, while a prostitute is called a *randul* in Konkani. The close proximity of both the words indicates the social psyche. Once she is a widow, it is a small step to become a *randi* from *rand*. A widow's sexuality becomes suspect and a source of threat once her husband is gone. These words are used as common abuses. In fact, the widow is not considered as a complete human being.

The Konkani folksong in question, "*Paklea Teka Choi Naka re, Choi Naka re Cheddum nu Bhaile Tim Randu*," sheds light on the societal attitudes towards widows during the Portuguese rule in Goa. The term "*Paklo*" refers to a man of Portuguese origin, reflecting the colonial context. The verse translates to "Stop eyeing at her; she's a widow, not a virgin". highlighting a rude distinction and reinforcing a negative stereotype about widows. The context of this song illustrates the social marginalization and stigmatization of widows. By drawing attention to a widow's status and contrasting it with that of a young, unmarried girl, the song perpetuates harmful stereotypes and societal attitudes. This form of ridicule not only on a widow's sexuality, specifically highlighting her non-virgin status, reveals societal preoccupations with female purity and virtue.

There was another instance where the widow experienced embarrassment . It happened during a wedding reception she had attended. The dance sequences at such events are structured, with the first and last sets typically reserved for couples. However, during one of these sequences, a colleague invited the widow to dance. She felt very happy at that moment as she had given up on such occasions. However, this action of hers lead to disapproving glances from her in-laws. The social norm dictates that widows should maintain a period of mourning. At this time, she was widowed since last 18 months .Hence, taking part actively in such gatherings was considered premature by societal standards. She was further embarrassed when she heard mocking remarks questioning the intentions of the man who invited her to dance, implying a readiness to exploit her newly single status.

The respondents were asked to define and explain what being a widow means to them personally. The following responses were elucidated. They explained how this aspect of their life influences their sense of self, roles, and social interactions. This question delves into the individual's subjective experience of widowhood, including the emotional, social, and practical aspects of their identity as a widow or widower. What was most significant about the self-descriptions of these young widows was their surprise upon realizing the extent to which their identities had been intertwined with their husbands. Many were taken aback to discover they lacked an autonomous identity. They often reported feeling as though a significant part of themselves had also perished. Furthermore, being labelled by others as "widows" highlighted an imposed identity that they had not chosen for themselves.

At the time of filling application for widows' pension and other bank work many of them were shocked to check the box marked 'single' or 'widow'. This was the first time it dawned on them their new status. For some, this was the first time they were confronted with question of whether accepting the label or not. Thus, becoming a widow triggers the transformation of identity. Factors such as their role in the marriage, their concept of identity before the death, and their perception of themselves following the death of their spouse influence the identity reconstruction process.

Gilligan's (1993) theory supports the notion of needing a context within which to explore identity. She proposes that women's identity development is based on an ethic of care and a tie between relationship and responsibility. The young widows in this study found to have a sense of responsibility to honour the lives of their husbands, while continuing to go on living their own lives, thus indicating a responsibility to themselves and to the other relationships they cherish.

Erickson (1964, et. al) proposes that during early adulthood (ages 20-40) the goal is to achieve a sense of individual identity and to establish an intimate relationship. Many of the other young widows in this study embraced the opportunity to establish what they understood to be an individual identity and then they married and worked toward establishing a coupled identity. Following the death of their spouse, they are once again in a position of rebuilding an identity that integrates both their married identities and their new experience of themselves as no longer part of a couple. Participants were asked to describe their current identity and their identity before the loss of their partner. All participants indicated that the death of their spouse transformed

their identity, particularly from that of having a coupled identity to being a single person.

Some women were embracing the opportunity to explore their emerging identities and others were struggling with the realization that their identities had indeed become integrated with their partner's identity. Many women responded to this question by addressing a loss of identity. Those who experience growth following the loss of a significant person describe becoming more resilient and independent, in addition to becoming more aware of the fragility of life and vulnerable to other losses. They also describe a feeling of renewal and a sense of maturity.

In addition to the discussion of current and coupled identity, one of the themes that surfaced via the interview was the question of who am I becoming? Participants expressed wishes, desires, goals, and dreams they hoped would be part of their future lives.

There was a desire among many participants to give a good future for their children and accomplish what was left incomplete. Majority of them denied that they had any interests in finding a partner. They were not keen on remarriage and were completely immersed in the present than the future. Some wished they could make a difference in other people's lives especially those in a similar situation. They felt they could be able to ease their sorrow in some way.

Most participants were devoted in moving on with their lives in some way. It was observed that those who did not have much financial constraints prior to husband's death, now had difficulty in adjustment as the husband was the sole source of income. They had to either take up a job, learn new skills or depend on savings. The correlation observed was that individuals who experienced dissatisfaction within their marital relationships, particularly with their husbands, often faced significant struggles. However, they were also highly motivated to create a better life for both their children and themselves, a life they felt they had been deprived of. Some were already employed but were not independent to take decisions. Now they felt empowered financially and even socially. One respondent wished to send her daughter abroad for further studies. After the husband's death she went ahead with the decision.

The researcher came across participants who involved themselves in church work. They actively participated in Small Christian communities (*somudhai*) organised by the church. They joined prayer groups. These prayer groups gather at each other's house once a week and pray for the family. It also includes visiting the sick, cleaning

the village chapels , crosses and other religious shrines. They also organise social activities like sports for children, competitions for women, making Christmas sweets together, organising canteens for the church to raise funds, conducting events at the local chapel, programs for youth and so on. Thus, these widows find meaning by taking part in various activities.

6.5 OTHER COPING MECHANISMS

6.5.1 Visiting the Niche or memorial in the cemetery as coping strategy

The act of visiting the niche or memorial in the cemetery serves as a coping strategy for widows within Roman Catholic communities. This offers a glimpse into the complex interplay of grief, religious rituals, and familial bonds. Within this context, the cemetery holds significant cultural and symbolic value, serving as a sacred space for remembrance and connection with the deceased.

In this community, the grave is maintained for three years after the death of a person by the church. During this time, one month mass service is held followed by blessings and prayers at the grave. Subsequently first, second and third death anniversary mass service is held for family, neighbours ,friends who gather at the grave and offer prayers and floral tributes. This provides a framework for mourning and commemoration. The periodic gatherings of family, neighbours, and friends at the grave, especially during the first, second, and third death anniversaries, represent collective rituals of remembrance and solidarity. In these three years many widows make it a point to visit the grave mostly after Sunday mass service. They also take the children along . Some describe this visit as a different kind of connection which gives them solace and helps reduce the guilt of not visiting the memorial.

At the end of three years, the grave is emptied and the mortal remains are given to the family to preserve in a niche. The transition from the grave to a niche within the cemetery wall or the disposal in a designated well reflects the cultural customs surrounding the handling of mortal remains. A niche is a small closet type arrangement made of marbles in the cemetery wall. It has to be purchased and can cost between 10000 to 20000 for a lifetime. The mortal remains are put in this niche and sealed with a memoir on it. Sometimes people use it for the other deceased family members too. The niche symbolizes a lasting connection with the deceased and a space for ongoing

communication and prayer. This ritualized practice of visiting the niche, particularly on significant occasions such as birthdays, marriage anniversaries, and children's birthdays, fosters a sense of continuity and spiritual communion with the departed spouse. Many widows have opted for this niche and they see it as a way of staying connected to their husbands. They make it a point to pray there especially after attending Sunday mass service, and on special days like birthdays, their marriage anniversary, children's birthdays along with the children. They not only pray but communicate with the spouse sharing her innermost hurt and seeking his support to raise the children and protect them. This has a lot of meaning for them as they strongly believe that he will be by her side, at all times.

6.5.2 Memorial built at home

The construction of a memorial at home adds another layer to the coping mechanisms employed by widows. This is also a practice among Catholics to build a memorial for their dead at their residence. Five out of the total respondents have built a memorial at home for their deceased husband. This structure may take diverse forms like a shrine, a plaque, tombstone, a cross, a pillar and a cenotaph, with a photo inscribed. Sometimes the photos are engraved on marble and mounted on the compound wall. The cost of this can vary from 25000 to a lakh of rupees. On certain occasions like the birthday or death anniversary or their wedding anniversary the memorial is honoured by lighting candles, offering prayers and flowers, giving alms and other forms of charity in the name of the deceased. The parents of the deceased specially prefer a memorial at home as they fear that due to old age, they will not be able to visit the cemetery. The act of honouring the memorial through rituals like lighting candles, offering prayers, and charitable acts reflects religious traditions and familial remembrance practices.

From a sociological perspective, these rituals and practices within the cemetery and home setting demonstrate the role of collective memory, symbolic interactions, and religious symbolism in the construction of grief narratives and the maintenance of familial ties across generations. The intergenerational aspect, as seen in the preference of parents for home memorials, highlights the continuity of familial bonds beyond physical lifetimes. Symbolic structures play a crucial role in maintaining familial unity by serving as enduring reminders of shared experiences, values, and connections,

especially in the face of loss and aging concerns. These structures, whether in the form of cemetery niches or home memorials, serve as focal points for rituals, memories, and ongoing communication with the departed. They provide a sense of continuity and belonging, bridging past experiences with present realities and offering a tangible expression of love, respect, and remembrance.

