

**WIDOWS IN TAMIL NADU:
IN SEARCH OF DIGNITY, SAFETY,
HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS**

Research Report

**Aloysius Irudayam s.j.
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Paul Michael Raj s.j.
Dr Jayshree P Mangubhai**

**Research initiated by
KALANGARAI**
Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu

and

ALBOAN
San Sebastian, Spain

**November
2023**

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November, 2023 (first edition)

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ALBOAN

San Sebastian
Spain

Printed by:

Anto Art Crafts
Sivakasi
Tamil Nadu

DEDICATION

To

**All Widows,
especially the ones
who participated in this study...**

*whose turbulent life
filled with pain and trauma,
depression and disappointments,
discrimination and violence,
poses a challenge not only to them
to live with determination and hope in future
for themselves and their children,
but also, to the state institutions and civil society members
to heed to their demands for living with dignity and self-respect
and be counted as full-fledged citizens of this country
with the same rights and entitlements as any other citizen...*

*whose courage and resilience manifested in their efforts
to break gender oppressive taboos and traditions
should inspire every woman and man
thirsting for gender justice and freedom,
and whose undying hope for an egalitarian future
should impel all citizens
to pull down all dehumanizing structures
of culture and religion, power and authority, economy and social relations
and broaden the space for these widows and other single women
to breathe the fresh air of
gender freedom and equality, justice and equity.*

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PART I

INTRODUCTORY PAGES

PREFACE

For many years, the Indian state has committed to ensuring gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination against women. A number of laws, policies and programs have been put in place to address gender-based discrimination and violence. Commitments have been made for a stronger focus on gender equality and women-led development. And yet, gender inequality remains deep rooted, influencing all spheres of life – social, cultural, religious, economic and political – and all stages of women’s lives – from before birth until death. Socio-cultural norms stemming from the Brahminical patriarchy sustain the unequal status, value and treatment meted to women. And among women, there are significant differences linked to factors such as caste, class and marital status, which further marginalise certain groups of women and deny them their rights.

One such marginalised and vulnerable group is widows. Numbering over 45 million in India, and representing a sizeable 7.3% of the population of women in the country, their situation stems from a deep-rooted notion that ‘women cease to have the right to live the moment they are widowed... the moment they become single’. Brahminical patriarchy and caste structures set further limits on the rights and freedoms of women as soon as their husbands die. Degrading socio-cultural practices and social taboos are then used to reinforce their lesser status in Indian society. Consequently, they face high levels of deprivation, insecure property rights, social restrictions on living arrangements, restricted employment opportunities, social isolation and violence.

Recognising this situation, Kalangarai, a non-governmental organization, has been involved with empowering widows in Tamil Nadu to assert their rights and freedoms since 2004. In the face of the social oppression and poor living conditions many widows endure, Kalangarai focuses on enabling widows and their children to live with dignity. Part of this work is supporting widows to organise into a movement so they can support each other and collectively assert their voice in demanding safeguarding of their equal rights and entitlements in Tamil society and from the state government of Tamil Nadu.

Kalangarai has grappled with limited data and information available to enable state and civil society agencies to understand the situation and needs of widows in Tamil Nadu. It therefore decided to initiate a state-wide study of widows to have an in-depth understanding of their situation, raise awareness among Tamil and Indian society on this, and to enable widows to be able to advocate with state institutions to secure their rights to life and development with dignity and safety.

This research, undertaken in 2022-2023, covers 16 districts in Tamil Nadu and examines all major spheres of widows’ lives. Data is triangulated using several quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to accurately capture the experiences of a diverse group of widows. The research aims to shed light on this specific group of women to provoke the public conscience and public actions from law-makers and the executive government to bring about changes in the lives of widows through appropriate legislation, policies and other measures. It also aims to focus civil society attention on solidarity for widows and their movements to secure their rights and dignity. The hope is that this research will also open new avenues for further research and evidence building on the situation of widows, to ensure they become and remain a priority for state action.

Authors of the study

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge with sincere gratitude all the persons mentioned below for their generous efforts in providing assistance to this study in various capacities.

1. Overall Research Project in-charge

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7. With special thanks to:

- (i) **Arockia Amalan sj:** B.A., currently studying law at Madurai Law College, Madurai – for assisting in Focus Group Discussion & Case Study data collection
- (ii) **Santhanam Arockiasamy sj.:** B.A., B. L, Advocate, Executive Director, LAAS, Madurai for providing logistical arrangements
- (iii) **Sahaya Philomin Raj s.j.:** B.L., Ph.D., Advocate & Executive Director, IDEAS, Madurai & **Paul Michael Raj sj,** M.A., former Executive Director, IDEAS, Madurai – for providing logistical arrangements

INDIA MAP WITH TAMIL NADU INSET



A map of the state of Tamil Nadu, India, showing its various districts. The districts are labeled with their names in English. Tirunelveli is located in the southernmost part of the state, at the tip of the peninsula. Other districts shown include Kanyakumari, Thoothukudi, Tenkasi, Virudhunagar, Madurai, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram, Theni, Dindigul, Tiruppur, Karur, Tiruchirappalli, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Cuddalore, Kallakurichi, Salem, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Tirupattur, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Ranipet, Kanchipuram, Chengalpattu, Tiruvallur, and Chennai. A legend in the top left corner indicates that the map uses the Mercator projection. A scale bar in the bottom left corner shows distances of 60 km and 40 mi. A north arrow is also present in the top left corner.

GLOSSARY

Anganwadi	Basic health care centre for mothers and children in rural areas
Archakar	Hindu temple priest
Assembly Election	Democratic governance system at the State level (sub-national) – voters elect Members of the Legislative Assembly.
Bhajan chanting	Chanting of hymns
Bindi/Pottu/Red dot	Coloured decorative dot placed in the middle of the forehead by a woman
Brahmacharya	In Hinduism, it refers to a lifestyle characterized by sexual continence and complete abstinence.
Brahmin	Brahmin is a varna as well as a caste within Hindu society. In the Vedic- and post-Vedic Indian subcontinent, Brahmins were designated as the priestly class, serving as priests (purohit, pandit, or pujari) and spiritual teachers (guru or acharya).
Coolie	Term used to refer to low-wage labourers in the informal economy
Coparcener	Coparcener means a shared heir, as per Hindu succession law referring to a person who acquires a legal right to his ancestral property through birth in a Hindu Undivided Family.
Dalit	Literally meaning ‘broken people’, it is a term used by rights activists to denote the so called ‘untouchables’ or scheduled castes as the lowest group in the ritualised social hierarchy of the caste system and facing widespread discrimination on the basis of their work and descent.
Dharna	Agitation
Dvija	In Sanskrit, Dvija means “twice-born” – firstborn physically and at a later date born for a second time spiritually during a ritualistic ceremony.
Gram Sabha	Lowest tier comprising all the voting members in the panchayat system of governance
Idli	Rice pancake
Imam	Muslim cleric
Iyakkam	People’s movement

Kaavadi	A decorated physical burden carried on the shoulders by the devotee to implore God Murugan for assistance, usually on behalf of a loved one who is in need of healing, or as a means of balancing a spiritual debt. Devotees dance along a pilgrimage route while bearing these burdens.
KALANGARAI	Lit. meaning ‘Lighthouse’. Name of non-government organization situated in Nagapattinam town and working for the welfare of widows in Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu.
Kanmai	Water reservoir
Kisan	Farmer
Kumkum powder/ Sindoora	Red colour turmeric powder used for making the distinctive mark on the forehead.
Mann kudisai	Mud house
Mundachi	A derogatory term in Tamil language used for a widow whose marital necklace is removed at widowhood
Nalangu/Haldi	A pre-wedding ritual in Hindu custom that starts with the bride and groom being seated on a mat and then the women in the family come forward and first apply kumkum on the forehead followed by an application of the turmeric paste on the hands, legs, feet, and cheeks of the couple.
Nanchai land	Cultivable land otherwise known as wet land.
NGO	Non-government organization
Olai kudisai	Thatched house
Panchayat	Grassroot elected mechanism in the democratic governance system
Patta	Land title deed
Pannai House	House of a land-lord/estate owner
Pativrata	In Sanskrit, <i>Pati</i> means husband, and <i>vrata</i> means vow. As per Brahmanical religious texts, <i>Pativrata</i> is someone for whom her husband is the world. She should worship her husband as a god and live and die for him.
Pongal	It is a traditional dish made with rice, lentils, jaggery, and ghee and is offered to the gods on harvest day celebration as a sign of gratitude. It is also a popular dish that is served to guests and visitors during the Pongal (Harvest) Festival.
Poromboke land	Unassessed land belonging to the Government

Prasadam	A Sanskrit word, meaning “sacred food” and “gracious gift”, and signifying “God’s Mercy.” It refers to something that has been offered to God, which now has spiritual benefit.
Pucca house	Solid / Concrete House
Purva karma	As per the Hindu belief, a person’s good and bad deeds in the previous stages of existence are viewed as affecting his/her present fate.
Punchai land	Dry agricultural land known as punchai land
Sangam/Iyakkam	Organization / Movement
Saubhagyavati /Sumangali	It is the title given to a married woman living with her husband, as per the Brahmanical religious texts.
Sati	The practice of burning widows alive in the deceased husband’s funeral pyre
Stridharma	Stri means woman. Dharma means divine law or conformity to one’s duty and nature. As per Brahmanical religious texts, Stridharma refers to the ‘duties of women’.
TASMAC	The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) is a company owned by the Government of Tamil Nadu, which has a monopoly over wholesale and retail vending of alcoholic beverages in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
Thasildar	Revenue officer
Thali/ Yellow thread	Marital necklace
Valai kaappu	A prenatal ceremony or celebration similar to baby-shower, held by South Indian women in Tamil Nadu, a few parts of Kerala, and Telangana, meant to bless a pregnant woman, celebrate her fertility, and prepare the baby and mother-to-be for a safe birth.
Varnas	Literally means ‘colour’ and refers to the status of a social class in the Brahmanical social order
Varna system	Varna system otherwise known as caste system classified people into four social groups in the Brahmanical social order. The fifth category is considered to be outside of the Varna system.
Vibhuti	A white ash otherwise known as a ‘sacred powder’ in the Hindu religion. It is normally distributed by the temple priest to the devotees along with Kumkum in the temple after every prayer.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATM	Automated Teller Machine
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IGNWPS	Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme
MBC	Most Backward Community
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005
NSAP	National Social Assistance Programme
PAN	Permanent Account Number
PLF	Panchayat Level Federation
SC	Scheduled Caste
SHGs	Self-Help Groups
ST	Scheduled Tribe
RI	Revenue Inspector
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WIDOWS IN TAMIL NADU: IN SEARCH OF DIGNITY, SAFETY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Widows are the silent (silenced) sufferers in India. From the very moment of the death of their husbands, in the name of culture and religion, they are socially ostracized and deprived of all rights – to live a dignified life, to mobility, to assume leadership, to property, to re-marry, to dress in the way they want, etc. Their very presence is perceived to be abominable. They are considered and treated as ‘ill-omens’, ‘unlucky’, and ‘living corpses.’

This summary highlights the important findings of the study under various relevant themes and lists various recommendations addressed to the federal and state governments and the civil society.

I. Demographic Profile of Widows in India and Tamil Nadu

As per the 2011 Census of India, there were 43 million (43,261,478) widows in India, constituting 7.3% of the total female population of the country. Out of the 43 million widows, Uttar Pradesh had 48 lakhs, the highest number in the country followed by Maharashtra with 45 lakhs. Tamil Nadu stood 4th in the list with 3.8 million (3,856,398) widows, constituting 10.7% of the total female population of the country and indicating that the average percentage of widows in the state was higher by 3.4% than the national average.

This higher-than-national average percentage of widows in the state was confirmed by a UN study in 2008, which indicated that Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have more young widows than any other state in India. A significant reason mentioned in the study is that more Tamil men died young due to alcoholism. The ubiquitous state-marketed liquor shops run by Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) have enabled millions of Tamil youths to become alcoholics, and the increasing deaths due to alcoholism and road accidents are said to contribute to the increase in the numbers of young widows in Tamil Nadu.

Among the total number of widows in the state, approximately 54.8% were living in rural areas and 45.2% in urban areas. Of the total population of widows in the state, there were 0.7 million (738,181) or 19% SC widows, and 34,515 or 0.9% ST widows. Out of the 3.8 million (3,856,398) widows living in the State of Tamil Nadu, Vellore district had the highest number, 2.26 lakhs, followed by Chennai with 2.06 lakhs.

II. The Concept of ‘widow’ in the Brahmanical Patriarchy

Enforced widowhood that dehumanises widows is part of a larger Brahmanical patriarchal structure of caste, its production and reproduction. It perceived widows as a disrupter of

Brahmanical social order and believed that these women would be unguarded in their husband's absence, and their sexuality uncontrolled. It was thought best, therefore, to get rid of them through the practice of sati, or ostracise them by depriving their personhood and sexuality. Hence, stringent codes of behaviour were imposed '*in order to ensure that the widow's sexuality is repressed, mastered or forcibly contained*'.

