

WIDOWHOOD: A CASE STUDY OF THREE BIHARI WOMEN

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The aim of this interview-based study of three middle-class widowed-women from Patna (Bihar) is to understand their emotional state and social circumstances after a sudden demise of their respective husband. The present study employed interview as well as observation methods. Specifically, the study was designed to explore the widows' family environment, coping ways, sources of support, hardships, resilience, etc. Their responses indicate that despite sustained despondent mental state, these widowed women somehow adapt to the situation and gradually become relatively confident and self-independent. Children, family members, friends, and parents extend their supports in time of need. They maintain a close relation with their in-laws despite the less support or assistance extended by the latter to the former.

Keywords: widowhood, resilience, self-independent, Indian married woman

Naturally, it is very difficult for anyone to fully understand what goes on in the mind and heart of a suffering person who has lost her spouse. After a shock, depression, anguish, hopelessness, and being treated unfairly by destiny, it is natural for a grief-stricken person to face the painful reality and must continue to strive and move on in life. Perhaps some people may not like to talk about one's own disturbing memories; one may try to make a genuinely attempt to understand such people. However, it is also necessary that an appropriate approach of study to understand the mental state and challenges of such women (widows) be taken up. Generally, widows do struggle to cope with their loneliness, misery, and void; at times deal with their vulnerability and recover from depression and powerlessness (Achanta, 2012;

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Mar, 2021; Mishra, 2019; Lizi, 2021; Wright, 2009). The question to ponder upon remains, 'if it is correct to envisage and construct their experiences or we don't know them as they fight with their emotional battle in their own way?' Such attempt can perhaps be justified through the submission that the protagonist is but another human being like us and by trying to understand the psycho-social dynamics behind the widowhood experiences. The psycho-social state of widows could be assessed starting from the initial trauma to the ultimate realization that life goes on, and the understanding of oneself as being-human, and the revisiting of one's own weaknesses and strength.

Generally, the psychological evidences for the proposition that 'losses may lead to gains' are mostly limited to anecdotal reports. In the west, there have been efforts to have theoretical models designed to account for the processes by which traumas can lead to benefits. Studies have shown that depressed widows can change themselves during the process of recuperation and become psychologically evolved, self-independent, and positive by extending themselves to their surrounding world choosing to be more other-oriented, helpful, and sacrificing, others may become self-centred, defensive, vulnerably hurt and anxious (Trivedi, Sareen & Dhyani, 2009; Ullrich, 1988; Zisook & Shuchter, 1993).

An ideally believed and traditional world view is that in India, a Hindu marriage is a solemn association between two persons who wish to remain husband and wife not only in this life but for the rest of the seven lives to come (Gupta, 2011). In the context of India, the word 'widow' somewhat carries a negative connotation which has been swiftly changing for the urban women since the last ten years or more (Kadoya & Yin, 2015). On one hand, an average Indian woman repents outliving her husband in sensing the loss of her social status and on the other, in a conservative society like India, the social perception of a 'widow' may still be subtly undermined (Chandra, 2011; Kundu, 2018; Thara, 2004; Sitanggang, 2018). Naturally, losing one's life partner is a huge personal, emotional, and financial blow that puts an Indian woman in a serious vulnerable state especially when one is not economically independent and comes from a low- or middle-class society (Durai & Arokia, 2016; Jegan, 2020).

The present research-which is interview-based-attempts to understand the life experiences of Indian widows and their struggles, challenges, and

overcoming capacity associated ‘widowhood’. It explores on the enormity of ‘vulnerability’ among widows through a case of three selected widowed women of Patna, Bihar, a relatively more traditional Indian society.

Method

Backdrop of the Interview

The interview conducted was inspired by an ongoing research project from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, which primarily focuses on the understanding of vulnerable people and the concerns related to their relatively powerless position, resilience power, and trauma management process, etc. (NCCR LIVES, initiated in 2011). The questions for the interview were designed like those of the said project after receiving consent from the principal investigator. Keeping in view of the cultural milieu of India, the questions were scrutinized to be suitable for a small study to be carried out in Patna.