In exploring the experiences of widowed women and their journeys of reconstructing identity after loss, the researcher encountered a rich tapestry of narratives that highlight the resilience and adaptability of individuals facing profound life changes.

6.5.3 Creative expressions

The effects of grief while sometimes debilitating are also navigable, as these young widows demonstrate the way they have created meaning out of loss of their husband. A respondent who lost her husband when she was 24 years of age and was left with a daughter of two years. She went back to her old passion of singing. She joined a music band group and is now engaged in creating her own music videos mostly in Konkani along with her full-time job abroad. Another example is a widow who joined a self-help group and discovered her passion for ‘sweets making’ after the loss of her spouse. She turned this hobby into a full-time business, becoming a supplier of homemade sweets and also taking up catering orders. Some women are engaged in artistic expressions like quilt-making, crochet, and knitting. These activities not only served as creative outlets but also contributed to their economic empowerment. Many had to learn new skills like baking, riding a bike and driving a car, tailoring, etc. One respondent went back to complete her education. One of the respondents works as motorcycle pilot. She has taken up this job of dropping a girl child to school. The parent also feels safe to send their daughter with a women pilot. Some learned farm work and fishing-related activities which were earlier the occupation of their husband. Another respondent takes orders for bakery products.

Another respondent from a remote village in South Goa earns a living by collecting silt deposits from the river. This woman's daily routine starts early at 5 a.m., and she walks a kilometre to reach the river where she collects the silt. Once collected, she sells this silt to small-scale builders. This occupation highlights the resourcefulness and resilience of individuals in rural areas who often engage in livelihoods that are closely tied to natural resources and local economic activities. The dream of this

respondent is to educate her two daughters, who were studying in secondary and higher secondary school. This reflects her aspirations for their future. Education is seen as a means to break the cycle of poverty and provide better opportunities for her children. This narrative also sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals in rural areas, where access to quality education and economic opportunities may be limited, leading to a strong emphasis on self-reliance and determination to improve one's circumstances.

6.5.3 Increased engagement in household tasks

This was another coping strategy. For some, focusing on practical activities like cooking, cleaning, or organizing provided a sense of control and normalcy during a difficult time. Taking on additional responsibilities related to childcare was common among widows, as they need to fill the role of both parents. This was challenging but it also offers a sense of purpose and distraction from grief was how one of the responded described her experience of coping. These adaptive measures served as focal points in understanding the diverse ways in which widows navigate the challenges associated with their altered life circumstances.

In this context, several participants mentioned that they only find time for personal grieving after their children are asleep. They described this moment as the most difficult part of the day when they have to confront the reality of their loss. The uncertain future does not allow them to have a sound sleep. These findings show how important it is for widows to grieve and accept their loss in order to heal and move forward in life. It highlights the essential role of grieving in the healing process.

6.6. CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1

This case study delves into the experiences of a widowed woman. Through an in-depth analysis of her journey, the researcher aims to understand the complexities of reconstructing identity after loss and the strategies adopted in navigating this profound life transition.

Grace, a pseudonym used to protect her privacy, encountered the challenges of widowhood at a relatively young age in her late thirties. Her narrative encompasses various sociological themes, including marital dynamics, coping mechanisms, economic resilience, and social perceptions of widowhood. She met this man during her higher secondary school days. Overtime once he got a decent job they decided to enter into matrimony. Their marriage of sixteen years faced a tumultuous turn when her husband passed away due to cirrhosis of the liver. This event marked the beginning of her widowhood journey.

He worked for the Goa Public Services and earned a comfortable living. The initial years of her marriage were smooth and satisfactory. He would take up responsibilities of buying groceries and also giving sufficient money to her for other expenses. They had two children then. He was a loving father and husband. However, after eleven years of marriage, she started suspecting his illicit relationship with a woman around his workplace. Her son also told her about some neighbours talking about it. When she started searching for more facts, the truth was confirmed. He was found to be visiting a prostitute in a red-light area and gradually fell in love with her. At this point, Grace, took up all the courage to try and save her marriage. She went to the extent of visiting the woman and confronting her. The 'other' woman accepted her involvement with her husband but was not willing to give up on this relationship with her husband.

With considerable effort, Grace, along with support from her husband's sister, successfully persuaded her husband to move to her maternal home. She had to take this step to address the turmoil within their relationship. However, he continued to work in the same job. The challenges persisted for Grace as his behaviour escalated into abuse and alcoholism. In course of time, his behaviour became violent. He started abusing and beating his wife and children. He would stay absent from work on many occasions. He would drink while on duty. Hence, he was suspended from the job. He also developed health problems. Amidst all that she got pregnant and gave birth to their third child. The baby girl was born disabled.

Later five years after being widowhood, she was employed by the church. Prior to this job she navigated various job roles, from fruit vendor to domestic help, eventually settling into her current role of collecting parking fees at the church. Her job was to collect parking fees of tourists' taxis and vehicles parked in the church property.

There is a waterfall located 2kms away from the church and church provides the parking facility. She earns Rs. 300 per day. Her duty hours are from 8 a.m. to 6.30p.m in the evening. She lives in her maternal house with her children. Her parents are no more. Her married sister supports her financially as well as emotionally. Grace, a mother of three children, two boys, and a daughter with special needs maintains a composed and resilient behaviour.

As far as finances are concerned, she narrated that she gets her husband's pension of Rs.17000 per month. She also informed that upon his death, each family member received one lac as part of his death benefits. She has saved this money in the form of fixed deposit in the bank and is very possessive of this amount as she feels it is her husband's last memory. Today her elder son is employed on the cruise ship. The younger one is in school, and the daughter being disabled is confined to home. However, her daughter manages a lot of house hold work which is a big support. Grace still misses her husband. She strongly believes that he watches over her and the children. She has strong faith in God.

Grace's experiences also highlight societal attitudes towards widows. She gave evidences of discrimination she faced as a widow. She recounted two specific instances, where she faced offense and humiliation. Firstly, her neighbours right opposite her house pruned all the plants in the garden during monsoon, except one big tree. She noticed one big tree was left untouched. This tree was strategically positioned to block her view from her main door. Upon inquiry, she discovered that this deliberate act was indeed meant to avoid her sight, particularly at dawn. This hurt her a lot and made her stop communicating with them fearing further instances of blame or false beliefs. These practices persist among some members of the Catholic community, highlighting ongoing challenges faced by widows, especially those in remote areas of South Goa.

She narrated another incident that took place at a catholic wedding. There is a ceremony called 'ROS'(extracted coconut juice). The bath with coconut pulp juice is also another ceremony of a unique nature that precedes the wedding day for both the bride and the groom at their respective residence. It contains applying this juice ceremonially by close relatives first, followed by friends and neighbours. This ceremony is performed in the main hall, where the oratory is also in full view. Grace offered to extract this coconut juice with all good intentions but was told by her relative to refrain from doing so as a widow is considered inauspicious on an auspicious

occasion like this one. These two instances reflect entrenched cultural beliefs and stigmatization associated with widowhood.

Today she looks forward to getting her son married. She feels sad as her daughter is still dependent and will always be dependent on her and worries about her future. She advises young widows to turn to God for courage. Although, she advises young widows to turn to God for courage and encourages young women to remarry, she has chosen to remain single because she still holds deep feelings for him. She feels guilty about making him leave the illicit relationship. She also feels sad when she remembers her husband's struggle with his liver failure and says he had reformed his life and wished he survived. She is not worried much about economic security but believes her husband still watches and protects them. Irrespective of the difficulties she faced on account of his hurtful and rude behaviour, she has no plans to remarry. She wants to be identified as his wife. This is a case where her identity was completely merged with her husband as a coupled identity. She did not have a separate existence. In spite of his death, she still feels married to him and seeks his blessings. She has forgiven him completely.

Grace's identity reconstruction journey is complex, characterized by a profound sense of loss, guilt, and enduring love for her late husband. Despite societal pressures and advice to remarry, she chooses to remain single, driven by her emotional connection and loyalty to her deceased husband. Her identity is deeply intertwined with her marital status, reflecting a coupled identity where she continues to seek his blessings and forgiveness.

Case Study 2

“Overnight, I lost the fullness we experienced by combining our lives. I was single, alone, and part of my identity — being his wife — had vanished. I couldn't imagine my future, now that I faced it without him. My grief and heartbreak were physically painful and disorienting. It took months to return to sleeping through the night, even longer to make it through a day without hovering on the verge of tears. Each morning felt like a long race. How could I go on without him?”