Ideologically, widowhood is justified as a punishment for previous existence and not being a true *pativrata* – a chaste wife. She is regarded as inauspicious, which means she has to maintain a social distance from others. She will be considered part of the family, and at the same time, she is also considered an 'outcast.' Notably, a widow is socially and distinctly differentiated through the rituals and symbolic structure in a profoundly humiliating way and are performed with a degree of violence that the widows must undergo for the rest of their lives. Thus, a widow is retained within the society, but on its margins by institutionalising her marginality and making her live in a '*humiliating conditions of existence*'

The Indian Constitution, framed on the ideals of the human rights framework, guarantees the right to equality and non-discrimination for all citizens, including widows. However, the Brahmanical ideology continues to dominate the people's behaviour and subjugates women, particularly widows in India. The Brahmanical doctrine that condemns widows to social alienation, deprivation of their personhood, and forceful control of their sexuality is very much alive even today. Despite this, the Indian government, both at the state and central level, pays no heed to the prevalent customs and traditions that ostracises widows. By adhering to principles of non-interference in cultural norms, the government reinforces these practices. In doing so, it upholds the religious sanctioning of such harmful practices and fails to uphold its obligation to protect widows' right to a life of dignity and self-respect.

III. Objectives, Purpose and Methodology of Research

- 1. Objectives:** to understand the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of widows in Tamil Nadu, analyze the causes and consequences of widowhood, examine the different forms of discrimination and violence the widows face, assess the extent of widows' access to the state entitlement provisions and provide concrete policy recommendations to the state and civil society for protecting and fulfilling the rights of widows.
- 2. Purpose:** to raise public awareness on the socio-economic conditions of widows as well as the discrimination and violence faced by them in Tamil Nadu; provide a strong evidence base for doing social advocacy with the state institutions for a robust legal and policy framework, and to strengthen the empowerment process of widows' organizations and movements for effective assertion of their rights and entitlements.
- 3. Geographical scope:** The study covers 495 widows, 30-31 widows on average per district, from across 16 districts of Tamil Nadu – Ariyalur, Chennai, Thiruppur, Dindigul, Erode, Kanchipuram, Ramanathapuram, Karur, Mayiladurai, Nagapattinam, Nilgris, Perambalur, Sivagangai, Theni, Trichy and Villupuram.

- 4. Data sampling and tools:** For the purpose of quantitative data collection through structured questionnaire, and qualitative data gathering through focus group discussions and case study interviews, purposive and snowball sampling has been used to select widows on the basis of certain specific criteria. 36 women (12 widows and 24 non-widows) who are members of, or associated with, widows' networks in the 16 study districts, were selected as Field Investigators to collect the questionnaire data.

IV. Profile of widows

Out of 495 respondents, 401 (81%) are between the age group of 21 to 50. SCs form the largest group of respondents (241 or 48.7%), followed by BCs (108, or 21.8%). Of the total number of respondents, the majority (363, or 73.3%) are Hindus, followed by Christians (102, or 20.6%) and Muslims (30, or 6.1%).

Of the 495 respondents, 440 (88.9%) were widowed before the age of 45. Significantly, while the minimum age of marriage for women in India is 18, 14 of the respondents were widowed before reaching the age of 20. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (365, or 72.5%) said that addiction to liquor and illness were the two major causes of the death of their husbands, with many attributing the illness to alcohol addiction. In short, primarily 'addiction to liquor' is the cause of their widowhood.

Of the total number of respondents, 346 (67.9%) have never crossed 8th standard education. Still worse, among them, 126 respondents (25.5%) are illiterate. Only 64 of the 495 respondents have accessed technical or vocational training programs and are holding certificates. Out of these 64 widows, only 22 have managed to acquire jobs in line with their skills. Out of the 495 respondents, 18 (4%) do not have children. The remaining 96% have an average of 2 children each. Over half of the respondents (275, or 55.6%) live with their children, while 92 (18.6%) live alone, 13.9% live with their parents and 9.5% live with their in-laws. It is quite disheartening to note that 78 respondents (15.8%) had to discontinue the education of their children immediately after the death of their husbands. When analyzed, it is quite revealing that all the reasons given are related to poverty.

V. Widows' Livelihood Status

- (1) Food intake:** A sizable number of respondents (184 widows or 37.1%) do not enjoy three square meals a day.
- (2) Housing facilities:** One-third of the widows (157 or 31.7%) have no house of their own. They either live in rented houses or their parents' or relatives' houses.
- (3) Basic amenities:** The majority of widows have access to drinking water, access to health care facilities, and electricity. However, 156 widows (31.5%) do not have toilet facilities and 234 (47.3%) do not have sewage facilities.

(4) Possession of formal documents: The vast majority of the widows have documents related to entitlements such as Aadhar cards, Smart cards, Voter cards, etc. However, only 191 widows (38.6%) have their widow pension cards, meaning that many widows are losing out on their basic entitlement as widows. Moreover, 398 widows (80.4%) do not have birth certificates, which is a vital document to prove one's citizenship in the country.

VI. Identity, Independence and Dignity

(1) Funeral rites and socio-cultural practices: Almost all of the widow respondents (91.3%) have undergone ritual ceremonies as part of their husbands' funeral rites. However, 85% were for banning those rites because they felt that they in no way helped them come out of their sorrow and, instead, humiliated and dehumanise them. A total of 90% of respondents who had undergone those rituals cited traditional compulsions and their helplessness as reasons for their acceptance of those rituals. Regarding day-to-day socio-cultural practices, a sizable percentage of them seem to be setting aside some of such practices like strict dress code, keeping bindi (dots) on the forehead, and wearing ornaments. However, most are not yet able to bypass the social norms that prohibit them from beautifying themselves: using cosmetics, keeping flowers on their heads, and especially turmeric and 'kumkum' which are associated with sexuality and fertility.

(2) Regarding mobility, attendance at family related events, more attendance is noticeable in inauspicious (88.6%) than in auspicious (60.1%) functions; even while participating in auspicious functions, widows experience discriminatory treatment.

(3) As regards conversing with relatives and men, and facing people in early mornings, more than 50% of the widows said that they were either obstructed or feel hesitant to engage in these matters.

(4) Decision-making on household matters: In relation to (a) basic needs, (b) social matters that involve finance, (c) needs involving capital investment, and (d) participation in public events, over half of the number of widows said that they could take decisions independently or contributed financially. A caution, though, in reading too positively into women being the major financial contributors is that often this might be because they received no other support and therefore have to manage by themselves. Next in responsibility for decision-making and financial contribution, it is the elder brothers of widows followed by other persons who were not close family members.

VII. Economic Assets, Savings, Loans, Income and Expenditure

1) Employment: Despite the high work participation rate among widows, nearly 353 of them (71.3%) work as labourers for daily wages in the informal sector without job security and access to employment benefits. Only 22 (4.4%) have secured permanent jobs.

2) Income level: Income data reveals that most widows live in poverty. Nearly 211 widows (42.6%) earn less than Rs.50,000/- per annum, and 84 widows (17%) make between Rs.50,000/- to Rs.60,000/- per annum. Only 30 widows (6.1%) earn more than Rs. 1,00,000/- per annum.

3) Govt. welfare benefits: As per the data, only 225 widows (45%) have accessed government welfare schemes. Corruption, prejudice/stigma about widowhood in the district administration, and gender discrimination in public institutions seem to prevent them from accessing government benefits.

4) Agri land ownership: Of the 495 widows enquired, most of them do not own any agricultural land. Among them, only 45 (9.09%) have *patta* for their land and of them only 11 (2.2%) have *patta* registered in their name.

5) Loans: Debt is one of the significant burdens among widows. Of the 495 widows enquired, 419 (85%) have loans. The top reasons for borrowing loans include (a) health and medical care; (b) subsistence needs; (c) marriage; (d) house construction or renovation; and (5) repaying other loans. Nearly 248 (50%) have borrowed from moneylenders and private microfinancing firms. Consequently, 391 widows (79%) pay interest ranging from around Rs.12,000/- to 6 lakhs per annum.

VIII. Participation in Public Life

1. Almost all the respondents are involved in either a self-help group or widows' movement. Their involvement in these spaces seems to empower them, significantly boosting their emotional well-being, helping them to challenge some customary practices, gain knowledge about their entitlements, and acquire skills and financial support to start small businesses.

2. Almost all the widow respondents (489 or 98.8%) cast their votes in the latest Assembly and Panchayat elections, with 413 (83.4%) mentioning that it was their political right.

3. Despite a vast majority exercising their voting rights, only nine widows contested the panchayat elections, the majority (eight women) from a rural constituency. Out of the nine widows, only two won the election, and these two could exercise their governance and authority without interference.

4. Of the 495 widows, only 43 (8.7%) are interested in contesting elections in the future. Their disinterest, for 254 widows (51.3%), stemmed from the discriminatory experiences they have faced as widows, while 124 (25.1%) said they were not interested in politics.

5. While various factors confine women within the domestic sphere, in the case of widows, this is worse as they are overburdened with the challenges of widowhood. While they struggle to fulfill the livelihood needs of their families, the religious and cultural framework treats them as 'inauspicious' and excludes them from social and public life. They feel that political life is not safe for them. Participation in the widows' movement and self-help group seems to be the only avenue that provides an empowering experience for them.

IX. Experiencing Emotional Well-being

1. Of the 495 widows enquired, almost all (487 or 98.4%) mentioned that their widowhood has detrimental mental health impacts. Among the various factors affecting them, the highest was anxiety about their and their children's future, negatively affecting 321 (64.8%) of them.
2. The other important factors affecting the widows' mental health include the overall feeling of being depressed, overburdened by multiple responsibilities, isolation and exclusion, loneliness, and lack of trust in others.
3. A vast majority of widows (314) rely on their close family members for their emotional solace, primarily their children (201) and then their parents (113). Only a paltry number (19) said they get support from their in-laws.
4. Widows pointed to five areas of economic support required to reduce financial insecurity as well as help them emotionally: (a) secure employment for the widows or their children; (b) financial aid (bank loan with no/less interest) to start a business; (c) educational support for their children; (d) social security policies; and (e) sanctioning of widows' pension.
5. Other factors they seek to reduce their emotional burden include: (i) ban on the customs and rituals that discriminate widows; (ii) a house of their own or the registration document (*patta*) for their house; (iii) counselling service and support; and (iv) skills training and career guidance.

X. Discrimination against Widows

1. When comparing the five contexts – socio-cultural, religious, livelihood, economic and political – in which the widows have suffered discrimination, a greater number of widows seem to have suffered discrimination in the socio-cultural context, followed by the religious context, thereby indicating the predominant role played by culture and religion.
2. The data on the perpetrators for the socio-cultural context is outweighed by family members, relatives and neighbours, and for the religious context the perpetrators are predominantly from the families, relatives, neighbours and religious actors (*archakars/priests/imams*).
3. As regards livelihood, economic and political matters, discrimination is quite spread out for all the categories of perpetrators but with slight preponderance for the government officials since these are the actors whom the widows have to necessarily approach for matters concerning their livelihood, economic development and political involvement.

XI. Security and Protection Measures

(1) Widows' safety and security: Over 50% (254 widows) of the widows surveyed felt unsafe and insecure in both the private and public sphere. This is especially so in the case of young widows and widows living alone or only with their young children.

(2) Awareness of legal protection measures: Of the 495 widows surveyed, only a small number (ranging from 39 to 194 widows) are aware of one or the other law protecting women's marital life or security. However, more widows (208 widows) are aware of MNREGA legislation that deals with income generation for daily labour.

(4) Widows approaching police stations: Although a large number of widows reported experiences of discrimination and violence during the focus group discussions, case interviews and informal interviews during the survey data collection, only one-fourth of them (114/495) have approached the police stations seeking protection or remedial assistance.

(5) Treatment by police officers: A good number of widows mentioned that they had been treated with dignity and respect and that the police had been helpful in filing cases and providing protection. But this has to be balanced against the many instances mentioned during case interviews and focus group discussions about police indifference to the widows' complaints, treating them with disdain, using caste-based abusive language against them, demanding bribes, or pressuring them to enter into compromises instead of following the due process of law.

(6) Proposals for security and protection measures: Almost all the widows (481/485) affirmed the need for specific legislative protection for widows indicating a number of significant features: Abolition of Social-cultural Practices, Access to Welfare Schemes, Access to Housing Facilities, Access to Employment, Access to Business Enterprises, Access to Right to Re-marriage, Protection against Violence, Access to Psychological Rehabilitation, Abolition of Alcohol Sale, Access to Right to Property, Children's Welfare, Access to Right to Political Participation, Abolition of Bribing Practice, Functioning of Police and Court Machinery, and setting up of Separate Ministry and Department for Widows.

XII. Manifestation of Courage and Resilience

Out of 495 widows, 454 (91.7%) said that they have had occasions to face life with courage. A significant number manifested their courage in three areas – socio-cultural, gender, and human rights and self-respect: occasions include participating in the auspicious functions of their families, relatives and friends against all opposition; themselves organizing auspicious events for their children and grandchildren; choosing to remain single without re-marriage; daringly questioning those who do injustice to women/widows; and, gradually building up their material and financial assets to build their social status.