The Respondents

A case of three selected middle-class widowed women from Patna of Bihar, India who recently lost their husband was considered. The interview was carried out in 2012. Prior to the interview, consents were taken from all the three interviewee participants. While the youngest interviewee lost her husband only after 14 month of her marriage and was left with a 6-month-old daughter, the other two (middle-aged) whose children are grown up, had lost their husbands some years back. Two of them live with their in-laws. All personal details of the respondents were kept confidential. However, for the purpose of this paper, the author preferred to identify each respondent by imaginary names i.e., *Sunita*, *Sudha*, and *Puja* for the first, second, and third respondent respectively.

Interview Questions

The interview questions (Appendix) were developed to draw information on a few domains of ‘widowhood’ i.e., to explore on the vulnerable position (shocked and pained) of widows after a sudden demise of their husband, a lifelong companion and supporter. Open-ended unstructured questions were also asked to understand the mental state and other mundane concerns of the widows. Overall, the interview process seeks to understand issues on their emotional fragility, hardship, perception of relevant others, future plan,

attempts to gain status, and efforts towards recovery, etc. The descriptive content from the interviews is presented under some specifically chosen heads and sub heads that incorporate the data from the above-mentioned domain.

The Observations

First, descriptions from the women's *married life with her husband* are presented which is followed by their *feelings and emotions* after they lost their husband. The next part of the annotation deals with the change (if any) in the *perception of the relevant others* towards the widowed woman. The subsequent part is about *resilience* and includes *factors* behind women's efforts towards *resilience* and the resources of *resilience* for them. Next in line are the observations on *adaptation*. That is, how does widowed women *adapt* to their new situation, demands, and responsibilities. In the very end, the *outcomes* of their struggle and emotional journey are accounted for. In sum, the respondents' expositions are elaborated under six common themes and a few sub-themes.

Widowhood: The Experience

Feelings and Emotions after the Loss

Loss of spouse generates a whirlpool of emotions and for almost every widow these emotions are of pain, suffering, depression and hopelessness. A few highlights of the descriptive data suggested that the aggrieved woman's emotional state *was strong and overtaking, it took time to have control over emotions or it was very difficult to do so*. For instance, though Sunita said that her children continuously tried to console her, and money was also not a big concern, "feelings take over and there is no control on them" (wept). Sunita's tears rolled easily, she was inconsolable at times and became very emotional when referring to her husband. On the other hand, Sudha could not control her feelings for around a couple of years. However, it dawned upon her that if she kept on crying in front of people, they would think that she has the habit of weeping and hence, managed to control her emotions. Puja admitted having no control over herself and her eyes were brimmed with tears on several occasions even now (after so many years of her husband's death). Puja was able to regain some control over her emotions due to the continuous co-operation and support of her brothers and parents who helped her get a place to live and set a small shop.

Experiences of one's own Husband

All the interviewees categorically expressed that their husbands were “supportive and loving”. Sunita’s (respondent#1) husband was a “model” for her, and she considered him her “guide and *guru*”. According to Sudha (respondent#2), her husband sometimes offered help in her daily chores and was a “good human being.” He did support his younger brother for engineering studies and urged her not to crib over small family matters in order to maintain peace in the family. Puja (respondent#3) had a very short married life. Her husband was “loving” to her and to their six months old daughter. He showed respect to her family.

Having a good husband is a good thing in every woman’s conjugal life. For Sunita, despite the differences at her in-law’s place, her husband remained supportive and loving towards her. He was good to convince her on any matter. Similarly, Sudha’s husband was a person of good mind and thoughts (*buddhi vichar*). Sudha repented that she had lost the only person in the family in whom she could confide. Her husband respected her parents while her in-laws didn’t like them. Moreover, he was a supportive father who cared for his children’s education, listened to his wife and was a responsible son to his parents.

Even in the very short span of her married life, Puja found her husband so loving and that her sisters-in-laws playfully taunted her for this. He was a doting father to their little daughter with whom he had only 6 months to spend.

The widowed women reported a few things that were not so ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in their married life. Sunita felt that her husband’s job was a “struggle” with long time-consuming travelling hours forcing him to return home late at night. She mentioned on what she found ‘bad’ in her marriage was related to her husband’s happy-go-lucky “*bindas*” or casual attitude. Sudha on the other hand, didn’t like the occasional taunts or scoffs coming from her husband on not receiving enough gifts (golden ring and chain, etc.) from her parents. She was hurt and she also argued defending her parents. Further, her husband didn’t consult her in important joint-family decisions. The third respondent Puja could not spend enough time with her husband and had little to add.