These were the words from Bernadette Fernandes, a young woman widowed at age 23. At the time of her husband's death she was left to navigate life as a single mother to an 18-month-old child. Their marriage lasted for three years and was a result of a love match. Bernadette was pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree when she met her husband at a cousin's wedding reception. He was the youngest of four siblings, with three elder brothers. The caste difference—Bernadette's family belonged to the Chaddo caste, perceived as higher in the social hierarchy compared to her husband's Toddy Tappers caste—resulted in significant familial disapproval and conflict.

Economic stability was present in both families; however, the caste disparity caused considerable tension. In response to her decision to marry him, Bernadette's father threatened to disown her, which led her to leave both her college education and parental home. Unable to marry immediately, she was placed in a boarding school as a caretaker for a year before the marriage took place. After a year, they got married. Bernadette was managing the household while her husband contributed to the family-run Bar and restaurant and engaged in extraction and sale of toddy and other related products.

Bernadette's narrative captures the profound loss of identity and sense of security experienced upon the death of her spouse. On what was to be their third Christmas together, they were engaged in the familiar activity of decorating their home and preparing a traditional Christmas crib, a ritual rich in cultural significance. In the course of their preparations, they encountered a shortage of white sand, commonly used by Goan Catholics to complete the crib. Her husband volunteered to fetch the sand from a nearby beach, but he never returned. Early the next morning, the family received a call from the police informing them of his death. His body, along with his motorcycle, was found in roadside bushes. The cause of the accident remains unexplained, with no other vehicles involved in the incident.

Since he was drawing his income from the joint family business, after his death, she had no separate savings. The house was jointly held and the mother-in-law looked after household expenses. She treated her well and took good care of her granddaughter. Her in-laws supported her and the child. However, Bernadette's parents were still angry. After some months she decided to pursue her further education having left college during her B. A Second year. She was supported by her parents in this decision and also by her in-laws. After completion of her studies, she worked in private-sector

jobs in Goa. After 3 years with her brother's support, she too joined him in Dubai. Her mother looked after her child. After working in the gulf for 10 years, she took her daughter to complete her remaining education. Today her daughter is pursuing MBA in Poland. Despite the profound personal loss she experienced, Bernadette chose not to remarry. Instead, she has channelled her energies into her career and personal interests such as vocals for a music band.

Bernadette has embraced her life on her own terms, finding fulfilment in her job and her hobbies. She has developed a passion for singing and actively engages in creating and sharing her music videos on social media. This creative outlet not only provides her with personal satisfaction but also allows her to connect with others in a meaningful way. Her journey through marriage, motherhood, and widowhood has shaped her desire to live a life that aligns with her personal values and interests. Her focus on her job, hobbies, and the upbringing of her only child illustrates her commitment to carving out a fulfilling life amidst the challenges she has faced.

Case Study 3

Rosy Dias is a 36 years old Roman catholic widow who resides locally in Salcete Taluka of South Goa. She is presently unemployed and depends on family support for raising her two dependent children between the ages of twelve and fourteen. They were married for 15 years. It was an arranged marriage. Her husband was working abroad on the passenger cruise line. (An occupation common among Goan men). The couple had their own house. They were parents of two children, a boy and a girl. She came to know her husband's drinking habit only after her marriage. She regrets and blames his parents and sister for cheating her into this marriage as they hid the truth about his drinking habit. Her husband was an alcoholic. His Voyage on ship was of 9 months and was entitled to two months' vacation. During this time his interests would be his friend's circle. A large part of his earnings was squandered on drinks and partying with friends.

The alcohol took a toll on his health. During the one year prior to his death, life had been in and out of hospitals. The huge cost of medical expenses and treatment dwindled all their resources including her gold ornaments. They also borrowed money from family members and other relatives. He did not survive. Rosy relies on her family for economic support. This includes her sister and brother-in-law who work abroad.

They are her only hope and support. They assured her of taking care by sending monthly remittances. Rosy being a graduate and given such dire consequences, had to set out to search for source of livelihood. At this time through a well-wisher, she managed to get employment in church-run pre-primary school. She was working there for three years. Unfortunately, during covid 19, the school closed down. She was rendered jobless. The closure of her school due to the COVID-19 pandemic further underscores the precariousness of economic stability for marginalized groups during crises. The challenges she faces in securing stable employment post-widowhood highlight structural barriers and the need for supportive policies and opportunities for widows, especially those with limited resources.

At this time her daughter was studying in Standard X .This added to her worry and anxiety. In course of time, she developed mental problems. with no source of income and fear of covid-19 pandemic. Her sister, biggest support system, also lost her job abroad. She was struggling to arrange money for her daughter's tuition fees as well look after all other household expenses. Rosy's economic struggles after her husband's death show the vulnerability faced by widows, especially those with dependent children. Currently, Rosy resides in her late husband's house, where she and her children occupy two rooms. A portion of the house remains unused and is managed by her husband's sister, as her parents-in-law have passed away. Rosy wishes she could make full use of the entire house, as the current space is insufficient for her needs. Being a graduate, she is hoping for a well-paying job. She also hopes to see her children finish their education .She is determined to provide a bright future for herself and her children. She believes in the sanctity of marriage as a one-time commitment. This reflects cultural and personal values regarding relationships and identity reconstruction after loss. She does not wish to remarry. Her sister who works abroad is the only hope and support.

The three case studies illustrate different trajectories of widowhood, reflecting how women navigate their identities and life choices after losing their spouses. The above three cases varied in their ways. The three cases presented above have three age groups of women being widowed. Bernadette was widowed at a young age (23 years) with a child, facing the immediate challenge of managing her life and responsibilities while still in her early adulthood.

Grace and Rosy, on the other hand, experienced longer marriages (15 and 16 years, respectively), which likely influenced their coping mechanisms and identity reconstruction differently. Their extended marital histories would have contributed to a more profound sense of loss and a longer period of adjustment. In all three cases, the women had dependent children. Grace and Bernadette entered into love marriages, while Rosy had an arranged marriage. Each woman was educated to at least the 12th standard or beyond. Following their husbands' deaths, all three took up employment, which was a significant adjustment from their previous roles. This shift in marital status led to changes in their future aspirations. Despite these challenges, each woman demonstrated resilience and successfully built a new life for herself and her children.

These case studies reveal three distinct types of identities that emerged from their experiences:

Embracing Widowhood as a Permanent Identity: Some women have integrated widowhood into their self-concept, accepting it as a defining aspect of their lives. Others have focused on achieving personal autonomy and self-reliance, valuing independence over traditional roles thus prioritising independence and thirdly some women have embarked on a journey to redefine their identity and life goals, seeking a new sense of self beyond their previous roles and experiences.

Case Study 4 : Transformation of Identity through Remarriage in Widowhood

The formation of a family through marriage is one of the most significant events in a person's life. Widowhood represents the partial dissolution of this original family unit, leading to profound transformations in the surviving partner's life course (Tovar, 1999; Perez Cardenas and Infante, 2005).

Queenie Menezes, born in Cuncolim, South Goa, experienced widowhood eight years ago at the age of 31, following a four-year marriage that ended with her husband's death due to complications from diabetes. Queenie's narrative provides a vivid illustration of the complexities and challenges of widowhood. Her daily life was previously centered around managing her husband's delicate health, which required strict dietary restrictions and multiple medications. His passing marked a significant rupture in her life, leading to profound loneliness and the need to reconstruct her identity.

Loneliness emerged as a central theme in Queenie's experience of widowhood. She describes it as a profound and inescapable consequence, stating, "There is only one

way to deal with loneliness: seeking company." Two to three years after her husband's death, Queenie found companionship in a man she had known for years. This new relationship highlights a critical aspect of widowhood: the ability to form new attachments and reconstruct one's life narrative, often in ways that defy societal expectations. Queenie's decision to pursue a new relationship underscores the human need for connection and intimacy, even after significant loss.

The transformation of sexuality following the loss of a partner is another critical dimension of widowhood. Though they got married and her child from previous marriage was looked after Queenie's reflections reveal that while the love for her second partner was significant, it was different from the love she felt for her first husband. This differentiation illustrates the complexity of love and relationships in widowhood, where new relationships are often shaped by the memories and emotional bonds of the past. Queenie's experience challenges the societal taboo surrounding widow sexuality, particularly in cultures where remarriage and new relationships are often stigmatized. Goan culture, particularly among Roman Catholics, places a significant emphasis on the sanctity and permanence of marriage, viewing it as a lifelong bond dissolved only by death. This cultural norm complicates the widow's journey, as societal expectations often conflict with personal needs for affection and intimacy. Despite facing social scrutiny and gossip, Queenie asserts her right to seek companionship and intimacy, stating, "Even when we are alone, there's always people's gossip to put up with." This assertion reflects a broader sociological reality where widows must navigate the intersection of personal desires and societal judgments.

Queenie's narrative also touches on the broader sociological implications of widowhood. The experience of losing a spouse not only brings about emotional and psychological challenges but also involves a process of identity reconstruction. Widowhood often leads to feelings of depersonalization and identity loss, as the surviving partner grapples with the absence of the marital bond that once defined their social and familial role. Queenie acknowledges the deep sense of loneliness that accompanies widowhood, emphasizing that it is not fully compensated by the presence of children and grandchildren. This highlights the unique emotional and social needs of widows, which extend beyond familial support.