XIII. Future Household Needs

(1) Looking at the future advancement of their lives, a large number of widows have stated employment opportunities, housing facilities and educational welfare of their children as their first set of priority needs. This is followed by a lesser number of widows referring to loan

repayments, toilet facilities and food for their households as the second set of priority needs. A smaller number of widows have also mentioned care for their ill-health, marriage of their sons and marriage of their daughters as their third set of priority needs.

(2) Some widows having broader perspectives regarding their future needs and hopes desire to lead an independent and self-sufficient life through commercial enterprises, advancing their children's good social standing in life, working towards empowering and advancing the livelihood security, independence and self-respect of other widows in society.

(3) While the widows are highly motivated to care for and ensure better prospects for their children, they are also beset with anxieties about their future. Prominent among these concerns are their children's marriage prospects, unemployment/irregular employment, and disinterest in or discontinuation of education, the children's disrespect towards them, their unhappy married lives, addiction to liquor/drugs, and irresponsible and careless behaviour.

XIV. Recommendations

The 495 widows who have presented both the quantitative and qualitative data come out with a clear message, that is, these data are not to be considered in mere statistical terms; nor are these to be counted from a mere academic point of view. Rather, these are to be perceived as their voices, thereby manifesting the various ways through which they have been oppressed by the caste-ridden patriarchal ideology, traditions, and customs; articulating how their dignity and self-respect and humans and women have been defaced for centuries; expressing their anguish regarding the violations of their rights and entitlements; pointing out their determination to live with courage and resilience despite the multiple hurdles they face; and, asserting their right to live in future as dignified women.

This therefore becomes a message for the state institutions and civil society bodies: for the state institutions which as **political duty-bearers** have the obligation to convert these voices into concrete and realistic policy decisions and actions for the betterment of the widows' lives and status in society; for the civil society bodies which as **moral duty-bearers** hold the responsibility of acting as the widows' representatives working towards a systemic change in the ideological underpinnings of caste, gender and patriarchy.

This study can therefore be looked at as the product of the widows' voices registered and reported for action. The widows have spoken out. It is for the state actors and civil society members to respond. The recommendations given below point to a course of action that the state actors and civil society can embark upon as a way of responding to the voices of the widows.

I. Recommendations addressed to the Indian Central and Tamil Nadu State Governments

1) Safeguarding the Economic well-being of Widows:

In order to safeguard the economic well-being of widows through employment guarantees, economic development, and social security measures, it is recommended that the government:

- a. prioritizes widows in employment, and provides 10% reservation in employment in the State-run public sector and private sector for widows with opportunities for upgrading their educational qualification and technical skills;
- b. collects comprehensive data regarding the living conditions of widows and accordingly work out welfare measures and development programmes for improving their life in various fields;
- c. sets up a bank exclusively for widows to avail them with small and big loans with modest interest to start small and big commercial/business enterprises, pursue higher and professional education, and launch institutions in education, commerce, technical skills, etc.;
- d. mandates the corporate sector to set apart 0.5% of the money from the 2% amount, falling under the CSR provision (Corporate Social Responsibility) under the Companies Act 2013, to improve the livelihood needs of widows and their dependents.

2) Access to Government Benefits:

It is recommended that the government amend the 'Destitute Widows' Pension Scheme with the following provisions:

- a. The term "Destitute" be removed from the "Destitute Widows' Pension Scheme" as it denotes a pejorative meaning of 'helplessness', and be replaced with "Widows Below the Poverty Line";
- b. While the pension amount fixed by the Tamil Nadu Government must be raised periodically as per the officially estimated cost of living, it must be increased, as of now, from Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 5000/-;
- c. The payment of the pension amount should automatically begin from the date of death of the husband as indicated in the death certificate of the husband rather than from the date of signature of the Thasildar (Taluk Revenue Officer) affixed officially in the application form as has commonly been the practice of the Tamil Nadu Government administration so far; in case of delay, the amount must be calculated and disbursed retrospectively from the date of the husband's death;

- d. The following three conditions, not found in the Tamil Nadu GO but arbitrarily and autocratically imposed on the widows by the government administration, must be removed immediately, namely, that for availing of the pension, the beneficiary widow (a) must have completed 40 years of age; (b) must not have a son who has completed 18 years of age; and, (c) must surrender the ration card; instead, the only condition for pension entitlement must be the widow's status of being below the poverty line;
- e. That the Government should have a Grievance Cell for widows to report incidents of corruption and administrative lapses and any other concerns that may arise in accessing any welfare measures and development schemes.

3) Safeguarding the Emotional Well-being of Widows:

In order to address the factors affecting widows' mental health it is recommended that government:

- a. Bans all the customary practices that traumatize and humiliate widows by passing a legislation '***Eradication of Traditional Customary Practices Degrading Self-Respect of Widows***';
- b. Integrates gender sanitization education as part of the school and University curriculum and constitutes a committee to censor media programs/movies promoting the degradation of widowhood;
- c. Offers a helpline and counseling services for widows and their children in all aspects related to mental health, economic well-being, education and availing of loans, etc.;
- d. Encourages civil society organizations to provide counseling services to widows in their locality.

4) Empowering Widows to take part in Public Life Actively:

By way of creating opportunities for widows to participate in public life, especially in politics, actively, it is recommended that the government:

- a. Provide 10 % reservation for widows in the Local Bodies and the Legislative Assembly;
- b. Ensure widows' participation in Village Development, Child Protection, School Management, and Panchayat Committees;
- c. Recognize and support the emerging widow's movements as a space for widows to collectively raise their voices against widowhood practices and situations that dehumanize their dignity and deprive them of personhood;
- d. Encourage civil society organizations to mobilize widows and form sangams or Iyyakkams as an avenue for upholding their rights collectively.

5) Legislation for Widows' Safety and Protection

It is recommended that Government enacts a legislation '***Prevention of Discrimination and Atrocities against Widows***' in the Parliament/ Tamil Nadu State Assembly as early as possible, and that shall include the following constituent provisions:

- a. ensuring the widows of their right to equality in all matters of life related to the livelihood, social, economic, political, and religious spheres;
- b. abolishing all socio-cultural practices imposed on the widows at their husbands' demise;
- c. affirming the right of widows to continue to adopt all those socio-cultural practices which they enjoyed before their widowhood, and protect them from all unjust and superstitious cultural and religious teachings and actions;
- d. safeguarding the right of widows to self-respect, physical and sexual safety and integrity, security of life, livelihood and property;
- e. protecting the safety and security of their children;
- f. enlisting all the rights of widows and witnesses with reference to criminal offences and proceedings;
- g. enlisting the duties and responsibilities of government administrative officials and the police force when the widows approach them for their developmental and protection needs;
- h. thereby ensuring the widows a life of dignity as women and full-fledged citizenship as Indian women.

6) Governmental Administrative Machinery for Widows' Welfare, Development and Safety:

It is recommended that the Central and State Governments set up a separate and autonomous Ministry in the Government structure for the following objectives:

- a. to study the living conditions of widows and to periodically update the statistical data on the status of widows in the country and in the state of Tamil Nadu;
- b. to evolve appropriate legislations, new policies, and relevant schemes to promote welfare and development;
- c. to set up administrative structures at the lower level under the Ministry for receiving and processing widows' petitions, disseminating information on government schemes and budget allocations, conducting capacity programs, enhancing the education of the widows, providing guidance related to emotional well-being, etc.;
- d. to safeguard the safety and security of widows and their children;

- e. to allocate adequate budgetary resources for welfare, development, and protection purposes;
- f. to initiate, monitor, and review the implementation of various legal, judicial, welfare and developmental measures towards the empowerment and emancipation of widows;
- g. to prepare annual status report on the condition of widows;
- h. to submit this report to the Parliament and the State Legislature for information and debate; and,
- i. to place this report in the public domain for the benefit of the widows and the larger public.

II. Recommendations addressed to Tamil Nadu Government

7) Addressing the Problem related to Liquor Addiction

It is recommended that the Government of Tamil Nadu:

- a. Stops selling liquor as a commercial dealer;
- b. Re-visits its policy with regard to liquor in the state and moves towards banning it;
- c. Starts as many de-addiction centers as possible in the state in order to retrieve addicts back to a normal and healthy life.

8) Promoting Widows' Re-marriage, especially of Young Widows

It is recommended that the Government comes out with a policy framework with the following features:

- a. A package for BPL (Below Poverty Line) widows – who come forward to marry men of their choice, which contains solid assistance of Rs. 2 lakhs financial contribution to the account of the widow;
- b. Employment is ensured for widows in government or private sector employment in order to safeguard their dignity, protect their security of life and improve their economic well-being;
- c. Priority in employment is to be given to the male members who come forward willingly to marry the widows, thereby encouraging widows' re-marriage extensively;
- d. Children born of the re-married widows are given educational facilities (admission, scholarship, etc.) and employment opportunities;
- e. Widows' pension for ensuring the secure livelihood of the widows is disbursed within one month from the date of the husband's demise.

9) Providing Financial help for the continuation of the Studies of the Widows' Children

It is recommended that the Government bears the entire school or college fees for all the students of Government-run schools and colleges, in case of their fathers die during their studies. There should never be a drop-out case due to the death of the father of the children.

10) Ensuring the transfer of property to widows that are due to their husbands within a year

It is recommended that the Government comes out with a notification that the property of the bereaved husbands as well as the due share of the undivided property in the family be transferred to their widowed wives within a year failing which penal action will be taken against those holding the property.

III. Recommendations addressed to Civil Society Organizations

11) Evolve new and meaningful social rituals and cultural expressions

Civil society organizations can evolve and introduce certain meaningful rituals such as the one done in houses where the bereaved person is laid to rest. All the menfolk of the family would stand at the entrance of the house and keep open the palms of their hands in a gesture of welcome and willingness to receive solidarity and support. In return, the people who enter the house to pay their homage to the bereaved person would touch and hold the opened palms of the male inmates of the house, and proceed forward into the house. The meaning of the gesture is that 'I am with you in your pain'. Similar meaningful rituals can be evolved by civil society organizations for widowed women in view of smoothening their pain, assuring solidarity with them in their struggles, and instilling hope in them for future.

12) Promote Egalitarian Society through Mass Awareness

It is recommended that civil society organizations:

- a. In view of bringing systemic change in society, sustained awareness programs in educational institutions and in public fora are launched through folk and modern art performances as well as the use of media technology, social media in particular. While depicting the dehumanizing effects of traditional socio-cultural practices, efforts are required to affirm the dignity and rights of women by evolving new cultural forms and expressions that promote an egalitarian society;
- b. Launch mass awareness campaigns among the public at large to eradicate the humiliating practices that degrade widows, thereby creating avenues for widows' empowerment and emancipation, social recognition and acceptance.

13) Initiate multi-pronged service delivery and empowerment ventures

It is recommended that Civil Society Organizations:

- a. set up as many counseling centers as possible to help widows come out of their psychological blocks;
- b. support widows in child care, offer career guidance, upgrade their educational qualifications and technical skills, and create opportunities for them to venture into individual and collective entrepreneurial enterprises;
- c. provide opportunities for those widows who are capable of, and interested in, pursuing professional education (law, teaching, research, engineering, journalism, business, administration, etc.) so as to not only build up their social status in public life but also get integrated into mainstream society;
- d. support widows to gain knowledge about their entitlements and create spaces for collective bargaining with the administration when their rights are denied;
- e. mobilize widows and support them to form and strengthen their widows' movements to the extent of gaining self-confidence and skilled leadership to defend and protect the rights and entitlements of the community of widows;
- f. Further, in the light of the study findings showing a low level of interest of the widows for political leadership in the democratic governance system, it should be a major concern of the civil society organizations to impress on the widows the necessity of their participatory role in the governance system. To make a breakthrough in the patriarchal cultural setup that keeps the widows as a subservient section of society, and to access power and authority in the current political arrangement for a greater share of resources and entitlements for women in general and for widows in particular, training, empowering, encouraging and supporting widows to assume leadership positions at various levels in the democratic governance system is a challenging and enterprising task for the civil society organizations.