Unsupportive In-laws

None of the women found their in-laws supportive, affectionate or understanding especially after their husband's demise. The family background of Sunita's parental home was quite different from that of her in-laws in terms of traditions and lifestyles. Sunita spent about 10 years in her husband's joint family which seemed a "torture" and "quite a bad life as people were selfish." Unlike her experience of love and affection from her parents and kins, her in-laws' expectations were high, and her efforts were not appreciated. Sunita told that after her husband demise, her in-law's family was with her for about 15 to 20 days for meetings the customary social obligations. Nevertheless, Sunita continues to maintain her relationship with her in-law's as they are residing in the same complex.

Sudha married to a big joint family along with her husband's three brothers and five sisters. Her husband's family environment is a 'difficult ambience' for her who comes from a small nuclear family. Sudha's in laws expected her to be polite and obedient, serve the elders, care for the young and be a help in family chores. Throughout the interaction, Sudha's message was loud and clear that she was not happy with her in-laws as they consider her 'uncaring' and 'relentless'. They rarely support her in her life matters. Sudha admitted that she kept herself aloof from the family matters as all the important family decisions were taken in consent with her mother-in-law and sons of the family. She added that her husband was close to his mother and always consulted her in important matters.

Quite shockingly for Puja, her in-laws suddenly changed and disowned her after her husband's death. They didn't return her personal belongings, gifts and clothes that her infant daughter was gifted after her birth. Puja left her husband's home empty. Though her in-laws are not economically weak, they seldom ask her to stay to nurture and care her daughter (their female grandchild). She, however, has healthy ties with her husband's second cousins, who are nice to her though she hardly keeps in touch with them. It was equally surprising that Puja didn't show bitterness or anger nor asked for her share from her husband's family property.

'Turning Points' in the Widows' Life

In general, the 'turning point' question appeared somewhat difficult for the respondents to understand. Nevertheless, Sunita told that perhaps 12-13

years back her involvement in different domestic engagements has help her to “improve her mental health” and to become more capable (*saksham*) and strong. Sunita can manage to support her elder son for his studies in one of the engineering colleges in Bangalore, which is one of the great efforts for her being a widow.

Sudha has become more independent and does not depend on someone for her decisions. A major ‘turning point’ for her is being the ‘head woman’ of the family i.e., a voice in the family affairs (family property, marriage, etc.), after the demise of her mother-in-law. For Puja on the other hand, the ‘turning point’ is in getting the ownership of the shop along with the support of her brothers. For her, there is a prospect of becoming self-independent and economically a stable woman.

Overall, it may be said, that being able to make decisions, having a voice in the family and the prospect of becoming self-independent are the turning points in the lives of the widows interviewed.

Perception of Relevant Others

Perhaps, a person in a disadvantageous situation is perceived with disrespect and disdain thinking that he/she has low social status, is weak and not good enough anymore. Change in the attitude and behaviour of close relative and in-laws, is worth focusing on especially if the target of the unkind behaviour is a widowed daughter in-law. The descriptive data suggested about a few possibilities: (a) *there will not be much change in the attitude and behaviour of the relevant others and genuine well-wishers (i.e., mother, brother, at times second cousins and some friends) will always stand by,* (b) *relatives could be scornful and envious or form an opinion and* (c) *the in-laws could disown the daughter in-law and her children completely.*

Sunita’s in-laws do not show any noticeable or negative change in their behaviour and attitude, nor do they offer her any significant support. On the other hand, her maternal cousins and particularly her maternal brother and his family, always stand by her and remain “helpful, caring and supportive.” However, Sunita regrets that her husband’s relatives did not praise her for helping the elderly members of the family nor did much for them.

Sudha’s in-laws are not supportive. The only exception is her husband’s younger brother who helped her with some money and otherwise too. The

particularly momentous support comes from her mother. Apparently, if Sudha succeeds in getting something done, the scornful and envious reaction of some relatives is, “Oh she has been able to do this; she will be able to manage herself and can carry on well”. The people who know Sudha, somewhat hold the opinion that ‘she does what she feels like’ or ‘takes her own decisions and therefore it is not worth telling her anything’. A few relatives stop contacting her as Sudha prefers avoiding them. Sudha realizes that often people would bring up old domestic stories or personal family experiences and such conversations do not interest her. When others talk about her husband, she pains because he is not going to come back, and the topic does not make sense or is any consolation.