Despite the inherent conflicts and challenges in marriage, Queenie finds widowhood to be an event laden with sadness and loneliness. Her candid

acknowledgment of her desires and needs represents a counter-discourse to traditional views of widowhood. She concludes, "It's a matter of how you feel, how much energy you have; there are women who are still looking for a husband, the body demands it, calls for it, it still feels the energy calling for sex, it feels when you were young, though it's really no longer the same. You feel the longing, the desire for the hug, a kiss, to hear pretty words. It's normal, it's part of what we are: as women, we feel that longing."

Queenie Menezes' story exemplifies the complex journey of widowhood, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. Her experience underscores the importance of reconstructing identity, challenging societal perceptions, and embracing the transformed yet enduring nature of sexuality and affection in later life. By navigating these challenges and forming new relationships, widows like Queenie can redefine their identities and continue to lead fulfilling lives, highlighting the resilience and adaptability inherent in the human experience. Queenie Menezes' case study introduces the dimension of remarriage and its impact on identity reconstruction. Queenie's experience challenges traditional views on widowhood and sexuality, highlighting the complexities of forming new relationships while grappling with the memories of a previous marriage. Her story underscores the tension between societal expectations and personal needs, particularly in a cultural context that places significant emphasis on the sanctity of marriage. Queenie's decision to seek companionship and her reflections on love and sexuality challenge societal taboos and illustrate the ongoing negotiation of identity in widowhood. Societal expectations often conflict with personal desires, creating a challenging environment for women seeking to redefine their identities. The scrutiny and gossip faced by widows like Queenie highlight the broader sociological realities where personal choices must be navigated within the constraints of cultural norms and societal judgments.

The emotional and psychological dimensions of widowhood, as illustrated by the experiences of all four women, reveal the profound loneliness and identity loss that accompany the death of a spouse. Despite the support of children and extended family, the need for personal connection and intimacy remains a crucial aspect of the widow's experience. The stories of these women reflect a broader human need for affection and a sense of self that transcends familial roles. The experiences of Bernadette, Grace, Rosy, and Queenie provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between personal desires, societal expectations, and the ongoing process of identity

reconstruction in widowhood. By examining these diverse experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by women as they the profound transformation that accompanies the loss of a spouse.

Each case study reveals unique trajectories and coping mechanisms, illustrating the diverse ways in which women reconstruct their identities and negotiate their new realities. The experiences of Bernadette, Grace, Rosy, and Queenie provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between personal desires, societal expectations, and the ongoing process of identity reconstruction in widowhood. By examining these diverse experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties and triumphs faced by women as they manage the profound transformation that accompanies the loss of a spouse.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to summarize the findings of the study, 'Bereavement, Widowhood, And Social Construction of Identity: A Study of Roman Catholic Young Widows of South Goa'. The study was undertaken not to prove any hypothesis but with the broad objective of understanding the plight of young widows of Roman Catholic population. For this purpose, specific lead questions were framed. The study has a two-pronged approach: to study the impact of spousal death on the young widows and its socio-cultural implications and to examine the process of identity reconstruction post-widowhood. This chapter also includes the major findings, suggestions, and recommendations for further research.

The thesis begins by providing a background of the phenomena and magnitude of widowhood with special emphasis on young widows. In India, a traditionally patriarchal society, the duty of a woman centres around the home and hearth. The identity of women is largely impacted by the status of their spouses. The manner in which society considers her is through the perspective of her identity concerning the males around her. As a result, the loss of the husband poses several challenges for the widow. This perception has not changed much.

Widowhood, whether a woman is young or old, presents an intertwined network of social, economic, and psychological complications. The demise of her husband translates into the loss of any approved cultural identity for a widow and constitutes for all practical purposes, the end of her social identity (Chakravati, 2006:96). This is even more complicated, for young widows, as they are not prepared for this non-normative or unexpected life event. When a woman in her 20s or 30s becomes a widow, she is thrust into a role for which she is unprepared (DiGiulio, 1992:86). Young widows grieve both the loss of a partner and the death of their dreams. They also grieve the loss of their identity as a married individual, of their goals, and future aspirations that were jointly held with the deceased husbands (e.g., raising children, growing old together). All of a sudden, a young widow is exposed to face the pain of bereavement, as well as realign herself to the new role. This unexpected loss may also stir up unanswered queries such as, "Will I or should I marry again?".

Barret (1976) expressed the unfortunate situation of widows saying that widows belong to a sub-culture whose members live in despair and loneliness. They chide each other for self-pity and advise each other to keep busy. They individually hope for an avenue to escape, but collectively succumb to an attitude of hopelessness. The pain of bereavement itself is the first stress that a widow faces. A sense of futility and suspicion that nothing in life is worthwhile, an inability to sleep and a need to blame her fate, are commonly found among widows. In addition, various concepts and theories found relevant to the study of widowhood were reviewed and working (operational) definitions were formulated. Key concepts such as widow, bereavement, grief, mourning, single parent, identity and social identity were discussed in detail.

Whereas 'bereavement' refers to an objective state of having experienced a loss, grief in contrast is the nature of the physiological and psychological reaction to the loss (Marwit, 1991:76). Thus, Grief is a highly subjective condition. It is characterised by disruptions in cognitive, emotional, physical, and interpersonal functioning. To state it more simply, bereavement is the unit of time following a loss, whereas grief is the subjective effect experienced by the individual. Further, the period of grief and loneliness is longer in young widowhood as compared to widowhood in later life. Additionally, grieving itself is psychologically draining. Symptoms following the loss of a life partner include sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, feelings of fear and guilt, and intense emotional reactions. These reactions are rarely understood by others, much less by the widows themselves, (Di Giulio, 1992: 73).

The most difficult period for widows is not the initial bereavement, when the widow receives support from various social customs, but later, when she must move out of the widow role (Lopata, 1975:60). This transition period is often marked by internal confusion, as well as ambiguity about social mores and what is deemed to be socially "acceptable" behaviour for a widow.

7.1 THE THEORETICAL GROUND OF THE STUDY COMPRISES THREE THEORIES OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTIVIST RESEARCH:

- a. Erickson's (1964, et al.) theory of lifespan development
- b. Gilligan's (1982) theory of women's identity formation

- c. Niemeyer's (2002; 2005) constructivist and narrative methodology.

The second chapter presents the framework in which the present study has been undertaken. It mainly focuses on the research problem, methodology and design of the study, the specific objectives of the research, research questions, research universe, and locale of the study, sampling procedures, field experiences and methods of data collection. Since the study is complex in nature, multi tools are used to study the various aspects of widow's and widowhood. These include: Interview schedule, observation, informal and formal discussions, content analysis and case studies. This chapter also highlights the practical significance and potential weaknesses of the study.

7.1.1 The objectives of the study are:

1. To undertake a socio demographic profile of young widows of South Goa.
2. To discern the socio-cultural rituals and customs of bereavement among the Roman Catholic widows of South Goa.
3. To enquire into the socio- cultural and economic issues that young Roman Catholic widows of South Goa have to negotiate, and
4. To understand the process of social construction of identity formation that takes place among young widows of South Goa.

To get a holistic perspective of varied aspects of widowhood and to understand how women, children and the elderly folks are coping in his absence, an in-depth study was carried out in four talukas of the South Goa District. These District have a large catholic population. Thus, a study was conducted in villages and towns from this District. The methodology adopted was in line with the overall objective of gaining an in-depth understanding. Personal interviews on a one-to-one basis were conducted with 38 young widows. To get supplementary information, observation technique was also used. In addition, case study of selected respondents was undertaken to meet the objective of finding supportive systems in meaning and identity reconstruction.

The data gathered from the field work is presented in the subsequent chapters. The third chapter presents a socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The understanding of the socio demographic background of the respondents is inevitable for this study to analyse the other significant dimensions of young widowhood like bereavement, grief, identity, the problems faced, etc. The primary data collected through field work from young widows, is depicted in a graphical and descriptive form.

The researcher has made an attempt to understand the socio-economic background of the respondents, in the context of variables such as age of the respondents, education, employment, structure of the family, income, age at marriage, duration of marital life and other characteristics. The variables having the greatest influence on the identity reconstruction of the young widows is discussed below;

The study found that the highest percentage of widows belonged to the age group of 36-40 (42 per cent) followed by women between the age group of 31-35(24 percent) and 41- 45 (16 per cent). While 10 percent were widowed between 26 – 30 years and another 8 percent between 20- 25 years. This distribution indicates a notable presence of young widows who are significantly below the average age of widowhood (60-64 years) as per the Goa Marital Census 2011. With regard to educational attainment, the findings show that a large number of respondents are educated. Graduates are 29 per cent, followed by those who have completed H.S.S.C. (45.6 per cent), S.S.C. (13.7 per cent). About 8 per cent are post graduates. With regard to educational attainment, the findings indicate that a high percentage of widows have only completed schooling, with 45.6 percent having studied up to the 12th standard (H.S.S.C.) and 13.7 percent up to the 10th standard (S.S.C.). In contrast, a smaller proportion have pursued higher education, with 29 percent being graduates and only 8 percent holding postgraduate degrees.