PART II

CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When one reads through the pages of history, one feels aghast about the agony that widows have been going through, starting from the tortuous experience of ‘Sati’ – a practice of self-immolation mandated by Brahminic tradition for every woman at the demise of her husband. A telling excerpt, taken from the letter of Francois Bernier, dated October 4, 1667, and entitled “*Describing the Superstitions, strange customs, and Doctrines of the Indous or Gentiles [Hindus] of Hindoustan*”, portrays an eyewitness account of one such experience of ‘Sati’:

*As I was leaving Sourate [Surat] for Persia, I witnessed the devotion and burning of another widow: several Englishmen and Dutchmen and Monsieur Chardin of Paris were present. She was of (the) middle age, and by no means uncomely. I do not expect, with my limited powers of expression, to convey a full idea of the brutish boldness, or ferocious gaiety depicted on this woman’s countenance; of her undaunted step; of the freedom from all perturbation with which she conversed, and permitted herself to be washed; of the look of confidence or rather of insensibility which she cast upon us; or her easy air, free from dejection; of her lofty carriage, void of embarrassment, when she was examining her little cabin, composed of dry and thick millet straw, with an intermixture of small wood; when she entered into that cabin, sat down upon the funeral pile, placed her deceased husband’s head in her lap, took up a torch, and with her own hand lighted the fire within, while I know not how many Brahmins were busily engaged in kindling it without. Well, indeed may I despair of representing this whole scene with proper and genuine feeling, such as I experienced at the spectacle itself, or of painting it in colors sufficiently vivid. My recollection of it indeed is so distinct that it seems only a few days since the horrid reality passed before my eyes, and with pain, I persuade myself that it was anything but a frightful dream.*¹

This narration explains the violent social practices followed in the name of culture and religion, which led to the deaths of widows and sent a message that ‘bereft of men, women have no living’. One should not misunderstand this widow’s acceptance of ‘self-immolation’ as valour on her part. If we look at it from the perspective of human rights, the deed mandated to be done by her is barbaric and inhuman. The influence of patriarchal society over widows in the name of religion and culture has been very strong. However, one does not, and cannot,

¹ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668* in World History Commons, Translated by Archibald Constable on the basis of Irving Brock’s version. Edited by Vincent A. Smith. 1934. Reprint: Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1194. Available at: [Link](#) [accessed 31 March 2023]

comprehend the agony of the women, their perspective of the world, and their options when forced to that ultimate sacrifice.

Widows are the silent (silenced) sufferers in India, as in many parts of the world. From the very moment of the death of their husbands, in the name of culture and religion, they are socially ostracised and deprived of all rights – to live a dignified life, to mobility, to assume leadership, to property, to re-marry, to dress in the way they want, etc. Their very presence is perceived to be abominable. They are considered and treated as ‘ill-omens’, ‘unlucky’, and ‘living corpses.’ Analysing the reality of widows, Meera Khanna stated, *“Indian widow is triply discriminated against – as a woman, as a widow and as a poor widowed woman. They are ... physically alive, but socially dead.”*²

The age-old plight of widows is intertwined with gender discrimination and superstition – issues that have deeply penetrated the ethos of Indian culture. Their situation emanates from the deep-rooted notion in the mindset of Indians that *‘women cease to have the right to live, the moment they are widowed... the moment they become single’*.

The High-Level Committee on the Status of Women has acknowledged widows as one group of ‘marginalized women and women in difficult circumstances.’ The Committee notes that “the incidence of singleness is much higher for women than men, and numerous socio-cultural, psychological, and economic factors make them vulnerable and marginalised. Among single women, divorced/separated ones are more stigmatised than the rest. Widows are the largest category of single women (86%), and face high levels of deprivation, social taboos, limited freedom to re-marry, insecure property rights, social restrictions on living arrangements, restricted employment opportunities, emotional and other forms of violence, and lack of social support... ‘Half Widows’ are another category of single women who face unique challenges when their husbands go missing for a long time.”³

I. Population of Widows

A study in 2015 revealed that approximately 258 million (258,481,056) widows live worldwide. Among them, 46 million (46,457,516) live in India.⁴ India had the largest number of widows followed by China, which had 44.6 million.

The findings of the study correlate with the findings of the 2011 census of India, which indicated there were 43 million (43,261,478) widows in the country, constituting 7.3% of the total female population of the country. Among them, 68.2% lived in rural areas.⁵

² Meera Khanna, *The Voiceless Millions of Widows in India – Focus on Rights of Widows within the CEDAW Framework*, The Guild of Service India, 2015. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 31 March 2023)

³ High-Level Committee on the Status of Women, *Report on the Status of Women in India: Executive Summary*, 2015. pp. 36-37.

⁴ The Loomba Foundation, *World Widows Report*, 2016, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 31 March 2023)

⁵ Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

1. The Population of Widows at the National level

Out of the 43 million (43,261,478) widows living in the country, Uttar Pradesh had 48 lakhs, the highest number in the country followed by Maharashtra with 45 lakhs. Tamil Nadu figures 4th in the list with 38.5 lakh widows. Table 1.1 indicates that 72.4% of the total population of widows live in 10 states that have the highest number of widows and the remaining 27.6% of widows live in the other 25 states.

Table 1.1: The list of the top 10 States in India having the highest number of widows in 2011⁶			
S. No	States	Population of Widows	Percentage of the population of Widows
	All India	43,261,478	
1	Uttar Pradesh	4,856,188	11.2
2	Maharashtra	4,520,764	10.4
3	Andhra Pradesh	4,297,481	9.9
4	Tamil Nadu	3,856,398	8.9
5	West Bengal	3,792,184	8.8
6	Bihar	2,238,793	5.2
7	Madhya Pradesh	2,160,609	5.0
8	Kerala	2,010,984	4.6
9	Rajasthan	1,983,634	4.6
10	Orissa	1,612,627	3.7
Total of all the 10 states		31,329,662	72.4

Table 1.2 illustrates the national average (7.4%) and each of the 32 states' average population of widows in comparison with the total female population living in these states.

It is interesting to note that the state of Uttar Pradesh, while having the highest number of widows in the country, occupies 29th place with 5.1% in comparison with the female population living in the state, which is far less than the national average of 7.4%. Similarly, Puducherry, which does not figure in the list of top 10 states with the highest number of widows, occupies first place with 11.6% in comparison with the total female population of the state. This is 4.2% higher than the national average.

The point to be noted here is that the higher or lower number of widows living in each state does not determine the percentage of widows in comparison with the total female population of the state. Perhaps the prevalent socio-economic and political context in the state determines the increase or decrease in the percentage of widows.

⁶ Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

Table 1.2. National and state-wise average percentage of the population of widows to the total female population living in them ⁷					
S. No	State	Total Population	Total female Population	Population of Widows	Percentage of widows to the total female Population
	All India	1,210,854,977	587,584,719	43,261,478	7.4
1	Puducherry	1,247,953	635,442	73,579	11.6
2	Kerala	33,406,061	17,378,649	2,010,984	11.6
3	Goa	1,458,545	719,405	77,935	10.8
4	Tamil Nadu	72,147,030	36,009,055	3,856,398	10.7
5	Andhra Pradesh	84,580,777	42,138,631	4,297,481	10
6	Karnataka	61,095,297	30,128,640	2,989,429	9.9
7	Tripura	3,673,917	1,799,541	164,969	9.2
8	West Bengal	91,276,115	44,467,088	3,792,184	9
9	Himachal Pradesh	6,864,602	3,382,729	293,475	8.7
10	Maharashtra	112,374,333	54,131,277	4,520,764	8
11	Assam	31,205,576	15,266,133	1,156,042	8
12	Lakshadweep	64,473	31,350	2,448	8
13	Orissa	41,974,218	20,762,082	1,612,627	8
14	Punjab	27,743,338	13,103,873	928,158	7
15	Uttarakhand	10,086,292	4,948,519	387,215	7.8
16	Chhattisgarh	25,545,198	12,712,303	973,787	7.7
17	Daman And Diu	243,247	92,946	6,816	7.3
18	Gujarat	60,439,692	28,948,432	2,015,742	7
19	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	380,581	177,710	12,525	7
20	Haryana	25,351,462	11,856,728	773,297	6.5
21	Jharkhand	32,988,134	16,057,819	1,027,878	6.4
22	Madhya Pradesh	72,626,809	35,014,503	2,160,609	6.2
23	Rajasthan	68,548,437	32,997,440	1,983,634	6
24	Delhi	16,787,941	7,800,615	456,613	5.9
25	Meghalaya	2,966,889	1,475,057	84,825	5.8
26	Manipur	2,855,794	1,417,208	77,990	5.5
27	Mizoram	1,097,206	541,867	28,569	5.3
28	Chandigarh	1,055,450	474,787	24,496	5.2
29	Uttar Pradesh	199,812,341	95,331,831	4,856,188	5.1
30	Sikkim	610,577	287,507	13,717	5
31	Dadra And Nagar Haveli	343,709	149,949	7,378	4.9
32	Jammu and Kashmir	12,541,302	5,900,640	283,650	4.8

⁷Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

2. The Population of Widows in Tamil Nadu

The 2011 Census data for Tamil Nadu showed that 3.8 million (3,856,398) widows were living in the state of Tamil Nadu, which constituted 10.7% of the total female population of the country. That is an indication that the average percentage of widows in the state is higher by 3.4% than the national average.

Table 1.3: The list of top 10 Districts in Tamil Nadu having the highest number of widows in 2011⁸			
S. No	District	Population of Widows	Percentage of total population of widows as per district
	State – Tamil Nadu	3,856,398	
1	Vellore	226,990	5.9
2	Chennai	206,815	5.4
3	Kancheepuram	190,508	4.9
4	Salem	187,652	4.9
5	Coimbatore	184,518	4.8
6	Tiruvallur	180,723	4.7
7	Villupuram	176,657	4.6
8	Tirunelveli	170,583	4.4
9	Tiruchirappalli	163,338	4.2
10	Madurai	158,937	4.1
Total		1,846,721	47.9

Among the total number of widows in the state, approximately 54.8% were living in rural areas and 45.2% in urban areas. Concerning the population of SC and ST widows in the state, they formed 0.7 million (738,181) or 19%,⁹ and 34,515 or 0.9%,¹⁰ respectively of the total population of widows of the state.

As seen in Table 1.3, out of the 3.8 million (3,856,398) widows living in Tamil Nadu, Vellore district has the highest number, 2.26 lakhs, followed by Chennai with 2.06 lakhs. Of the total population of widows in the state, 47% live in 10 districts and the remaining 52.1% live in the other 22 districts.

Table 1.4. shows that widows form 10.7% of the State's female population, which is 3.3% higher than the national average of 7.4%. It is interesting to note that the district-wise statistics, too, reinforce the point.

⁸Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

⁹ Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

¹⁰ Census of India 2011, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 02 April 2023)

Table 1.4: Tamil Nadu State's & District-wise average percentage of the population of widows to the total female population living in them¹¹					
S. No	State & District	Total Population	Total Female Population	Total no of widows	Percentage of widows to the total female population
	State – TAMIL NADU	72,147,030	36,009,055	3,856,398	10.7
1	Karur	1,064,493	536,309	71,565	13.3
2	Namakkal	1,726,601	857,321	106,906	12.5
3	Erode	2,251,744	1,121,876	139,874	12.5
4	Theni	1,245,899	620,216	76,799	12.4
5	Tiruchirappalli	2,722,290	1,370,006	163,338	11.9
6	The Nilgiris	735,394	375,251	43,796	11.7
7	Ariyalur	754,894	380,191	44,239	11.6
8	Vellore	3,936,331	1,974,643	226,990	11.5
9	Thanjavur	2,405,890	1,223,474	140,872	11.5
10	Tiruvannamalai	2,464,875	1,228,986	140,238	11.4
11	Nagapattinam	1,616,450	818,323	92,348	11.3
12	Dindigul	2,159,775	1,078,837	120,919	11.2
13	Perambalur	565,223	283,066	31,711	11.2
14	Thiruvavur	1,264,277	637,584	71,662	11.2
15	Salem	3,482,056	1,700,485	187,652	11
16	Tirunelveli	3,077,233	1,556,321	170,583	11
17	Thoothukkudi	1,750,176	885,155	96,433	10.9
18	Virudhunagar	1,942,288	974,579	105,605	10.8
19	Coimbatore	3,458,045	1,728,748	184,518	10.7
20	Cuddalore	2,605,914	1,294,217	136,997	10.6
21	Madurai	3,038,252	1,511,777	158,937	10.5
22	Tiruppur	2,479,052	1,232,893	127,405	10.3
23	Villuppuram	3,458,873	1,718,054	176,657	10.3
24	Dharmapuri	1,506,843	732,540	74,933	10.2
25	Pudukkottai	1,618,345	815,157	82,417	10.1
26	Sivaganga	1,339,101	670,429	68,007	10.1
27	Thiruvallur	3,728,104	1,852,042	180,723	9.8
28	Kanniyakumari	1,870,374	944,029	90,529	9.6
29	Kancheepuram	3,998,252	1,985,294	190,508	9.6
30	Krishnagiri	1,879,809	919,577	86,684	9.4
31	Ramanathapuram	1,353,445	670,787	59,738	8.9
32	Chennai	4,646,732	2,310,888	206,815	8.9

This higher-than-national average percentage of widows in the state was confirmed by a UN study in 2008, which indicated that Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have more young widows than any other state in India. A significant reason mentioned in the study is that more Tamil men died young due to alcoholism.¹² The ubiquitous state-marketed liquor shops run by Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) have enabled millions of Tamil youths to become

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²Ground Report, (2008), *UN Study – More widows in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry*, 2008 Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 04 April 2023)

alcoholics and the increasing deaths due to alcoholism and road accidents is said to contribute to the increase in the numbers of young widows in Tamil Nadu.¹³

II. Challenges faced by Widows

The challenges faced by widows in their daily lives can be categorised as (1) ill-treatment targeting their psyche; (2) disregard for their re-marriage; (3) sexual abuse; (4) economic challenges; and (5) social challenges.