For Puja, the change is obvious in the attitude of her late husband’s family. They totally disowned her and her infant daughter after her husband’s death. Though Puja’s distant relatives or her husband’s second cousins are nice and often insist her to stay at her husband’s home, Puja hardly find occasions to meet the supportive relatives. Apparently, the moral, psychological, and monetary supports are from her brothers and parents.

Factors behind Resilience

Concern for the Children

One often marvels about the resilience shown by individuals who have gone through unexpected calamities in life. The narratives gave an idea about the factors behind resilience shown by the interviewed women. Accordingly, Sunita thought only about her children to recover from her quandary and all her efforts towards becoming normal were motivated by the concern for her children and their wellbeing. Further, a major help in picking up herself included the continuous support of her mother’s parental family (*nanihal*).

After the initial phase of trauma, Sudha took almost two years to cope with the loss of her husband. She has two daughters and two sons and when her husband died, only one of her daughters was married. She decided to make herself strong having realized that she must take care of her children and herself. She had to marry a daughter and settle her sons. Puja was disturbed after the tragedy. At times, she was anxious and afraid that she had undergone health issues. However, she continues to work hard and remain strong for her daughter’s safe future.

Attitude towards Life

People are likely to adopt or choose a standpoint for their life after a particularly ruffling event. The descriptive data indicated that the grieved widows are likely to adopt one or the other of the following perspectives: (a) *one must live so one lives any how* (b) *life must be lived well and one must think of one's children and one's future responsibilities* (c) *one must try to pacify oneself and keep to oneself*. At this instance, the inputs from the interviews appeared as follows:

For Sunita, life doesn't seem worth living but she ventured that "one has to live so one lives any how". She said, "My husband was my Guru, my father, my husband was all for me. Nobody can compensate his loss. I know that one must live life if one has it, so why to bother children and make them unhappy". Even though she was not enthusiastic about her day-to-day life, Sunita didn't want to bother her children by appearing miserable.

Sudha on the other hand, knows that people could break down after a tragedy, but she never felt this way as she believed that 'one lives only once, so life must be lived well. Moreover, she realized that it is important to live for one's own children. This attitude eased her revival to certain extent. Puja often thought that her life would have been far better with her husband and reasoned, "perhaps I had only this much happiness." Being widowed makes her extremely unhappy though she tried to pacify herself by remaining calm.

The Neutral Perspective

One way of coping with a traumatic situation could be by not looking at life in terms of black and white or loss and gain and espousing a neutral perspective. Therefore, one may wonder if adopting a 'neutral' perspective towards painful eventualities facilitate resilience for facing life in the right spirit. The descriptions from the respondents were quite insightful and comprised of some themes such as: (a) *One must leave things on the 'time'* (b) *it is desirable to adopt an accepting attitude towards the happenings as they appear*, (c) *it helps to consider human life as important and look at life in a positive way*, (d) *effort should be made to pacify oneself and keep to oneself*. These are pointed out in the following observations:

Sunita believes that one must leave things 'on time' since one cannot change anything. She said "What happened has happened. It was not in my

control, it had to be that way. This is how life goes...when he went, my happiness was gone but I didn't cry much. Everyone must go; we have no control over this. What is left is also not in our control, we must bear with it and what comes must also be accepted." Sudha strongly believes that one life is attained through much difficulty and therefore, one must live it well. Regarding the untimely death of her husband, she said, "He had to go so he went away... I prefer to look at life in a positive way." Sudha does not condemn herself or cursed her destiny but takes the tragedy as a reality of life. She is working towards educating her children. Young Puja had been very unhappy but tried to pacify herself by keeping to herself (*shant rah kar khud main rah jatethey*).

Resources for Resilience

For an Indian widowed woman, the resources for resilience may be sourced into: (1) *Social support*, (2) *financial security*, (3) *belief in destiny*, (4) *spiritualism* and (5) *occupying in entertaining activities*.

Social Support

After her husband, an Indian woman's social support is often sourced to her family members (her in-law's and parent's) and her children. Sunita's in-laws are not very supportive but her maternal cousin and his family, her mother, and her two children are her strong supporters to her. Her elder son is close and caring and she has strong faith in her two sons. Sunita is quite emotional about her first son's marriage; she knows that she must 'let him go'. She emotionally appealed to her son and daughter in-law, "you both will have to support me".