In this study, it was found that 50 percent of the widows are employed in the private sector, highlighting their integration into the mainstream labour market. A significant portion, 25 percent, remain unemployed and are consequently dependent on family members, church organizations, and relatives for financial support, illustrating the economic vulnerabilities that accompany widowhood. Notably, 19 percent of the widows are self-employed, engaging in various entrepreneurial activities such as catering, tailoring, door-to-door sales, embroidery, knitting, tutoring, vegetable vending, and selling silt from riverbanks. Additionally, 6 percent are employed in government sector, which often provides more stability and benefits. Interestingly, some respondents have sought employment abroad in countries like Dubai and Kuwait, driven by the financial insecurity and sudden loss that widowhood brings. The findings indicate that while some widows have secured stable employment, such as government jobs or opportunities abroad, a significant number remain in economically vulnerable

positions, either unemployed or engaged in small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Only a few have access to secure, well-paying jobs, highlighting the financial instability that many widows face. A critical link was found between economic stability and the ability to navigate the profound personal changes that widowhood entailed. Such as taking on new responsibilities as sole providers and decision-makers. The economic hardships they face can further intensify feelings of isolation, grief, and uncertainty about the future.

The data on children's ages at the time of their father's death, highlights the multifaceted tasks faced by widows. The age of the child at the time of paternal loss has significant sociological implications, particularly in terms of dependency, socialisation, and emotional strain. A substantial 43 percent of children fall within the 6–10-year age group. This age is critical as it marks the early stages of formal education, where children require extensive emotional and practical support. They are developmentally capable of understanding the concept of death, which necessitates the mother's additional emotional labour to explain the loss and help the child deal with their grief. However, this increased dependency can restrict the mother's ability to seek new employment, thereby impacting the economic stability.

The second largest group, comprising 26 percent of children, falls within the 11–15-year age bracket. This period corresponds with adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by emotional turmoil and identity formation. The loss of a father figure during this critical period can profoundly impact the child's emotional and social development. For the widow, managing her own grief while addressing the complex emotional needs of an adolescent can be exceptionally challenging. The dual role of caregiver and emotional support system places significant strain on the mother, affecting her own process of grief and identity reconstruction.

Children aged 1-5 years represent a particularly vulnerable segment, heavily reliant on their mothers for all aspects of care. This dependency heightens the widow's caregiving responsibilities, limiting her ability to engage in employment or social activities that could facilitate economic and social mobility. The lack of a paternal figure during these formative years can impede the child's socialisation process, affecting their long-term emotional and psychological development. The smallest group, children aged 16-20 years, constitutes 6 percent of the sample. While older

children may exhibit greater independence, they still require parental guidance, especially as they go through significant life transitions such as completing education and entering the workforce. The absence of a father as a role model can impact their future aspirations and emotional stability especially for the male child, placing additional pressure on the widow to fulfil dual parental roles.

Extreme cases, such as a child being only three months old or the widow being pregnant at the time of her husband's death, highlight the severe emotional and financial strain faced by widows as sole caregivers from the onset. These scenarios emphasize the compounded difficulties in coping with grief while managing the immediate and intensive caregiving needs of very young children.

The data on duration of marriages among the widows studied, revealing significant patterns that are crucial for sociological analysis. It shows that 47 percent of the respondents were married for 6 to 10 years, representing the largest group. This duration typically encompasses key phases of marital life, including the establishment of shared routines, deeper emotional bonds, and potential parenting responsibilities, contributing to the development of a strong marital identity. Another substantial portion, 37 percent, had marriages lasting between 1 to 5 years, a period characterized by initial role socialization, spousal adjustment, and the development of joint life plans. The remaining 16 percent were married for 11 to 15 years, indicating a period where marriages generally achieve a level of stability and norm consolidation.

The selection criterion for this study, requiring respondents to have a minimum marriage duration of three to four years, is crucial. This is because the research focuses on identity construction post-widowhood, a process deeply influenced by the socialization and role internalization that occurs during marriage. The experiences of these women, shaped by their varying durations of marriage, provide a rich tapestry of narratives that can be analysed to understand how the length and depth of their marital relationships influence their role transition through widowhood. The varied durations offer insights into different stages of marital life and their impact on the widow's identity reconstruction, including role exit from being a wife to navigating new social roles and statuses as widows.

The length of the marriage not only affects the depth of the emotional and social adjustments required post-loss but also shapes the widow's sense of self and her strategies for coping and rebuilding her life. By exploring these different durations, the researcher can gain a nuanced understanding of the widowhood experience and the complex interplay between marital history and identity reconstruction. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how the social roles and identities formed during marriage influence the processes of role transition and identity renegotiation in widowhood.

The data on the structural composition of the family sheds light on the present living arrangements of widows and their children in the absence of their spouse. A majority, i.e., 68 percent of widows, live in a single-parent family with children headed by herself, which was a nuclear family prior to widowhood. Another 24 percent live in an extended family along with the in-laws and other relatives. Nine percent of the total respondents in this study are remarried.

The data highlights the adaptive nature of family structures in response to changes in marital status. The shift from a nuclear family to a single-parent family indicates resilience and the reconfiguration of familial roles to ensure stability and support. The presence of extended families for 24 percent of widows suggests a reliance on broader kin networks for emotional and practical support.

The primary data on income of the family post widowhood reveals a diverse income distribution among the respondents of this study with significant variations in their economic stability. A substantial 42 percent of respondents have a monthly income above Rs. 15,000, which indicates a relatively stable financial situation, allowing them to comfortably meet their basic expenses and possibly save or invest. In contrast, 26 percent earn between Rs. 11,000 and Rs. 15,000. While this group can manage their basic needs, their financial stability might be more vulnerable to economic fluctuations or unexpected expenses. On the lower end of the spectrum, 16 percent of respondents earn between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000, suggesting they face more significant financial challenges, although they might still manage to meet their basic expenses with some difficulty. This group is likely more reliant on support from extended family or community resources. The remaining 16 percent, earning less than Rs. 5,000, face severe financial hardships, making it extremely difficult to support their families

without substantial external aid. The upper-income group (earning above Rs. 15,000) represents women who likely have better access to education, employment opportunities, and social capital. This economic stability allows them to participate more fully in societal activities and potentially influence community decisions. In contrast, the lower-income groups face constraints that limit their social mobility and exacerbate their dependence on external support.

The fourth chapter titled ‘Bereavement and Socio-Cultural Dimension’ discusses bereavement and grief in the context of the socio-cultural milieu. It provides insights into the socio-cultural practices and rituals associated with death in general and widowhood, in particular. It also throws light on the cultural variations of rituals and beliefs associated with death and dying. The aim is to find out the psychological and societal impact of such rituals on the bereaved. While bereavement may be an intense personal phenomenon, it is at the same time very social. Man is a social being. The culture of a society provides with varying degrees of specificity, expectations (rules and regulations), both prescriptions and proscriptions, which can be consulted during bereavement. The rules usually specify mourning behaviour of various types, although non-mourning may be specified. Without rules to follow, individuals behave differently from how they do otherwise.

Conjugal bereavement has been characterised as one of the most complex, challenging, and stressful life events (Hardy, Concato, & Gill, 2004; Holmes & Rahe, 1967). It can be a source of distress not solely for one individual, or even a social network, but also for an entire community. Grief can be influenced by relationships, the setting, and the survivor’s personal and social resources. The marginal state of a widow, who is viewed as socially dead (Barik, 2009), is marked by a variety of rituals, all of which are damaging to a widow’s sense of self-identity. There are in each society, including that of the Roman Catholic Community of South Goa many, at times, tension creating, socio-cultural practices and mourning rituals. The rituals practised emphasise on unconditional love and absolute fidelity in the foreground and self-sacrifice as the proof of that love and devotion in the background and is that which defines, quite precisely what widowhood is. They are also excluded from rituals of certain domestic festivities, even from the wedding of her own children mostly in the case of Hindu widows with some exceptions in Catholic community as well.

In the fifth chapter titled ‘Widowed Young: Issues and Concerns’, the researcher found it pertinent to find out the issues and concerns particularly related to the young widow. The information regarding the challenges that the young widows often face as they navigate grief after their spouse's death and start rebuilding their lives post-loss is gathered through primary data collected from field work. The problems of widows especially young widows are not only immense, but also unique. Widowhood is also different from other marital statuses like never married, divorced, or separated. It is an unchosen situation. In this study, the respondents shared their reactions to becoming a widow due to the untimely death of their spouse, their experiences as single parents, the issues and concerns related to different aspects of their new status, and also in raising dependent children.