1) Ill treatment targeting their psyche

- a) **Treating widows as ill omens:** This refers to disregarding the presence of widows on auspicious occasions, avoiding situations of looking at them, etc.
- b) **Blaming widows for the death of their husbands:** Whatever may be the reason for the death of the husbands, the blame is put on widows through allegations such as 'she has swallowed or killed her husband'.
- c) **Verbal abuse:** In the Tamil language, there are quite a number of derogatory words such as 'முனி' (deformity, defect of limb, ugly woman), 'மொட்டச்சி' (a woman with bald head), 'கம்மநாட்டி' (widow), 'அறுத்தவள்' (one who snapped marital necklace), 'தூக்கி முழுங்கியவள்' (one who swallowed husband), 'அபசகுணம்' (a person of ill omen), 'ராசியில்லாதவள்' (unlucky person), etc. used against the widows. When widows hear these inhuman words, they are shattered psychologically.
- d) **Disrespect from in-laws:** From the moment of the death of the husbands, the in-laws begin to show disdain towards the widows.
- e) **Being looked at sympathetically:** In general, people who meet a widow put forth the feeling of 'sympathy' for her, not realizing that it deepens the psychological wound they have already experienced rather than soothing or healing them. They do not seem to look at her problem as 'a denial of her due rights'.
- f) **Denial of rights to beautify oneself:** Widows are denied their rights to wear ornaments, and beautify themselves using simple items such as facial powder, turmeric paste, etc. Still, if a widow goes ahead beautifying herself, a number of insidious remarks and gossips would be made against her – that she is attempting to attract menfolk, she is roaming around enjoying life, etc. If widows dress up well and go out, the people around would give a suspicious look as if these women are involved in immoral acts.
- g) **Disregarding their leadership capabilities:** Society, in general, would not accept the leadership of widows and consider it 'evil' or 'ill omen'.
- h) **Denial of their right to live an independent life:** If widows try to live an independent life, they would be accused of being arrogant and shameless.

¹³ The Sunday Indian, *Tamil Nadu becoming land of singles*, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 10 January 2022)

2) Disregard for widows' re-marriage

- a) In general, widows would not get support for re-marriage from relatives and society, in case they aspire for it. As a result, they have no other way but to suppress their feelings and move forward in their life as single women.
- b) Even when a few widows come forward to re-marry, usually they don't find a decent groom. Here, one needs to keep in mind that even widowers prefer only unmarried women, that is, chaste virgins. If at all any man comes forward to marry a widow, he would demand a huge dowry.

3) Sexual abuse

- a. As there is no one to speak on behalf of widows or defend them while in distress, the public in general considers them as 'public property', (பொதுச் சொத்து) and 'fenceless crops' (வேலியில்லாத பயிர்).
- b. Widows are not expected to talk to any men, especially strangers. If they do, people comment negatively as if they are going morally astray. In case, any man comes forward to help widows, people would attribute sexual motives for the help sought or received.
- c. When widows approach men seeking assistance for anything, the latter would expect or seek sexual favours in return. It is not uncommon for widows to be looked at or abused sexually in their workplaces.

4) Economic challenges

- a. Many men are addicted to liquor and are sickly. The wives of such people, for the treatment of their husbands, sell the entire property of the family or borrow money. Despite these efforts, when the husbands die, their widows are forced into coolie work (daily wage earning) to repay the debt incurred and to care for their children.
- b. Denial of right to inherit husbands' property: After the death of their husbands, in order to confiscate the entire property due for the widowed women, the close relatives of the widows – e.g., brothers and sisters of husbands – make false allegations related to the morality of the widows and try to chase them out of the house.
- c. Even if widows come up in life through their hard work, the people around them take their possessions and properties away.
- d. Since many widows are illiterate, they are not aware of the welfare schemes announced by the government. But when they apply for such schemes, taking advantage of their ignorance, some people, in the guise of helping them, extract money from them. Government officials, on their part, often make widows run from pillar to post through their wrong guidance. Further, they threaten to confiscate their ration cards if the widows continue to demand their rights.

- e. Widows in general are involved in coolie work. The salary given to them is not the same as that of their male counterparts; indeed, it is much less. Hence, widows struggle to meet their family's basic needs. They are also not able to provide education to their children who often are forced to give up their education and join their mothers in coolie work. Also, the widows struggle hard to get their daughters married.
- f. Amid all these hardships, widows cannot think of saving anything for their future needs. They are perennially forced to borrow money from moneylenders for urgent basic needs.
- g. In general, no one comes forward to lend money to widows because of the fear that they would not be able to pay back the loan on time. As a result, in times of dire need, widows are forced to borrow money from anybody even if they charge high interest rates.

5) Social challenges

- a. While society does not want the presence of widows for any auspicious occasions, it requires their help for the ceremony of 'removal of *thali*' of newly widowed women.
- b. When the children of widows make mistakes as any other children, they are magnified out of proportion. Often negative comments are passed such as, '*After all, it is a child brought up by a widow*', meaning that any child brought up by a widow does not behave properly.
- c. The married daughters of widows are often ill-treated in their in-laws' house as there are no men on their parental side to question the in-laws and defend the daughters.
- d. In some places, children, especially sons, follow the diktat of their spouses to abandon their widowed mothers.
- e. Many widows do not share all these problems with anyone. They keep them to themselves and withdraw from social life.
- f. In general, widows attribute all their hardships in life to fate and try to accept them with resignation. They do not dare to question or challenge the system which dehumanises them.

While the problems of widows are plenty, there is no forum to voice out openly and effect changes in society by way of (i) creating awareness among the widows themselves, (ii) awakening the conscience of society in general, and (iii) demanding the attention of the government to look into their age-old problems and address them through legal and welfare remedies. For all these, a serious, authentic, and scientific study is required.

III. Absence of Adequate Legal Mechanisms to Protect and Promote Rights

The Indian Constitution mandates gender equality. Similarly, there are legislative provisions assuring women's rights to security, education, and employment opportunities. However, no legislation is in place to specifically look into the security and development concerns of widows. A few progressive laws were passed in both the pre- and post-independence period: *The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act (1856)*, *the Bengal Sati Regulation Act (1829)*, *the Sati*

(Prevention) Act of Rajasthan (1987), and The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act of India (1987). Further, India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, an international treaty that obligates States to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promote women's and girls' equal rights.

Despite all these initiatives, India's widows have not seen the dawn of freedom and liberation even after 77 years of independence. It is unfortunate that neither the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution, nor the series of laws enacted to safeguard the rights of women, nor the 2001 National Policy for the Empowerment of Women address the issue of prejudice against widows.¹⁴ Still, India needs stringent legal measures to ensure the recognition of widows and their rights, protection, and welfare.

1) A perusal of the policies and programmatic measures for widows

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001¹⁵ makes only one mention of widows in its section on 'women in difficult circumstances', where it states, "In recognition of the diversity of women's situations and acknowledgment of the needs of especially disadvantaged groups [including widows], measures and programs will be undertaken to provide them with special assistance" (para 6.12).

More progressive is the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-2017), which for the first time inserted a separate section on single women and widows with the following:

Special attention is needed on the issues of single women, particularly widows. The provision of rehabilitation and compensation, besides economic packages for widows, must be examined. Further, the widow's pension scheme should be extended to a larger pool of beneficiaries by reworking the age eligibility criteria as some States have done. Indexing of pension to inflation should be considered. (Para, 23.59)

A separate quota under Indira Awas Yojana and Rajiv Awas Yojana [housing schemes] for single women will be considered and their access to employment and equal wages through special job cards for single women under MGNREGA must be ensured. Separate entrepreneurship and leadership development schemes for single women will be promoted along with preferential selection in credit grants with flexible payment modalities and lower interest rates. (Para, 23.60)

*Single women must be made aware of their rights and entitlements within their maternal and matrimonial households. For this, special focus is needed on legal aid to single women as well as the promotion of separate federations of single women at block and district levels. (Para, 23.61)*¹⁶

¹⁴ Women and Child Development, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

¹⁵ National Policy on the empowerment of women 2001, Available at: [Link](#) (Accessed 05 April 2023)

¹⁶ Planning Commission Government of India, *Twelfth five-year plan 2012 -2017*, Social Sectors, Vol. III, SAGE Publications 2013. p.175, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

The Minister of Finance subsequently noted for the first time in his budget speech for 2013–2014, “Women belonging to the most vulnerable groups, including single women and widows, must be able to live with self-esteem and dignity”. He further moved on to allocate a separate budget for the development of single women.¹⁷

By way of extending economic help to BPL (Below Poverty Line) widows in the age group of 40 to 59, under the ‘National Social Assistance Programme’ (NSAP), in 2009 the Ministry of Rural Development launched a scheme called ‘Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme’ (IGNWPS), which provided a sum of Rs. 200/- up to 79 years of age and Rs. 500/- thereafter. In 2021, the Central Government changed the name of the scheme to ‘Vidhwa Pension Yojana’ and increased the amount from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 300/- per month for widows between 18 to 60 years of age¹⁸ and later in 2023-24, the amount was raised to Rs. 500/- per month.¹⁹

As per the guidelines of the ‘National Social Assistance Program’ (NSAP), along with the contribution of the Union government, the State governments are expected to add at least an equal amount before passing the amount to the beneficiary widows.²⁰ In the case of Tamil Nadu, along with the Union Government’s contribution of Rs. 500/- per month for a widow, the State government adds Rs. 1000/- per month. While appreciating the intention of both Union and State governments, the amount allotted to widows is still minimal and insufficient to secure an adequate measure of basic living.

The limited research available on widows in the country, and in Tamil Nadu in particular, as well as the large gaps in legal, policy, budgetary, and programmatic measures to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of widows, makes research on the socio-economic conditions of widows in Tamil Nadu imperative. Adequate evidence is required to highlight the prevailing conditions of this vulnerable group of women, to feed into ongoing advocacy work by movements of widows and supportive civil society organizations to ensure an adequate state framework, including specific legislation, enabling widows to live with dignity.

Conclusion

The age-old problems of widows deny them their rights, including their right to live with dignity. These problems have been imposed on them down the years in the name of culture and religion. Consequently, many widows accept all their agonies as the product of ‘fate’ in the absence of any supportive environment. Even today, many live as ‘silent sufferers’ due to lack of adequate social and institutional supportive mechanisms. In the list of countries, India stands first with 46 million, which is 18% of the widows living in the world. Within India, Tamil Nadu has a higher percentage of widows than the national average.

¹⁷ Chidambaram, *Budget 2013-14 Speech of P. Chidambaram*, Ministry of Finance, 2013 p.4, para.19, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

¹⁸ Vidhwa Pension Yojana scheme, Union Government Scheme, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

¹⁹ Vivian Fernandes, *Union Budget 2023-24: Dear FM, please provide relief to those most in distress by raising their pension amounts*, First Post, 2023. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

²⁰ National Social Assistance Program, Ministry of Rural Development, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 05 April 2023)

Down the years, barring one legislation ('Sati Prevention Act') enacted in 1987, both Union and State Governments have not done much to safeguard the rights of widows. In the realm of social welfare measures too, barring the monthly pension scheme initiated for widows in 2009, which also is insufficient, governments have not yet come up with concrete pro-active plans to ameliorate the situation of widows and empower them as women with dignity.

In this context, this study attempts to (a) raise public awareness of the socio-economic conditions of widows in Tamil Nadu; and (b) provide strong evidence-based material for advocacy in view of seeking a robust legal and policy framework from the state institutions, matched by adequate budget and programs, as a means to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of widows.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Patriarchy, a social system that oppresses and subordinates women in both the private and public spheres,²¹ is a common feature in different societies and stages of history. However, Brahmanical patriarchy is a unique system in the Indian sub-continent that causes various forms of subjugation for Indian women, including what widows undergo in the religious and cultural realm. Brahmanical patriarchy, which stands on two unjust systemic structures – casteism and sexism, is the intrinsic part of the Brahmanical social order, otherwise known as the caste system or four-fold varna system. As the longest-surviving form of social stratification, the Brahmanical social order and its inherent patriarchy continue to govern people's social behaviour. Built on the premises of caste, class and gender hierarchies, this social order shapes India's social, political, economic and cultural institutions even today. Despite constitutional protection, the inherent ideology of the Brahmanical social order keeps women and Dalits, a social group in the lowest rung in the caste system, in '*humiliating conditions of existence*.'²²

This chapter analyses these ideological factors that propagate enforced widowhood in the Indian context and the remedial aspects put in place down the years. It is divided into two sections. Section-I explores the ideological underpinnings and the structural framework that subordinate women, especially widows, in India, and Section-II assesses the existing legal guarantees and protection laws that safeguard widows from various forms of subjugation.

SECTION I

IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND THE CONCEPT OF WIDOWHOOD

The concept of widowhood is a dehumanising factor. It emanates from the Brahmanic-patriarchal structure of caste, its production and reproduction. The foundation of its operation is the ideological and material framework that stringently controls female sexuality and deprives women of their personhood.

Enforced widowhood exclusions are a severe form of subjugation imposed through the powerful instrument of Brahmanical patriarchy and its ritualistic religious traditions.²³ Brahmanical ideology condemns widows to social death through alienation, deprivation of their personhood, and forceful control of their sexuality. In this section, an attempt is made to unearth this ideological base, as it is essential to understand the different forms of discrimination, humiliation and violence the widows go through in modern times.