The second interviewee Sudha reiterated several times that she could pick up herself only after 2-3 years of her husband's death. Her relationship with her in-laws and her husband's brothers and sisters is not cordial. She does not want to meeting people and prefer to quietly re-live her husband's good memories. Her husband's younger brother (whom her husband had supported for his studies) is her hope whom she can trust. She often takes his opinion and advice on important matters such as selling of land, buying a house, and finalizing her daughter's marriage. A very significant support also comes from Sudha's mother. Sudha's mother often makes her understand that when other women (whose husbands are alive) can manage themselves, so why can't she? Sudha admitted that her mother's encouragement boosted her morale.

Puja's daughter was still young and has not even reached High School. She used to console her mother (Puja) when she is tensed. For Puja, her brothers support her and helped her to set up a small cosmetics and gifts shop. Puja lives in a two-bedroom flat that her father had gifted to her. Due to her friendly nature, Puja has friends from among her customers who occasionally invite her to various family functions. In sum, being helped by her brothers to set up a shop, gave her more than one reason to feel engaged and spend her time in a better way.

Sunita understands that 'when people stand by her and support her, their gesture may not take away her pain, but the burden is somewhat lightened as she feels that people are with her'. Sunita mentioned about one of her husband's colleagues (who later became a family friend) once advised her not to remember her husband tearfully but to remember him for his qualities and uphold them.

Similarly, Sudha mentioned about her husband's high school friend who was reliable and helpful. He once ferried her son late night to the hospital for urgent medication. In that sense, this friend was closer to her than her own family members.

Puja recalled that her husband's friend (of similar business as her husband) has helped her in getting her husband's savings transferred in her name in the bank. He also stood as guarantor for her and helped her withdraw money from her husband's account. In fact, Puja left her in-law's home without any money or bank passbook and had no idea in which bank her husband deposited money. Even some people of her locality, and the locality's policemen were sympathetic and protective towards her and ready to punish someone who tried to take advantage of her.

Financial Resources

For a woman losing her man, the bread earner, adds a tremendous pressure to her existing emotional trauma. Money is an extremely important resource for survival. After their husband's demise, the widowed respondents have been taking responsibilities for themselves and her their children in the absence of their husbands.

Responding to a question 'whether a financially secured woman's adaptation process is easier?', Sunita said that whatever belonged to her husband

is now hers, and with some landed property she is financially secured. Sudha too expressed the same. She is financially secured because of the land she procured in her husband's name and the monthly pension of her husband. She also told that she could get a job (on compassionate ground) in the same college that her husband was working. In sum, financial security assured them a safe future.

For Puja, the feeling of financial insecurity was quite daunting after her husband's death. In 1999, Puja had to sell her husband's car and scooter for opening a shop, which was an alternative mode of earnings for her. The "feeling of security and courage" (*himmat*) started to develop as her brothers are helpful and supportive. Puja is doing well, and her small business certainly aided in her well-being.

Destiny

In time of a sudden tragedy, one might think of a 'destiny' be it favourable or not favourable. However, there are also few people who might not believe in destiny. Few relevant questions pondered upon were: "if a woman (widow) believes in destiny?"; "how the 'belief in destiny' helps one to live a life after losing a spouse?" Some noteworthy inputs in this regard are: (a) *Belief in destiny and surrendering to the situation helps*, (b) *destiny is not all; one must think reasonably to help oneself* and (c) *one doesn't have to believe in destiny, but you cannot explain why things happen the way they do and perhaps misfortune is carryover from the past life*. Here the descriptions of the respondents were rather revealing.

According to Sunita, "One can make oneself understand and pacify by believing in destiny...when we accept destiny and situation, we can be peaceful...by surrendering to the situation we can 'let go' of the expectations". Sunita cited an example of her mother who could lead an independent, self-capable life after compromising her wants and standards she earlier wished. Unfortunately, during her old age, her sons (Sunita's brothers) were not willing care for her, and she had to stay with her daughter's place (Sunita) and had to depend on her daughter. Sunita added, "had my mother not surrendered and remained fussy and angry we would have kept away from her". When she surrendered herself to her destiny, she was better off and well cared for.