These issues and concerns are classified under different heads such as the psychological impact of widowhood., Physical Health, Physical Longing, Facing Judgement, Experiencing Loneliness, Parenting Bereaved Children, Loss of Income, Loss of Couple Friends’, Secondary Losses , Compounded Losses, Relationship with Parents, Siblings and In-laws, Social Implications of widowhood etc.

Chapter Six deals with the question of how young widows attempt to rebuild their identity after the spousal death. 38 participants were interviewed using pertinent questions to examine their experience of being a young widow, their understanding of identity, and their process of meaning reconstruction. The interviews were verbatim transcribed and analysed. What is central in this study is the impact of timing. This study focuses on death that has occurred at a younger-than-expected age. It is usually expected that death will occur at the end of the lifecycle. When the death of the spouse occurs at a younger age, it becomes challenging due to prolonged mourning as compared to older widows.

Widowhood is difficult at any age, but young widows and widowers often find themselves especially alienated from their peers, who are in the midst of having children, buying new homes, and in general building a life with their spouses. Also, most people under age 40 usually do not have anyone in their existing social circle who has experienced a similar loss. There is also the daunting prospect of living another 30, 40, or 50 years without your spouse by your side. Further, the relationships with the spouses are often a cornerstone of one's own identity; the spouse's needs, wants and

dreams are intertwined with one's own. Losing one's spouse means losing your identity as a husband or wife and thereby losing all of the plans one had with the spouse. This chapter thus provides an account of the various negotiations employed by these widowed spouses (wives) in their coping and to move ahead in their journey from coupled identity to being single again.

Responses conveyed that all the young widows were actively engaged in making meaning of their experience. This chapter explains the themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews and a description of these women's identity and meaning reconstruction process. Themes were created based on threads of similar responses and interpretations of the meaning of the responses .

7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The thesis begins by outlining the magnitude and phenomena of widowhood, with a focus on young widows. The aspects of identity and marginalisation that distinguish young widowhood from other forms of grieving are what set it apart from other types of bereavement. Young widowhood has significant sociological and psychological consequences, as has been discussed. The findings of this study support Identity theory of Erickson (1964) which states that our identity is linked to partnership and due to the untimely death of the spouse, widows find themselves back in the position of discovering who they are.

From a sociological perspective, the reorganization of relationships post-bereavement can be understood through the concept of role strain and role redefinition. Role strain occurs when an individual experiences difficulty in fulfilling the expectations associated with a particular role, in this case, the role of a widow. The loss of a spouse necessitates a redefinition of the widow's role within her social networks.

The Major findings of this thesis are as follows;

I. Reshuffling(Changing Dynamics) of Relationships

Relationships are vital in our lives because they allow two or more people to connect. Intimate connections are frequently associated with romantic or sexual partnerships, but they can also refer to any interpersonal relationship including physical

or emotional intimacy. A romantic partner, friends, family, loved ones, or sexual relationships are all examples of this. For the participants in this study, the loss of an intimate relationship resulted in changes in other relationships. They are;

a. In-laws: The death of a spouse often led to a reshuffling of relationships with in-laws. Some participants reported growing closer to their in-laws, as the shared grief over the loss of a son strengthened their bond. Conversely, others experienced increased distance and bitterness, leading to misunderstandings and a withdrawal of support.

b. Natal Families: A majority of participants found that their natal families (parents and siblings) formed stronger bonds with them. This reinforcement of familial ties provided emotional and practical support, helping them navigate their loss. The strengthening of bonds with natal families can be seen as a re-establishment of kinship networks. These networks provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, which are crucial during the grieving process. This shift often leads to a stronger reliance on family of origin rather than the marital family.

c. Formation and Restoration of Friendships: Many women formed new friendships post-bereavement, seeking connections that could understand and support their new identity as widows. Others sought to reconcile or rebuild old friendships, finding solace in the familiar bonds from their past. Socializing with friends they shared as a couple became less common, indicating a shift in their social circles to better fit their new life circumstances. The formation of new friendships and the rekindling of old ones can be seen as an effort to rebuild social capital. Social capital refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. For widows, rebuilding social capital is essential for social support and integration.

Despite the profound loss, participants expressed optimism about the potential for starting a new life and forming new relationships. This reflects a resilient outlook and the capacity to envision a future beyond their immediate grief. This illustrates the impact of widowhood on social networks and relationship dynamics. The reconfiguration of social networks demonstrates how individuals adapt to significant life changes by reshaping their social ties. This process involves both the strengthening of some relationships and the dissolution or distancing of others. The formation and

restoration of friendships indicate the importance of social capital—the networks of relationships that provide support and resources.

II Reconstructing Spirituality

A worldview is a mental framework that develops as a result of acquiring established norms. As per these norms, widowhood is expected to appear later in life in most marriages. Hence, the premature death of a spouse becomes a non-normative event. It alters people's fundamental assumptions about life, forcing them to rethink their worldview, which are as below;

a) Changes in Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

The majority of young widows said their spiritual or religious beliefs had changed after experiencing the unexpected early death of their spouse. For the most part, their religious perspective became clearer and grew stronger. They went through significant shifts in their religious or spiritual beliefs due to this life- altering event.

b) Strengthening Faith

One participant, who was an active member of her church community, found solace and strength in her faith. She said that her belief in a higher power gave her a sense of purpose and helped her navigate her grief. She became more involved in church activities and found a support system among fellow congregants. This reflects the concept of "religious coping," where individuals use their faith to cope with stress and adversity.

c) Questioning Faith

Another participant experienced a crisis of faith. The sudden loss of her husband led her to question the existence of God and the fairness of life. She struggled with feelings of anger and betrayal, which are indicative of "spiritual dissonance," a state where one's religious beliefs are in conflict with their experiences.

d) Increased Compassion

Many participants reported an increase in faith in the Divine and a newfound compassion for the downtrodden. This can be linked to the concept of "spiritual

awakening," where individuals develop a heightened sense of empathy and a desire to help others. One widow started volunteering at a local shelter, feeling a deep connection to those who were suffering and a calling to alleviate their pain.

The premature death of a spouse forced participants to rethink their fundamental assumptions about life. This revaluation process aligns with the sociological theory of "disenchantment," where individuals become disillusioned with previously held beliefs and seek new ways of understanding the world. Widowhood is generally considered a normative event in old age. However, for young widows, it is a non-normative event that disrupts their anticipated life trajectory. One participant shared how the sudden loss of her husband shattered her long-term plans, forcing her to adapt to a new reality and redefine her future goals.

III. Transformation in Former and Current Identity

Participants had to respond to a question about their previous and present identities. Most participants initially defined their former identities in terms of their coupled status, reflecting a "marital identity" where their sense of self was closely tied to their relationship with their spouse.

a) Marital and Coupled Identity

For many new widows, this question was particularly challenging as they were only beginning to grapple with the concept of identity in relation to their loss. They found themselves in a state of "identity liminality," a sociological concept describing a transitional phase where individuals are no longer in their previous role but have not yet fully integrated into a new one. This ambiguous status of being 'single' yet still married highlights the complexity of their identity reconstruction.

b) Positive Transformation in Identity

Despite the initial identity crisis, many participants stated that the death of their spouse catalysed a willingness to improve their lives and make an impact on their communities. This shift reflects the concept of "post-traumatic growth," where individuals experience positive psychological changes as a result of struggling with highly challenging life

circumstances. Participants expressed hope that sharing their experiences could provide some benefit, either to themselves or to others facing similar situations.

c) Intertwined Identities and Shock

Several participants described their identities within the context of their relationships with their husbands, expressing shock at how intertwined their identities had become. This intertwining can be understood through the lens of "relational identity theory," which posits that our identities are significantly shaped by our relationships. The greatest challenge for new widows was the shift from a collective 'we' identity to an individual 'I' identity. This shift necessitates a process of "identity renegotiation," where individuals must redefine their sense of self independently of their spouse.

d) Hopes and Fears for the Future

The young widows expressed a mixture of hope for a better future and fear of another calamity. Many hoped to establish new relationships, change occupations, pursue new careers, move abroad, or further their education to enhance their prospects. This forward-looking perspective is indicative of "future-oriented coping," a strategy where individuals focus on planning and preparing for future challenges and opportunities as a means of managing their current distress. The participants' responses highlight the profound impact of widowhood on identity. The transition from a coupled identity to a redefined self-concept involves navigating liminality, experiencing post-traumatic growth, renegotiating relational identities, and adopting future-oriented coping strategies.

IV. Unique Nature of Young Widowhood

The research findings highlight the distinctive challenges faced by young widows, which differ markedly from those experienced by older widows. The findings also bring out the complexities of young widowhood which are as follows;

a) Parenting Responsibilities

One significant issue that sets young widows apart is the dual burden of parenting minor bereaved children while managing their own grief. This situation is not commonly faced by older widows, whose children are typically adults. The concept of

"role strain" is pertinent here, as young widows must navigate the conflicting demands of being both a grieving spouse and a single parent. This dual responsibility exacerbates their emotional and psychological stress, requiring them to provide stability and support for their children while coping with their own loss.

b) Marital Status Dilemma

Young widows also grapple with the dilemma of whether to remarry, a concern less prevalent among older widows who are more likely to accept their single status. The societal expectation that young widows should remarry reflects the "temporary state" view of widowhood. This notion is reinforced by the definition of a widow as "a woman who has lost her husband by death and usually has not remarried" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2008). This definition implies that widowhood is a transient phase, potentially minimizing the long-term emotional and psychological impact on the widow.