²¹ Kamla Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy?* Kali for Women, New Delhi 1993. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

²² Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993 (Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

²³ Ibid

I. The Identity of Women in Brahmanical Patriarchy and its Foundation

Historically, scholars argue that ancient Indian society was relatively egalitarian²⁴ and treated women equally. It was pastoral, semi-nomadic, and tribal. The economy was based on hunting, cattle rearing and agriculture.²⁵ Anthropological data affirm that the tribal societies were egalitarian and the status of men and women was characterised as '*separate but equal*'.²⁶ Women had the right to education, participated in religious activities and played an equal economic role.²⁷ As Ambedkar mentioned in his writings, women occupied high intellectual and social positions.²⁸ He noted women had access to public arenas and were involved in public discussions with men on subjects of religion, philosophy and metaphysics.²⁹ But, during the sixth and fifth centuries BC, i.e. the post-Vedic period, there was a transformation in politics, economy and society, which seemed to adversely impact the identity and status of women.

1) Historical Context and Origin of Brahmanical Patriarchy

Scholars argue that with the expansion of Aryan culture further eastwards, society underwent a significant transformation. Especially between 500 BCE and 300 BCE, there was a tumultuous change in the economy, politics and society. A monarchical state system was formed. Urbanisation emerged, and notions of the money economy, private property and land ownership were introduced.³⁰ Brahmanism was integrated into the socio-politico-religious ideology which developed in this period. A four-fold varna system or Brahmanical social order was strengthened, with a clear distinction of the rights and privileges of the two 'upper' castes. The varna system played an essential role during the transition to the monarchical state. This system was a device for regulating production, tax collection, labour, and distribution and as a system of social control.³¹

The Brahmins (priests and teachers) and the *Ksatriyas* (rulers and kings), characterised as the 'upper castes', took control of political power and economic resources. In this process, they mutually supported each other. The Brahmins legitimised the new political rulers and, in return, retained the highest ritual status and access to economic resources.³² Their varna position authorised *Kshatriyas* to collect taxes and govern others, enabling them to support the *Brahmins*.³³

²⁴ Ujjayini Ray, '*Idealizing motherhood*': *The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India* (circa 500 bce – 300ce), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993 (Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

²⁷ Ujjayini Ray, '*Idealizing motherhood*': *The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India* (circa 500 bce – 300ce), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Pg.12. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

²⁸ Sharmila Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu- B.R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ujjayini Ray, '*Idealizing motherhood*': *The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India* (circa 500 bce – 300ce), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Pg.12. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

What is the four-fold *Varna* System/ Caste system?

This fourfold *varna* system or the caste system is a longest surviving social stratification that divides people into broad social groups, known as *varnas* or *jatis* or *castes* and place them in hierarchical order on the basis of ritual purity. The first four categories of social groups are regarded as *varnas* and the fifth category is considered to be outside of the *Varna* system. In the order of precedence, they are the *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), the *Kshatriyas* (rulers and soldiers), the *Vaisyas* (merchants and traders), and the *Shudras* (labourers and artisans). The fifth category of people who falls outside of the *varna* system are those known as “untouchable”, now commonly known as Dalits. Brahmins are said to be the most pure and other three considered to be less pure in descending order. The Brahmins are considered to be “twice born” and “superior social beings” worthy of all special rights and privileges, while the Dalits, who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy are treated as “sub-human beings or lesser human beings”. The Shudras, Dalits and Women are seen as persons to serve the ‘higher castes’.

During this period, the Brahmanical discourse on women emerged as an inseparable part of this new political, economic and *varna* (caste) system. The architects of the *varna* system realised that safeguarding resources, power, and caste identity could be maintained only by guaranteeing caste purity. Therefore, they decided to control the reproduction process by effectively controlling women’s sexuality. They institutionalised women’s sexual subordination in Brahmanical law codes and enforced it through the power of the state.³⁵ To maintain the Brahmanical social order and lineage purity, they created a structure of rules, institutions and distinctive cultural and religious codes for women that control their social mobility within the caste group. Through this division of women according to their procreative status, they limited and established control over women’s reproductive facilities.³⁶

2) What is Brahmanical Patriarchy?

Brahmanical patriarchy is referred to as a set of rules and institutions that link caste, class and gender and that shape each other. Chakravarti, who coined this term, explained:

Patriarchal codes in this structure ensure that the caste system can be reproduced without violating the hierarchical order of closed endogamous circles. Further, Brahmanical codes for women differ according to the status of the caste group in the hierarchy of castes, with the most stringent control over sexuality reserved as a privilege of the higher caste.

Chakravarti further explained it as the structure of rules and institutions by which caste and class hierarchies and gender inequality are maintained through both the reproduction of consent and the application of coercion.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993(Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

³⁶ Ujjayini Ray, *‘Idealizing motherhood’: The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India’(circa 500 bce – 300ce)*, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

³⁷ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*, in M.Monanty (ed) *Class, Caste and Gender*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2004, p.274

3) Religious Sanctioning and Idealisation of Brahmanical Patriarchy through Religious Texts

Various religious-legal texts dictate and legitimise this Brahmanical social order and the construct about women. These texts are devices used to disseminate Brahmanical caste and patriarchal ideology among women and social groups in the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. These Brahmanical texts were composed during different periods of history, including the Vedic period. Ironically, these texts are referred to as the source of law in modern times and incorporated into some personal marriage laws.

These texts are broadly classified into two groups *Srutis* and *Smritis*. *Srutis* are known as *vedas*, and they mostly depict the life of people. On the other hand, *Smritis*, broadly classified as *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras*, refers to the systematic exposition of rules and principles of law. Besides these texts, other Brahmanical literature, including *Arthashastra*, *Kamasutra*, the plays of *Bhasa* and *Kalidasa*, and epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that survive in modern times, explicitly degrade women.

For instance, as Chakravarti cited, '*Ramayana associates most women with being weak and sinful.*' *Anasuya* complains that usually, women do not know right from wrong, and even though they depend on their husbands for protection, they wander about with their hearts subject only to their desires.³⁸ Most texts depict women as sexually motivated, chasing men, destructive and lust, of malicious nature and immoral conduct³⁹. Using this backdrop, they asserted the social obligation to regulate women and control their sexuality to preserve social equilibrium and morality.⁴⁰

4) The *Manusmriti* – 'Hindu Code of the Law' and its Portrayal of Women

Among the vast list of *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras*, *Manusmriti* holds an essential place in the Brahmanic tradition.⁴¹ It is crucial to assess it critically for three reasons. First, it encompasses all the ideological values and patriarchal codes reflected in the other texts. It covers a wide range of ideas related to human life, like the sacraments, the initiation of Vedic study, forms of marriage, rules and codes for women and wives, hospitality and funerary rites, dietary laws, pollution and purification, administrative laws, juridical matters and above all religious issues. *Brihaspati Dharma Shastra* composed a few centuries after *Manusmriti*, says that Manu is the authority, and any text contradicting Manu has no validity.⁴²

Secondly, as Ambedkar said, *Manusmriti* played a significant role in converting Brahmanical social theory into the state's law:

³⁸ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993(Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

³⁹ Ujjayini Ray, 'Idealizing motherhood': *The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India* (circa 500 bce – 300ce), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

⁴⁰ Naseera N.M, Moly Kuruvilla, *The Sexual politics of Manusmriti: A Critical Analysis with Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights perspectives*, Journal of International Women's studies, Vol.23, issue. 6, May 2022 Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁴¹ Tejas Harad, *Why Manusmriti is the symbol of the caste system for anti-caste reformers*, The News Minute, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 09 March 2023)

⁴² Ibid

*There is nothing new or startling in the laws of Manu about woman. They are the views of the Brahmans ever since Brahmanism was born in India. Before Manu, they existed only as a matter of social theory. What Manu did was to convert what was a social theory into the law of the state.*⁴³

Thirdly, the text has high significance in the life and beliefs of the Hindu religion and Indian social life even today, and Indian courts have referred to *Manusmriti* multiple times⁴⁴. Brahmanic scholars have written more commentaries on this treatise than any other *Dharmashastras*. Therefore, understanding how the *Manusmriti* portrays women is crucial to unveil the ideological base for enforced widowhood.

Manusmriti, the *Manusamhita*, or the *Manava Dharmasastras*, was believed to be composed and compiled from 200 BCE to 300 CE. It consists of 2685 verses in twelve chapters.⁴⁵ It is written based on the iniquities of casteism and sexism, and its conception of women and their role is highly problematic, misogynist, and dehumanising. Ambedkar had famously burned *Manusmriti* in the Mahad convention on December 25, 1927, the event now celebrated by many anti-caste activists as 'women's liberation day'.⁴⁶ Kantabai Ahire, who blackened Manu's statue on the Rajasthan High Court campus, said:

*Hindu mythology believes that Manu was the author of Manusmriti and he had lawfully sanctioned the degradation of humanity on the basis of caste and gender. He had laid down regressive laws for the Shudras, and the ati-shudras and women. That fictitious figure still gets legitimacy in contemporary India. And what is most shocking is [his statue] is installed in the high court's premises.*⁴⁷

Manusmriti does not regard a woman as a human entity and denies personhood. It considers woman as an 'inorganic thing' with no value. The identity that *Manusmriti* gives to the woman is the main ideological base for enforced widowhood.

4. a) *Manusmriti* views woman as a 'sexual object':

Brahmanical discourse constructed women as unruly, sexually insatiable, fickle/inconsistent, cunning and wicked.⁴⁸ *Manusmriti* reaffirms this view and posits women as objects of sexual pleasure, especially for the 'upper caste' men. It objectifies a woman's body and takes away her dignity. For example,

It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world). For that reason, the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females. (Chapter 2 (213))

⁴³ Sharmila Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu- B.R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013

⁴⁴ Atindriyo Chakraborty, *Manusmriti and the Judiciary – A Dangerous Game*, Counter Currents, Kottayam. 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 09 March 2023)

⁴⁵ Naseera N.M, Moly Kuruvilla, *The Sexual politics of Manusmriti: A Critical Analysis with Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights perspectives*, Journal of International Women's studies, Vol.23, issue. 6, May 2022 Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁴⁶ Tejas Harad, *Why Manusmriti is the symbol of the caste system for anti-caste reformers*, The News Minute, Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 09 March 2023)

⁴⁷ Sukanya Shanta, *As Symbols of Discrimination Fall Worldwide, Meet the Women Who Blackened Manu's Statue*, Wire, New Delhi, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁴⁸ Ujjayini Ray, *'Idealizing motherhood': The Brahmanical discourse on women in Ancient India'* (circa 500 bce – 300ce), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1999. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger. (Chapter 2 (214))

One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister or daughter, for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man. (Chapter 2 (215))

Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age;(thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man', they give themselves to the handsome and the ugly. (Chapter 9(14))

Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they have to be guarded in this (world). (Chapter 9(15))

4. b) Manusmriti considers women as the property of men and recommends guarding them:

Manusmriti depicts women as having libidinous dispositions that need regulation by men, who are their protectors and guardians. Women are deprived of independence and liberty; men are expected to guard them constantly.

Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyment, they must be kept under one's control. (Chapter 9(2))

Her father guards her in her childhood, her husband guards her in her youth, and her sons guard her in her old age; a woman is not qualified to act independently. (Chapter 9(3))

Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclination, however thrifting (they may appear); if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families. (Chapter 9 (5))

Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives. (Chapter 9(6))

4. c) Manusmriti reduces the level of a woman as a slave to her husband:

Manusmriti outlines the duties of a wife and a husband whether 'they be united or separated'. It lists the various strategies men can use to control their wives lest they 'become disloyal towards their husbands'.

He should employ her in the collection and disbursement of this wealth, in cleaning, in meritorious activity, in cooking food, and in looking after household good. (Chapter 9 (11))

Manusmriti states that even if the husband is addicted to an evil passion, the woman – “a good wife”- is bound to respect him. The *dharma* of women is to be chaste and obedient. It also states that if a woman fails to provide children, especially sons, she is considered “barren” and can be replaced.

If a wife commits a transgression against her husband who is deranged, drunk, or sick, deprived of her ornaments and belongings, she should be cast out for three months (and be) deprived of her ornaments and furniture. (Chapter 9 (78))

When it is a matter of property:

A wife, a son and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong. (Chapter 9 (416))

4.d) Manusmriti depicts women as impure and sinful by birth:

Mensuration, a natural biological process, was seen as an impurity in the Brahmanical tradition. In a very dehumanising way, menstruating women are compared with animals. This culture has been percolated deeply in society and even practised to date.