Sudha gave some percentages of weight to destiny but not totally. She doesn't take the death of her husband as destiny. "We were together for just a while and that happened". She reasoned that everyone must pass one day, and she believes that one should live one's life fully.

For Puja, "it is hard to understand why things happen the way they do". Baffled by her husband's sudden sickness and death, the only explanation she offers is "it could be because of my own deeds in my past life "*karm ka phal hai*". In other words, she destiny plays is own turn, according to her.

Spiritualism

Interview questions to examine 'if the respondents are spiritual, contended, and inspired through spiritual ideas by reading spiritual books & scriptures, watching spiritual programs on television (TV), and practicing additional religious rituals (i.e., *puja path*)'. The descriptive data indicate that (a) *the women were not particularly drawn towards reading spiritual books, following spiritual ideas, or watching spiritual programs on TV, etc. for getting over their grief*, (b) *however, reading the great Hindu epics (Ramayana) was a help, all the women continued doing their daily puja* and (c) *peace of mind was sought in mantra chanting by one of them*.

The qualitative data on the other hand, suggest that Sunita does not learnt spiritualism from sermons and TV programs but through her life experiences. According to her, "an unhappy person is drawn towards a place where the mind can find peace." She prefers to read *Ramayana* which she is familiar with since her childhood. She also sings *bhajans* (devotional songs) and decorates her puja place. Sunita worships God as God gave us life and was like our parents and "parents don't hurt you or give you pain. This loss or pain is my "*niyati* (destiny) and not my punishment resulting from my past life's doings." After losing her spouse, Sudha was drawn somewhat towards a TV channel that aired spiritual talks, and features. She continued doing her regular *puja path* but did not become specially inclined towards adopting new ritualistic practices. However, alike Sunita, she read the *Bhagavada Gita* and the *Ramayana* that gave her some peace of mind. In case of Puja, one of her acquaintances advised her to chant the popular "*Gayatri mantra*" which was likely to pacify her. Puja had been practicing some religious rituals already and now started chanting the *Gayatri* mantra twice a day too.

Occupying the Mind with Entertaining Activities

Occasionally, a mind shaken by some trauma, tries to distract itself from the pain and agony by indulging into entertaining activities. Similarly, a peaceful mind may offer a new enthusiasm for life and facilitate the adaptation process. The responses to the question ‘Do you think that watching TV (entertainment) or talking to people on phone, shopping, and spending time in a pleasant way, etc. helped you look at life enthusiastically?’, indicate that: (a) *none of the women chose entertainment, shopping or socializing to facilitate her adaptation*, (b) *their earlier practice of reading and watching TV continued* and (c) *the major engagement became the new job or business instead of additional entertainment or socially enjoyable activities*. After her husband’s demise, Sunita preoccupied herself taking care of her children and preparations for her elder son’s prescheduled marriage. She was also engaged in gardening which was one of her husband’s hobbies. Watching TV is not a major attraction for her.

Sudha is not very talkative by nature and doesn’t visit people. She is more of a loner and prefers to read newspapers, magazines, and watching some TV channels. In fact, she continues to spend her leisure time in the same way as she did when her husband was alive. Shopping was never an entertaining choice for her but a necessity. The third respondent Puja, the priority is clear. She neither prefer nor does she have much time for watching TV, while shopping and socializing are not her preference.

Replies to a question ‘Whether keeping busy with job/work or an income generating activity was a solace and helped a woman adapt to her circumstances?’ suggest that for Sunita, her son marriage, her family and daily chores, etc. kept her busy and she didn’t have to look for other mind occupying activities. Nevertheless, she wishes to do a job. Categorically, Sunita states that she doesn’t need to make an extra effort to keep herself busy or feel better.

After three years of her husband’s death and much running around, Sudha could get the job on compassionate ground. The job keeps her busy and gives her the opportunity to meet new people. Puja did talk about her shop earlier too. In fact, the shop has been a major reason for engaging her time in a constructive manner. Her brothers want her to be a ‘self-independent’ woman. After the tragedy struck, she tried to learn shorthand and typing too. Puja told, “I always had the aim to do something and stand on my own feet.”

Efforts to Adapt

Having a Mission

Ideally, a husband is the central character in an Indian women's life whom she shares her whole life with. For majority of the Indian middle-class women, a husband is the epicentre of their lives and losing a life partner makes lives difficult. 'How to look at life from now?', for many women, life seems meaningless, and depression takes over. At this point, one may wonder if 'having a new life mission, or 'revisiting earlier missions' help adapting against the blow of a devastating personal loss?'