V. Societal Expectations and Identity Reconstruction

Another finding of this research work is the assumption society has about young widows. It is assumed that young widows can easily begin a new life and remarry. This overlooks the profound and enduring effects of their loss. This expectation can be understood through the sociological concept of "social identity theory," which explores how individuals' self-concepts are shaped by their social roles and relationships. For young widows, the pressure to remarry can conflict with their process of identity reconstruction, as they navigate their new status and redefine their sense of self outside the context of their marriage.

a) Emotional and Psychological Impact

The unique nature of young widowhood is further compounded by societal perceptions that underestimate the long-term emotional and psychological consequences of losing a spouse at a young age. The minimization of these effects can be linked to the "disenfranchised grief" concept, where the grief of young widows is not fully acknowledged or supported by society. This lack of recognition can hinder their coping mechanisms and delay their healing process.

VI. Lack of role models for widows

A significant finding in this research is the lack of role models for young widows. Although many participants were aware of other women who had lost their husbands at a young age, they lacked close confidants or mentors with whom they could share their experiences. This absence of relatable role models contributed to the difficulties young widows faced in navigating their new life circumstances. The participants in this study expressed a need for the guidance and wisdom of other young widows, which they believed could provide invaluable first-hand knowledge and powerful insights into thriving beyond their bereavement. The lack of such role models left these young widows feeling isolated and unsupported, exacerbating the challenges of accepting and adapting to their new status.

In the context of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, young widows face the crisis of "identity versus role confusion," typically experienced in adolescence but resurfacing due to the traumatic loss of a spouse. This stage involves exploring personal identity and integrating various roles into a cohesive sense of self. Without role models to guide them, young widows struggle to redefine their identities and roles, leading to prolonged periods of confusion and instability. The only role models available to these young widows were often their widowed mothers or mothers-in-law, who were widowed at a much older age. This intergenerational disconnect meant that the experiences and coping mechanisms of older widows were not directly applicable or relatable to the younger widows' circumstances. The older widows' acceptance of their single status and their different life stage meant they could not fully empathize with or support the younger widows' unique challenges. The lack of appropriate role models significantly hindered the identity reconstruction process for young widows. Without such figures, young widows found it challenging to envision and work towards a positive future, often feeling stuck in their grief and loss.

VII. Discriminatory customary practices particularly among the Catholic Gawda community

The prevalence of the bangle-breaking ritual exists among the Catholic Gawda community in South Goa, despite their Christian identity. This can be attributed to the community's deep historical roots, cultural syncretism, and the persistence of traditional

practices. Originally part of Hindu society, the Gawdas retained many rituals and customs, including those associated with widowhood, even after converting to Christianity in the 16th century. This continuity reflects the enduring influence of their Hindu past, where the bangle-breaking ritual symbolized the end of a woman's marital status and her transition to widowhood. Over time, the Catholic Gawda community developed a syncretic culture, blending Hindu customs with Christian beliefs, allowing certain traditional practices to persist. Social and cultural pressures within the community likely reinforced adherence to this ritual, maintaining social cohesion and identity despite shifts in religious beliefs. The ritual's symbolic significance in marking widowhood, coupled with the general resistance to change in traditional societies, has contributed to the ongoing practice of bangle-breaking among Catholic Gawdas, highlighting the complex interplay of religion, culture, and identity in their lives.

Bangles, which are traditionally worn by married women, represent marital status, prosperity, and the husband's protection. For many widows, this act also symbolizes a loss of their identity as a wife, which can be deeply traumatic. It publicly marks them as widows, changing their social status instantly. The ritual often takes place in a public or semi-public setting. It takes place just before the body is taken to the church for final rites. Relatives or older women in the community usually break the bangles. The public nature of the ritual can add to the humiliation and emotional distress experienced by the widow, reinforcing her loss and the societal expectations placed upon her. This ritual is rooted in patriarchal norms that view women primarily in relation to their husband. This practice reflects broader issues of gender equality and the secondary status of women in many traditional societies.

Traditions often dictate that widows lead a life of chastity and seclusion, limiting their social interactions and mobility. This can result in social isolation and a sense of exclusion from community life. It has been observed that widowers do not face such restrictions related to strict mourning practice like wearing dull- coloured clothes, and leading a life of chastity and seclusion .Widows bear the brunt of societal expectations that severely curtail their social activities and reinforce their marginalization. The transition from wife to widow involves a dramatic shift in social roles and identity, often leading to role conflict and identity crises. Widows often face societal expectations that dictate a life of chastity and seclusion. Thus, limiting their

social interactions and mobility. This can result in social isolation and a sense of exclusion from community life.

Also, honouring traditions of chaste life for widows and reinforcing certain societal patterns like 'marriage is only once' and belief in 'fate and destiny' further restrict the social mobility of young widows. This further restrict their social mobility. The widows' socioeconomic position is greatly impacted by the enforcement of such restrictive and extended mourning practices, isolation, and enforced dress regulations in some cases. It was observed that the widows of Catholic Gawda community accept their life of permanent widowhood irrespective of their age at the time of bereavement. This illustrates the powerful influence of deeply rooted cultural practices. On the other hand, widows in urban areas tend to view the mourning period as a temporary phase. They believe that they can eventually move forward in life, possibly remarry, or live independently. The Gawda widows often discuss their status with a sense of acceptance, leading a life free from extravagance while continuing to honour the memory of their marriage and the status bestowed upon them by their late husbands. This shows the impact of deeply rooted cultural practices on widows in rural and urban contexts, highlighting the differences in their experiences and responses to widowhood.

VIII. Factors Influencing Identity Reconstruction Among Young Widows

The process of identity reconstruction for young widows is complex and varies significantly depending on multiple factors. These include age at widowhood, income, family support, educational status, employment, caste, and others.

a) Age at Widowhood

Young widows, especially those who lose their spouses in their early 20s or 30s, often face a unique set of challenges. The sudden shift from a married life to widowhood can be particularly jarring, given the expectations of a long marital life ahead. For instance, a widow in this study lost her husband unexpectedly due to a heart attack. At the time of his death, they had two young children, aged 3 and 5. The sudden loss of her spouse left her devastated, but she quickly realized that she needed to be strong for her children. Her identity reconstruction was deeply intertwined with her role as a mother, which became her primary focus. The constant demand to be emotionally available for her children left her with little time to process her own grief. The need to

provide for her children pushed her to take on multiple roles. She also faced societal pressures and expectations about how a young widow should behave, including suggestions to remarry quickly for the sake of her children. Identity reconstruction involved redefining herself not just as a widow but also as a single mother. She had to navigate the dual responsibilities of being both mother and father to her children. This shift required her to develop new skills and strengths, including financial management and emotional resilience. Thus, the process of identity reconstruction for young widows with children involves balancing grief, financial responsibilities, and the emotional needs of their children.

b) Income

Economic stability plays a crucial role in how young widows negotiate their new identity. Those with a secure financial background or a substantial inheritance may find it easier to command respect and maintain their social status. For example, a young widow in this study inherited her husband's business, another one received his death benefit amount of almost a crore of rupees as the death occurred on duty on the cruise liner on which he was employed. It was found that such woman having a significant personal income may not face the same level of financial and hardship as those without such resources. This financial stability can provide a buffer against some of the social and economic challenges of widowhood.

c) Support of the Family

The support of the family can be a decisive factor in a young widow's ability to reconstruct her identity. The research found that a young widow with a supportive family that encourages her to pursue her unmet goals or employment is likely to experience a more positive transformation. For example, a young widow was welcomed back into her parental home along with her two children could rebuild her life more effectively. After gaining family support for two years, she took up a job abroad. She now supports both her parents as well as her children. In contrast, another young widow, who was an orphan raised by her deceased aunt and had no familial support, expressed

despair and hopelessness during the interview. She faced the challenge of caring for her two young children without a support network, highlighting the significant impact of family support on a young widow's process of identity reconstruction.

d) Caste Factor

The caste can indeed be a significant factor in the process of identity reconstruction for widows. In many societies, including India, caste-based norms and expectations can influence how widows are perceived. In the Catholic Gawda community, which is classified as a Scheduled Tribe, widows experience heightened levels of social stigma and discrimination compared to those from higher castes. Caste-based traditions and expectations dictate how widows are expected to behave, dress, and interact with society. For instance, widows from this community are required to adhere to specific rituals, such as wearing a black dress along with a black stole for one year following the loss of their husband, reflecting the concept of "ritualized mourning". Caste also influences the norms and practices related to widow remarriage. In this communities, widow face more resistance or social pressure against remarriage. There is a strong normative belief that marriage should occur only once. Interestingly, the participants from this community accepted their widows' roles and associated restrictions without much resistance. Thus, showcasing how individuals internalize oppression.