For the wisdom, the energy, the strength, the sight, and the vitality of a man who approaches a woman covered with menstrual excretions, utterly perish. (Chapter 3 (41))

If he avoids her, while she is in that condition, his wisdom, energy, strength, sight, and vitality will increase...let him not converse with a menstruating woman. (Chapter 3 (42))

A Kandala, a village pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, and a eunuch must not look at the Brahmanas while they eat. (Chapter 3(239))

What (any of) these sees at a burnt-oblation, at a (solemn) gift, at a dinner (given to Brahmanas), or at any rite in honour of the gods and pitrs (=spirits of the departed ancestors), that produces not the intended result. (Chapter 3 (240))

II. Caste Stratification, Brahmanical Patriarchy, and Gender Control systems

Brahmanical patriarchy enforces every possible step to control women's rights to mobility, production, knowledge generation, reproduction, sexuality and sexual life.⁴⁹ Among these, central is patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality that is institutionalised as part of caste stratification. By constantly projecting women as weak, lustful and wicked, control is established over women's sexuality. In order to propagate this further, Brahmanical patriarchy used four essential controlling devices:

- a) *Pativrata*: i.e., the ideal of a perfect wife
- b) Control exerted by the family by restraining women to the domestic sphere
- c) Denial of the right to education for women
- d) Use of violence in the general community and the family against women.

Women's cooperation is secured by using these means, namely, ideology, economic dependence, lack of knowledge, class privileges, and use of force.⁵⁰ Further, through the

⁴⁹ Naseera N.M, Moly Kuruvilla, *The Sexual politics of Manusmriti: A Critical Analysis with Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights perspectives*, Journal of International Women's studies, Vol.23, issue. 6, May 2022 Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁵⁰ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political weekly, [Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993](#)(Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

powerful instrument of religious traditions, women are made to internalise and accept such means as a customary norm.

1) Patriarchal Control over Women's Sexuality

1. a) Endogamy: Critical factor for caste purity and identity

The four-fold varna system introduced by the Brahmic tradition is critical for the dominant castes, especially *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, to maintain their social privileges, safeguarding their resources, power, and caste identity and cohesion. Hence, they needed to guarantee caste purity.⁵¹ To maintain caste purity and patrilineal succession (a requirement of all patriarchal societies),⁵² they exercised endogamy by controlling women's sexuality and freedom. As Chakravarti said,

*The safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. Women are regarded as gateways—literally points of entrance into the caste system.*⁵³

But for men, the rules are different, and their exploitation of women is justified:

*At first marriage, a woman of equal class is recommended for twice-born men; but for those who proceed further through lust, these are, in order, the preferable women. A Sudra may take only a Sudra woman as wife; a Vaisya, the latter and a woman of his own class; a Kshatriya, the latter two and a woman of his own class; and a Brahmin, the last three and a woman of his own class.*⁵⁴ (Manusmriti, Chapter 3, shlokas 12, 13)

According to Ambedkar, the idea of pollution or untouchability is not the key characteristic of the caste system; instead, it is endogamy.⁵⁵ 'The prohibition of inter-marriage provided the basic framework for the development of the caste structure.'

*...Three operations central to the origin and development of caste come to light: intra-group organisation or reproduction, violent control of surplus woman's sexuality, and legitimating control practices through ideology.*⁵⁶

In his analysis of endogamy, Ambedkar mentioned several customs introduced to sustain endogamy:

- Sati, or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband
- Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to re-marry
- Child marriages.

⁵¹ Aloysius Irudayam SJ, Jayshree P. Mangubhai & Joel G, (2011), *Dalit Women speak out: Caste, Class and Gender violence in India*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2011.

⁵² Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993 (Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

⁵³ U. Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*, in M. Monanty (ed) *Class, Caste and Gender*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004

⁵⁴ Subhashini Ali, *The Laws of Manu and What They Would Mean for Citizens of the Hindu Rashtra*, Wire, New Delhi, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁵⁵ P. Pardeshi, *Ambedkar and Women's liberation*, the dalit 40 (March -April 2002)

⁵⁶ Sharmila Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu- B.R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013

Ambedkar explained this phenomenon using the concept of surplus men and women. According to his analysis, the restriction of marriage within the caste group caused an imbalance in the sex ratio in the given group. This imbalance will likely create problems in the form of 'surplus men' or 'surplus women'. If the wife dies before her husband, the man is rendered 'surplus' and vice versa. In order to maintain the sex ratio and perpetuate endogamy, these exploitative customs were practised.⁵⁷

Ambedkar further said:

*If the surplus woman remains, she may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential bride.*⁵⁸

Therefore, under Brahmanical patriarchy, the idea of Sati emerged: burning the woman on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. If she cannot be burned, something must be done, which is why widowhood was enforced.⁵⁹

But in the case of surplus men, burning him with his wife was not considered, simply because he is a man with a higher social status. In order to balance the sex ratio, child marriage, therefore, was allowed. Ambedkar said, 'Woman has been easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions: religious, social or economic.'⁶⁰

1. b) Brahmanical patriarchy: Central to the preservation of caste-class stratification

As mentioned above, Indian women's subordination is intrinsically related to caste and class subordination. Anti-caste reformers like Phule and Ambedkar underlined the intrinsic relation between caste hierarchy and patriarchy. Yet, this analysis of gender, caste and class has not been further explored until recently. However, some anthropological studies by scholars provide historical evidence for class, caste and gender stratification and its intrinsic relations. For instance, Yalman⁶¹ argues,

*[The] fundamental principle of Hindu social organisation is to construct a closed structure to preserve land, women, and ritual quality within it. The three are structurally linked and it is impossible to maintain all three without stringently organising female sexuality. Indeed, neither land, nor ritual quality, i.e., the purity of caste can be ensured without closely guarding women who form the pivot for the entire structure.*⁶²

Chakravarti stated that patriarchy in the Brahmanical social order is unique and closely associated with the caste order. She further says,

⁵⁷ M.L. Kondreddy, *Ambedkarian Discourse on Gender*, 4(1&2) Indian Journal of Human Rights 224,2000. Pg.224

⁵⁸ Sharmila Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu- B.R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013

⁵⁹ Sharmila Rege, *Against the Madness of Manu- B.R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2013

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ [Uma Chakravarti](#), *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, Economic & Political weekly, [Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993](#)(Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

⁶² Ibid

*The purity of women has a centrality in Brahmanical patriarchy, as we shall see because the purity of caste is contingent upon it.*⁶³

If the 'lower caste' man were to get sexual access to women of higher status, the purity of women would be endangered, and thereby the purity of the entire group to which she belongs. The most revealing statement that Manu makes in the context of women's essential nature⁶⁴ is:

Knowing their disposition, which the lord of creatures laid on them at creation (i.e., their reproductive power, their sexuality, their essential nature), every man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them. (Chapter 9 (16))

For this reason, Brahmanical patriarchy ritualises female sexuality and prevents sexual access for 'lower' caste men to 'upper' caste women through endogamy. On the other hand, women of 'lower' castes are sexually accessible to men of 'upper' castes. As Channa argues,

*The purity of low caste women, whose offspring is not jeopardised by the possibility of high caste paternity, are assumed (by high castes) to be not virtuous and readily accessible to men of higher castes.*⁶⁵

2) Gender Controlling Devices

2. a) Pativrata, & 'Saubhagyavati' (Sumangali): Idealisation of wifehood

One of the critical devices that Brahmanical patriarchy uses to control women is the ideology that idealises woman's chastity and wife fidelity as the highest duty of a woman. This ideology also justifies enforced widowhood. The ideology is reinforced through custom and ritual and the construction of notions of womanhood, which epitomise wife fidelity.⁶⁶ As Chakravarti points out,

*A woman is recognised as a person only when she is incorporated to her husband – only then does she become a social entity, and in that state, she is auspicious, a 'sumangali' and a 'saubhagyavati'. Outside the husband, the wife has no recognised existence in Brahmanical patriarchy.*⁶⁷

First of all, according to *Manusmriti*, marriage is a contract between the father and the husband. The wedding ceremonies symbolise a woman's transition from her father to her husband's authority.

It is said to be the law of Brahmā when a man dresses his daughter and adorns her, and he himself gives her as a gift to a man he has summoned, one who knows the revealed canon and is of good character. (Chapter 3 (27))

⁶³ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*, in M.Monanty(ed) *Class, Caste and Gender*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004.P.286.

⁶⁴ Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India*, *Economic & Political weekly*, Vol. 28, Issue.14, 03 April 1993(Updated 22 November 2018) Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 08 March 2023)

⁶⁵ Rajakumari Michaelsamy, *Multiple Discrimination against Dalit Women in India*, University of Essex, Colchester, 2005

⁶⁶ U.Uma Chakravarti, *Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State*, in M.Monanty(ed) *Class, Caste and Gender*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2004.P.286.

⁶⁷ Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, *Economic & Political weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

In marriage, a woman has to live with a man from her caste, as decided by her father.

Secondly, Brahmanical patriarchy provides a specific code of conduct called '*stridharma*' for married women. A woman who follows *stridharma* and possesses those qualities is considered a "*Pativrata*" (*Pati* means husband, and *vrata* means vow). *Pativrata* is someone for whom her husband is the world. She should worship her husband as a god and live and die for him. The idea of *stridharma* and *pativrata* can be found in many Brahmanical texts. For instance, *Brahaspati*, a Brahmanical text, describes *pativrata* as:

*She is someone whose state of mind reflects that of her husband. She shares his distress, his delight, grows sickly and dresses unattractively in his absence, and dies when he does.*⁶⁸

Manusmriti describes a chaste wife as one who is pure and controlled in her mind, speech and body, does not transgress her lord, and thereby attaining her husband's region in the next life, for which she is exhorted to become like him already in this world by acquiring traits of mind and character similar to him.⁶⁹ This is further reinforced through the idealisation of mythological characters like Sita, Savitri, Anasuya and Arundhati.

Thirdly, a woman's goal in life is said to be to get married and procreate sons, and according to the texts, '*women are created for the sole purpose of procreating sons.*'⁷⁰ According to the Brahmanical text, man achieves salvation only when he discharges the following three debts: 1) to the sages – discharged through *Brahmacharya*, a compulsory stage before marriage; 2) to the Gods – by performing '*yajnas*'; and 3) to the '*pitr*' – by reproducing sons. A wife is expected to help the man discharge the last two debts. She thereby becomes an inferior partner who helps him achieve immortality and heaven through their son.⁷¹

Fourthly, Brahmanical literature depicts marriage and giving birth to sons as helping women to overcome the *karma* of female birth, which is considered inauspicious and sinful. Women are considered '*wild, untamed and disorderly entity*' by birth. Therefore, marriage is regarded as the only road to salvation. By loyally discharging their duties as wife and mother, allegedly '*women can overcome the inauspicious mark of female birth and acquire the necessary karma to be reborn as men, preferably 'dvija' (twice-born men) entitled to seek the goal of immortal heaven*'.⁷² As faithful followers of '*Stridharma*' and '*Pativrata*', they can achieve great powers and be converted into the 'cultured' woman – a social entity.

2. b) The control exerted by the family

Contrary to claims that women enjoyed great freedom and equality in ancient India, Brahmanical patriarchy entrusts the family to control and guard women. Considered as

⁶⁸Manu Priya, *An Insight into the Concept of Pativrata in Hindu Dharma*, HubPages, 2014. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁶⁹Aloysius Irudayam SJ, Jayshree P. Mangubhai & Joel G, *Dalit Women speak out: Caste, Class and Gender violence in India*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2011.

⁷⁰Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²Ibid

men's property and always to be protected, women must never carry out any task independently. As Chakravarti observed, 'woman's movement is severely curtailed and so too her behaviour'.⁷³

According to the *Arthashastra* (3.3.20-24), a wife is expected to depend on her husband. For example, she cannot, without her husband's permission, drink, indulge in unseemly sports, go on pleasure trips, leave the house when her husband is asleep or drunk, or refuse to open the door to him.⁷⁴ The husband's duty is extolled to the point of stating that the protection of wives is the highest duty of men of all the four *varnas*, even above all other possessions. The rationale for this is that since conception is considered the process of the husband being born in her and the child born of her is believed to be similar in every respect to him, he is said to have the paramount duty of protecting the purity of his progeny and, therefore, assiduously protecting his wife. Hence, knowing the God-given nature of woman, a husband is mandated never to give a licence to his wife but keep her protected, under his own control day and night, from the slightest corrupting influence for the sake of not aggrieving her father and her husband's families.⁷⁵

2. c) Denial of the right to education

The other primary device controlling a woman's mobility is denying her the right to education and practising child marriage. Women were prevented from studying Vedas and forced to get married at an early age. According to *Manusmriti*:

Woman have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskars (rites) are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda mantras is useful for removing sin. As woman cannot utter the Veda mantras, they are as untruth is. (Chapter 9 (8))

Manusmriti explicitly dictates child marriage:

A thirty-year-old man should marry a twelve-year-old girl who charms his heart, and a man of twenty-four an eight-year-old girl; and if duty is threatened, (he should marry) in haste. (Chapter 94(9))

2.d) Gender violence in the general community and the family

Besides these control mechanisms sanctioned for use by the family, violence is also a sanctioned means of ensuring female submission. In other words, built into the patriarchal caste system is the institutionalisation of gender violence in the form of punishments meted out to a woman if she fails to live up to the idealised perfect wife or the expectations of her

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Aloysius Irudayam SJ, Jayshree P. Mangubhai & Joel G, *Dalit Women speak out: Caste, Class and Gender violence in India*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2011.