The narratives show that having a mission did help and for the three respondents viz., Sunita, Sudha, and Puja, the missions are *social service, settling the children, and becoming economically independent* respectively.

Specifically, Sunita wanted to pursue 'social service' and engaged in some altruistic activities such as taking care of the elder members in the family, giving helpful advice to people from neighbourhood, and support to domestic helpers for their education. Such activities make her "feel good" within. For Sudha, marrying off her daughter and settling her sons are part of her mission after her husband died. In case of Puja, running her shop became the major undertaking and she has been working hard for the same. In fact, all her efforts are linked to bringing up her daughter and assuring her safe future.

Changing Oneself

At times, one's own behaviour may cause adaptation problems in interpersonal relationships. At this instance, the respondents believed generally, *changing oneself may not be necessary for adaptation, however, one should change if others were hurt by one's behaviour, and for taking care of one's business and herself.*

Sunita said, "if somebody gets troubled due to my behaviour than I should change myself" otherwise this may not be a useful adaptation effort. After a very long silence she added "situation changes an individual and it is difficult to change one's basic nature." Sunita believes that there is no change in her behaviour towards her close or even distant family members after the tragedy.

Sudha depends more on her own and becomes "more self-confident and energetic" and doesn't think of changing herself. Sudha's daughters are

married and once her sons settled, her responsibilities are over and there is no need to change. Being a friendly person, Puja connects with people and do not think that changing herself is necessary for adapting to her situation. It is true that she has positively changed herself and takes care of her shop. Earlier, Puja's brothers were concerned about her safety as she was a young widow, but gradually she became capable of managing herself and her small business well.

Outcomes

Often, it is not possible to fully do away with the weaknesses that a woman might procure while recuperating from one of the saddest experiences of her life. It is therefore crucial to understand the 'outcomes' of the adaptation process for the afflicted women.

Negative Outcome on Health and Relationships

Sooner or later, a woman's 'health' could be affected by a massive personal loss. At least Puja's health had taken a definite set back after her husband's death as she developed blood pressure and her body "bloated all over." There was some effect on Sunita's health too, she felt giddy at times and couldn't get up from the bed.

Similarly, a woman may find her relationship with her children, parents, kins, friends and colleagues getting affected by the negative signs or weaknesses in her personality and behaviour after the calamity. However, the responses of the widowed women suggest that they have no negative feelings in themselves during their efforts to facing their personal life and relationships after the sudden devastation.

Sunita has some apprehension that people would not perceive her in the same way as they did when her husband was alive. The low 'self-esteem feeling' re-emerged prominently during her son's marriage. She did not misbehave towards her in-laws who lived in the same apartment complex and did take care of her uncle-in-law, old mother and mother in-law. True, that at times she gets annoyed but prefers not to create unpleasantness.

Sudha's relationship with her in-laws remains as it had been prior to her husband's death. It is a 'so-so relationship' having no noticeable cordiality. Sudha admits that she was not able to meet the expectations of her husband's parents and siblings. This has displeased them, and things were not expected

to become any better after her husband's demise. Puja is a positive woman, kind spoken to others, and friendly and there is no negative outcomes resulted from her adaptation efforts.

Positive Outcomes

There is also possibility of noticing some 'positive' signs in a woman's self, attitude, and gestures, while she tries to recuperate from a huge personal loss. These positive signs are expected to have constructive implications for her health and relationships. The data suggested that in all the three cases, the widowed women gained *self-confidence, developed faith in themselves, were able to take some important decisions and could manage to do things they had to.*

After the initial feeling-that people might look down upon her-Sunita developed in herself the "I can do things" attitude. This attitude has helped her to successfully manage her elder son's marriage even after her husband's death. She also took decision and gave consent for the inter caste marriage of her second son. Her decision to coax and send her other son back to engineering studies in Bangalore was a good decision for her son's future. This helps in building a very special mother-son relationship. Sunita is confident in pacifying an 'aggressive' family member and having 'control on herself'. She added, "I now have stronger feeling to serve others. This would not have happened had my husband been around, because then I wouldn't have changed".