IX. Remarriage

Marriage is regarded as a revered social institution in Indian society. Unfortunately, widow remarriage in Indian culture lacks encouragement and support. The findings of this study revealed that only one out of 38 respondents has remarried. Widows may not remarry easily due to a combination of social, cultural, and personal factors. Societal norms and expectations, influenced by culture and religion, often dictate acceptable behaviours regarding widowhood and remarriage. In many cultures, there are strong norms that expect widows to remain faithful to their deceased spouse or to adhere to specific mourning rituals for extended periods. Thus, the young widows pass their remaining life in widowhood. There are strong beliefs about the sanctity of marriage and the idea that marriage should only occur once in a lifetime. These cultural beliefs influence widows' attitudes towards remarriage and may lead to reluctance or

hesitation to enter into a new marital relationship. Thus, remaining in widowhood is seen as the most honourable course of action.

Several participants expressed a profound attachment to their deceased spouses, leading them to dismiss the idea of remarriage. Personal considerations, such as the satisfaction derived from their previous marital relationships and the desire for a new romantic connection, also played a role in the decision-making process. Fear emerged as a prominent deterrent to remarriage, particularly among those with dependent children. Concerns revolved around the potential rejection of their children by a new partner. There were also apprehensions regarding property rights. Notably, one participant opted against remarriage to avoid leaving her sole surviving mother-in-law. This shows the significance of traditional gender norms that place greater emphasis on women's roles as caregivers and homemakers within the context of marriage.

Some widows have prioritized economic independence and self-sufficiency over remarriage. They prefer to focus on their careers or financial stability rather than entering into a new marriage. This reflects the concept of "rational choice" in decision-making, where individuals weigh the benefits and costs of different options before making a decision.

X. Positive as well as negative outcomes of widowhood

Findings of the study show that widowhood has both positive and negative outcomes. The study found that participants developed positive as well as negative outcomes. Some became more empathetic and compassionate towards others. They learned to value the time they have with their children and their family. Others developed a negative outlook on life. A sense of futility and suspicion that nothing in life is worthwhile, an inability to sleep, and a need to blame fate, were found to be common among the widows. The shared experience among all participants was a profound sense of loss, not only in terms of losing their spouse but also feeling like they had lost a part of themselves as a wife and as a complete human being. This feeling of ceasing to exist in their previous roles was a common theme that emerged from the study. However, amidst this struggle, a consistent source of hope and motivation for the participants was their children. The responsibility of caring for and nurturing their

children became a primary focus and reason to keep going. The love and bond they shared with their children provided a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, despite the profound loss they experienced.

7.3 TOWARDS MAKING THE LOSS BEARABLE

The thesis offers some steps towards making life more manageable during and after bereavement.

1. Each form of bereavement is different. Conjugal bereavement is not the same as other forms of bereavement like loss of a child or a loss of a sibling. Hence, utmost care should be taken while addressing a young widow especially for those widowed young. Counselling is crucial to orient these widows about the potential of re-marriage and its role in fulfilling their physiological and psychological needs like sexual gratification, provision of emotional support and others.

2. Role of Church and clergy in addressing widowhood rituals is significant. There is a need for “institutional intervention” to enlighten the community on the harmful effects of widowhood rituals and practices. There is also a need to change societal norms and practices that negatively impact widows.

3. The colleges and universities could offer courses on gender studies, women studies or feminists’ courses as an alternative approach to propose for addressing topics such as inclusivity, sensitivity, oppression, patriarchy and human empathy. The school curriculum should incorporate the various forms of widow abuses and sensitise the student and teaching community over irrational beliefs. Incorporating discussions on various forms of widow abuse and dispelling irrational beliefs in school curricula reflects a sociological approach known as "education for social change." By sensitizing students and teachers, this intervention aims to challenge existing stereotypes and promote social awareness and empathy towards widows....

4. There is a need for church or community-based widows support groups or online organisations. The internet forum today is well-established and widely used in western nations, thus, demonstrating that this community of widows requires a setting and a context in which they can articulate their emotions, voice their concerns and meet others who will reciprocate without prejudice.

5. Members of the general society should try to offer meaningful support to young widows in their role as friends, family, colleagues, or other support systems.
6. There is a need to educate young girls and unmarried women on misconceptions associated with widowhood. This will promote a more inclusive and empathetic society towards widows in the future
7. Most of the respondents suggested getting life insurance as they shared their experience of how the insurance claim helped them. Similarly, many shared their experiences of financial burden as their spouse did not have any insurance. Highlighting the importance of life insurance and financial planning reflects the concept of "economic empowerment."
8. Assistance in finding employment and child-minding facilities and temporary financial support is another way of extending support .
9. Many widows living with authoritarian in-laws having a patriarchal mindset would prefer to leave their homes if some alternative is available to them. Hence, efforts to provide such shelter homes is welcome.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the limitations and specific focus of the present study, there is scope for further research in several directions. Firstly, a cross-sectional study of young widows across religious, caste, and class backgrounds is highly recommended. Such an approach would allow for a comparative analysis of how intersecting social identities influence the experience of widowhood. Exploring variations in coping strategies, support systems, and social stigma across these dimensions can provide a more nuanced understanding of widowhood in diverse cultural contexts. For instance, the experiences of a young Catholic widow in Goa may significantly differ from those of a Hindu or Muslim widow from another region, owing to differing religious rituals, societal expectations, and community support mechanisms.

Secondly, existing literature and social discourse predominantly focus on widows, often overlooking the plight of widowers, particularly young men who have

lost their spouses. Therefore, future research should also include a gendered analysis of grief and bereavement by studying widowers' experiences, coping mechanisms, and social reintegration. Understanding how men navigate loss, single parenthood, and the expectations of masculinity in the wake of their wives' deaths would not only fill a significant gap in the literature but also challenge assumptions that men are less emotionally affected by bereavement. Such studies would help build a more holistic view of spousal loss, incorporating both male and female perspectives.

Given the fast-paced life today and the radical changes in social institutions as well as social relationships there is no stigma or taboo for widow remarriage. A study could be undertaken to know how the young widows navigate these transitions from experiencing widowhood and bereavement, to seeking partners through remarriage. Such women who have experienced second innings in matrimony are encouraged to share their narratives. This will help to broaden the data available on young widowhood and construction of their new identity. Further, researchers can also study how such women maintain connections with their children and former in-laws.

GLOSSARY

Aaachar	Superstitious beliefs
Adavot	Envy/resentful emotion
Aimori	Evening prayer of catholic community held at 7.00 p.m.
Alma Ferth	Souls' Day observed by Roman Catholic community on 2nd November each year
Armar	Cupboard
Bonth	A particular veil worn by widows of some catholic communities
Bhut	Soul or spirit of a dead person or animal that can appear to the living
Besanv	Blessing given by elders at the time of holy sacraments e.g. Marriage
Bhikre Jevonn	Food offered for the poor on behalf of the departed souls of the family
Buniad	Foundation
Chitti Vachop	Reading of the Banns in the church (A practice to announce about marriage of a couple among catholic community)
Chuddho	Bangle wearing ceremony of a to- be -bride
Contreal	A niche where the skeletal remains of the dead are stored as a memoir
Cinz	Ashes
Cantar	Sing/chant
Devak	For God
Dixtt	Evil eye
Doth	Dowry
Doce	A Goan sweet made for weddings and special occasions
Denem	Trousseau (gifts given to a girl at the time of her marriage by her family)

Forok	Difference
Gauddi	Original inhabitants of Goa who enjoy social rights
Ghor Khuris	Blessing of the foundation stone of a house bearing a cross carving
Ghozali	Rumour or talk of a personal, sensational, or intimate nature
Interrak	Burial
Igorz	Church
Kakonn	Bangle
Kakonkar	Bangle seller
Khuris	Cross
Kopel	Chapel
Kazar	Marriage ceremony
Magnnem	Prayer
Modd	Cloud/storm
Madrin	Godmother
Nal	Coconut
Nirmon	Destiny
Pagushe/Bonth	A stole worn by widows in Christian Gawda community usually black in colour
Paggilat	Crazy
Povitr	Sacred
Patoleo	Special local sweet of rice and jaggery
Paraya	Stranger
Padri	Priest
Padrin	Godfather
Raand	Informal term for ‘widow’
Rakhondar	Protector
Reindoros	An Indo-Portuguese word for toddy tapper
Resper	Nuptial ceremony
Ros	Application of coconut pulp ceremony
Rit	Rite
Roxi Matov	Pandal made for cooking the wedding food

Sagrad	Sacred/Holy
Tarikh	Date
Ters	Recitation of the holy rosary prayer
Umed	Enthusiasm
Upas	Abstinence
Viaje	Voyage
Vaddo	Village
Vidhwa	Widow
Vistid	Dress
Zagor	Night vigil
Zon	District
Zothis	Special marriage songs

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