Sudha is also very positive. She became more 'self-confident and energetic' after the initial low feeling. She is a person who liked to remain within her own comfort zone and is bold enough to do so even at the cost of being criticized by her relatives. She leads her family life according to her wish.

Puja is a nice and pleasant person. She is not even critical about her in-laws who disowned her after her husband's death. Being friendly and polite, she makes friends from her customers. She is dedicated to work hard for her business growth despite a zero support from her in-laws. She gained respect from the people of her locality through her stance and efforts in her business. The anecdote that she shared depicts that 'the local people helped her when a drunken man tried to misbehave with her'. Puja is happy-despite losing her husband only 14 months after her marriage-as she least bothers about other businesses. She said, "I never went on a wrong line. I only concentrated on my own work".

Overall, the positive outcomes resulting from the women's adaptation efforts were more of psychological and attitudinal nature. Self-confidence, faith in oneself, decision making capability, and being energetic, etc. have positively impacted on their health.

Conclusion

Apparently, despite being shattered from the sudden death of their husbands, all the three women gradually succeeded in adapting to their situations. Despite of the in-laws being unsupportive, the widowed women are maintaining the social relationship with them. In order to keep themselves engaged, Sunita decided to fulfil her husband's wish of 'helping others' and tries to help others at her capacity. Sudha does her job (obtained on a compassionate ground) confidently and works towards bringing up her son's future. Puja on the other hand, is determined to become self-independent and to bring up her daughter well by dedicating most of her time in her shop business. All the widowed women expressed that their children are caring and helpful. There are genuine well-wishers, relatives or friends, who help and inspire them to their adaptation and recovery. None of the widows developed a permanent 'negative attitude' after recovering from a temporary trauma. They gradually succeeded in improving their 'views to life' and developing a 'positive attitude' which in turns have positively impacted on their personality, nature, and relationships with relevant others.

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Appendix

The Domains Considered for Developing the Interview Questions

Emotional Fragility

- Do you feel that you have become emotionally fragile and have lost much control on yourself?
- Have you become unusually touchy and get hurt by small events or things said about you?
- Do you often think that your life is purpose less and colourless?
- Do you feel angry and cheated by destiny and feel revengeful?
- Do you get any peace thinking that one cannot beat the destiny and must live with this loss?
- No matter what you are unable to come to term with this loss?

Efforts towards Picking up Oneself

- How have you been trying to pick up yourself after the trauma?
- What exactly have made you move in your day-to-day life?
- What exactly have made you pick up yourself and move towards future (Children, job, close relatives, spiritualism, religious rituals (i.e., puja path) or something else?

Perception of Relevant Others

- Did you find your family members genuinely sympathetic towards you after the loss?
- In what way the family members have been helpful to you?
- Have relatives been genuinely sympathetic towards you?
- In what ways relatives have been helpful to you?
- Do you find any change in the attitude and behaviour of your close relatives and acquaintances?

- Do you find any change in the attitude and behaviour of your distant relatives and acquaintances?
- Do you find relatives indifferent towards you after this event?
- Do you get hurt easily by unsympathetic or unkind words and gestures of relevant others?
- Have you decided to become more tolerant of other comments or something said about you? If 'yes', Why If 'No' what do you do?

Mission for Future

- Have you decided a mission for your future life now? What is that?
- Do you think that you should be thinking more about how you can serve others around you in the family and even outside your family?
- Do you think of trying to earn some money by getting in self-employment or pursuing a hobby which was unattended earlier?
- Do you think of going to religious places (pilgrimages) and places of worship more often?
- Do you think of trying to help the needy people in your close surroundings if not financially by helping them teach some skills or educate them in your free time?

Attempts to Gain Status and Power

- Is it so that you feel powerless as a woman whose husband is no longer with her and do whatever possible to gain power? If yes, what do you do?
- Have you become more irritable, angry and critical of others?
- Have you started avoiding people who are apparently happy and doing well?
- Do you feel jealous of people who are apparently well off and have a happy family?
- Do you do something that others are hurt and feel bad?

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- Do you sometimes try to prove your power by using indirect manipulative ways? What might be these ways?
- Have you become lazy and indifferent and decided not to participate in family chores or functions?

Efforts towards Recovery

- Kindly tell in detail about what are your thoughts, feelings and efforts towards becoming as normal as possible or totally recovering from this trauma?