⁷⁵ Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

family. Institutionalised in two ways – family and state – violence operates in domestic and public spheres.

(i) In the domestic sphere: According to *Manusmriti*, the husband can beat his wife:

A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil and a younger brother of the full blood who have committed faults may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo. (Chapter 8 (299))

The forms of violence a husband is sanctioned to use against his wife ranged from a pecuniary fine, confiscation of whatever possessions he had given her, denial of beddings and ornaments, sexual abstinence, domestic imprisonment, sending her away to her paternal home for good, and the husband re-marrying.⁷⁶

(ii) In the public sphere, violence against women was justified to preserve caste purity and identity. For instance, adultery was treated as a serious crime, requiring the wife to be punished with amputation of her nose and an ear. The king was directed to cause her to be devoured by ferocious dogs in a well-crowded locality.⁷⁷ Therefore, public humiliation combined with cruel death was used as the deterrent against the wife's explicit infidelity towards her husband and implicit betrayal of her community's need for survival as a distinct caste.⁷⁸

III. Purpose and Practice of Enforced Widowhood in Brahmanical Patriarchy

Enforced widowhood that dehumanises widows is part of a larger Brahmanical patriarchal structure of caste, its production and reproduction. The ideological and material framework that stringently controls female sexuality and deprives a woman of personhood is the foundation for social norms on widowhood. Brahmanical patriarchy perceived widows as a disrupter of Brahmanical social order and a potential violation of the moral order. They thought these women would be unguarded in their husband's absence, and their sexuality was uncontrolled. Widows who were left 'uncontrolled' by men were perceived as threatening caste purity and maintaining social order. Therefore, as observed by Chakravarti, stringent codes of behaviour were imposed '*in order to ensure that the widow's sexuality is repressed, mastered or forcibly contained*'.⁷⁹

This was achieved through two solutions: a) get rid of them through the practice of sati, or b) ostracise them by depriving their personhood and sexuality. As Chakravarti observed,

*The prescriptive texts clearly outline only two models of widowhood: that of the dying sati who mounts the pyre rejects widowhood, and proves herself to the best follower of 'stridharma', and that of the other living sati who becomes the ascetic within the home, remaining celibate, steadfastly devoted to the husband till she dies.*⁸⁰

⁷⁶Aloysius Irudayam SJ, Jayshree P. Mangubhai & Joel G, (2011), *Dalit Women speak out: Caste, Class and Gender violence in India*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2011.

⁷⁷Ibid

⁷⁸Ibid

⁷⁹ Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (Accessed 16 March 2023)

⁸⁰ Ibid

Moreover, ideologically, widowhood was justified as a punishment for previous existence and not being a true *pativrata* – a chaste wife.

1) Ideology of ‘Purva Karma’ – Widowhood as a Punishment for Previous Existence

Brahmanical ideology propagates the idea that women bring widowhood upon themselves. As Chakravarti observed, the general position of Brahmanical prescriptive text is that *‘widowhood is solely attributed to ‘purva karma’ and is the punishment for a sinful existence in the past’*.⁸¹ Further, it posits that a widow is not a true *pativrata* and has not vanquished her innate weakness and sinfulness as a female. It propagates that a true *pativrata* like Savitri would have the power to save her husband from death. Therefore, it condemns her as responsible for the death of her husband. In the view of Brahmanical patriarchy, *‘She is the inauspicious and doubly condemnable creator; feared and despised.’*⁸² The last chance a widow gets to be redeemed is by immolating herself in the funeral pyre or doing penance for her sins, *‘for bringing widowhood upon herself through bodily mortification and steadfast devotion to her husband.’*⁸³

2) Ban on Widow Re-marriage

In this context, Brahmanical patriarchy strictly bans widow re-marriage. According to the Brahmanical ideology, a woman must remain faithful to her husband, dead or alive. Her *‘stridharma’* should continue in widowhood. She should be loyal and devoted to her husband and control her sexuality. According to *Manusmriti*, re-marriage is strictly prohibited for the woman. It is stated that even when she withers due to illness or depression, she *‘must never mention even the name of another man.’*⁸⁴

“Aspiring to that unsurpassed law of women devoted to a single husband, she should remain patient, controlled, and celibate until her death.” (Chapter 5(158))

Further, a woman’s second marriage and any offspring she may give birth to with another man are disregarded as it is not *‘taught anywhere that a good woman should take a second husband.’*⁸⁵

By being unfaithful to her husband, a woman becomes disgraced in the world, takes birth in a jackal’s womb, and is afflicted with evil diseases. (Chapter 5 (164))

On the other hand, a man is allowed to re-marry immediately after the death of his wife. A widower is advised that,

*After he has given his sacred fires to his predeceased wife at her funeral, he should marry a wife again and establish his sacred fires anew. (Chapter 5 (168))*⁸⁶

⁸¹Ibid

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Subhashini Ali, *The Laws of Manu and What They Would Mean for Citizens of the Hindu Rashtra*, Wire, New Delhi, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

3) The Practice of Sati (Widow Burning)

The practice of *Sati*, or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, has been widespread in India. It is believed that the first case was reported in 510 CCE in an ancient city in Madhya Pradesh⁸⁷, and the last known case of *sati* took place on August 6, 2002, in Panna district in Madhya Pradesh, where a 65-year-old Kuttu Bai, burned herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre.⁸⁸ The national and international outrage sparked against the practice of *sati* when Roop Kanwar, an 18-year-old teen, was burnt alive in her husband's funeral pyre on September 4, 1987, in Rajasthan. Although the spectators of this act described this act as 'voluntary'⁸⁹, reporters who investigated the case suggest that the decision was not hers. They further confirm that her parents, who live two hours from her husband's place, were not informed about the husband's death or the burning of their daughter⁹⁰. The gravity of this inhumane crime was noted in the police records maintained during the colonial era. For instance, the annual police reports published around 1815 indicate that 500 to 900 widows had been burnt alive yearly in the lower provinces of the Bengal Presidency alone. Missionaries and officials claimed that a lot more went unreported.⁹¹

The term '*sati*', or '*suttee*', translates as a 'chaste woman' in Hindi and Sanskrit texts. The religious sanctioning of *sati* is linked with the ideology of *pativrata*. According to the Brahmanical doctrine, 'a true *pativrata* can never be widowed because she will never leave her husband even in death. She will either die before him as '*sumangali*' or accompany him to death. It further emphasises the wifely power of *pativrata* can protect her husband from death. As Chakravarti observed:

*The ideal type of woman in the Brahmanical texts is one who is imbued with the qualities of a sati. She is a woman whose chastity makes her a living sati and gives her the power to ensure that she dies before her husband. Alternatively, if her husband dies before her, she has the power and will to accompany him in death as a sati and thereby reject widowhood.*⁹²

A woman immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre supposedly stays in heaven with her husband for millions of years, as would ancestors from her paternal, maternal and matrimonial sides.⁹³ Through this, she would redeem herself and escape the future misery that her bad karma would typically have brought on her.

⁸⁷ Gayatri Misra, *Roop Kanwar: Last Known Case of Sati In India & Its Relevance Today*, Feminism in India, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁸⁸ BBC South Asia, *Outrage over India ritual burning*, BBC News, 2002. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

⁸⁹ Gayatri Misra, *Roop Kanwar: Last Known Case of Sati In India & Its Relevance Today*, Feminism in India, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁹⁰ Ammu Joseph, *Remember Roop Kanwar? 'Padmaavat' Isn't the First Instance of Misdirected Rajput Pride*, Wire, New Delhi, 2018. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁹¹ Tankia Sarkar, *How Cultural Nationalism and Women's Rights Locked Horns in the 19th Century*. Wire, New Delhi, 2019. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁹² Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁹³ Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

Although *Sati* was initially introduced in the 'higher' castes, data collected during the colonial era shows it was performed with all castes. Although Brahmins provided the single largest category, it was noted with Shudra castes and even with Dalits, who are not meant to practice the ritual.⁹⁴

It is crucial to recall Ambedkar's analysis of the purpose of *sati*. It is done to maintain the Brahmanical social order, which structurally links caste, class hierarchy and gender inequality.

4) Ostracism: Enforced Widowhood as Social Death

As discussed in the previous section, a woman is considered a person only when incorporated with her husband. She is given the social entity only when she is married, and that too for the 'sole' purpose of procreating sons and helping men to achieve salvation. Therefore, when the husband dies, she is deprived of her sexuality and personhood. Chakravarti says, '*Outside the husband, the wife has no recognised existence in Brahmanical patriarchy*'. Therefore, once her husband is dead, she is alienated from reproduction and sexuality and the functioning social unit of the family. Simply put, she is condemned to social death by depriving her personhood and dignity.

One way is to retain a widow within the society but on its margins and institutionalise her marginality. She will be considered part of the family, and at the same time, she is also considered an 'outcast.' She is regarded as inauspicious, which means she has to maintain a social distance from others. Notably, a widow is socially and distinctly differentiated through the rituals and symbolic structure in a profoundly humiliating way. One of the most dramatic visible ways of differentiating widows is tonsuring or shaving her head and making her wear white clothes. This has been a practice until recently. Other symbolic structures are discussed below.

The second way is constituting a separate community of widows, a non-sexual community⁹⁵ such as those currently put up in Vrindavan. They are disconnected from maternal and paternal families and the rest of society and forced to live in isolation, dejection and poverty. The Brahmanical concept that a widow should do '*penance for her sins through bodily mortification and steadfast devotion*' is forcefully imposed on them as a community. These widows are mainly constituted in places like Vrindavan because it is believed to be the 'land of god Krishna' or 'holy land'. Widows in such constituents are expected to dress in white and lead lives of extreme austerity, making 'devotion to God' the central aim of their lives. Abandoned by their families, they live in humiliating conditions of existence.

5) Rituals and Symbolic Structures of Widowhood

Rituals and symbols play a significant role in Brahmanical patriarchy; they act as a vehicle to convey this ideology across generations. They are also a powerful weapon to secure women's cooperation, internalised as moral and religious obligations, and carry them forward as

⁹⁴ Tankia Sarkar, *How Cultural Nationalism and Women's Rights Locked Horns in the 19th Century*. Wire, New Delhi, 2019. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 15 March 2023)

⁹⁵ Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, *Economic & Political weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

customary norms. The rituals and symbols of widowhood are humiliating and traumatic, performed with a degree of violence that the widows must undergo for the rest of their lives.⁹⁶ These rituals and symbolic structures are created with two critical intentions: a) to socially alienate and differentiate widows and mark their inauspiciousness so that others stay away from them, and b) to reject and deprive their sexuality and personhood. As Chakravarti says:

*The customs and rituals mark a social and ideological resolution of the tensions inherent in a conceptualisation of widowhood in which the widow continues to exist but is sexually a non-being.*⁹⁷

These rituals symbolise the passage of a woman from the position of wife, *sumangali*, to that of the widow. While marriage rituals focus on marking women's entry into legitimate sexual activity, widowhood rituals focus on renouncing the widow's sexuality.⁹⁸ This transition is distinctly marked and systematically reinforced by these symbolic structures, which include colour coding, barring widows from using materials associated with sexuality and reproduction and giving up all adornments considered attractive. For example, at the marriage event, a 'Nalangu' (*haldi*) ceremony is conducted, where a spouse is smeared with turmeric and the red colour of *kumkum* or *sindoor* is applied by the husband on her forehead. According to Chakravarti's interpretation, turmeric is expected to heat the body for sexual intercourse, and the red colour symbolises the sexually active or sexually potent female. The bride's red sari and *kumkum* represent the fluids of the creation of life, female creative power, and, specifically, the capacity to bear children.⁹⁹ All these connote women's entry into legitimate sexual activity. On the contrary, at the ceremony of widowhood, this red sari is replaced with a white sari, the red *kumkum/sindoor* is replaced with sacred ash (*vibhuthi*), and widows are banned from applying turmeric for life. All these indicate that widows have no role in reproduction and any association with sexuality.

Brahmanical texts insist that, soon after the husband's death, the widow gives up all forms of adornments and symbols associated with the marriage. The *Vrdha Harita* is more explicit about the marked nature of the widow's appearance and behaviour. It says:

*She should give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments, and dyed clothes, taking food in a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying collyrium to the eyes: she should wear only a white garment, curb her senses and anger, and sleep on the ground.*¹⁰⁰

One of the most dramatic and visible rituals followed until recently was tonsuring or head shaving. The unique practice of tonsure was mainly prevalent among Brahmin women. According to Chakravarti, this ritual indicates the reiteration of the community's power to control the widow's sexuality and the powerlessness of widows in the 'hands of a cruel system,

⁹⁶Uma Chakravarti, *Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood*, Economic & Political weekly, Vol. 30, No. 36 (Sep. 9, 1995), pp. 2248-2256. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 16 March 2023)

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

insisted upon by the Brahmana men'.¹⁰¹ Shorn heads are symbolically considered as the loss of power and freedom.¹⁰² This also marks the social death of a widow.

Other rituals and symbols mentioned below and followed across all caste groups symbolically mark women's asexuality, alienation, and transition from wifehood to widowhood.

Symbols of Wifehood	Symbols of Widowhood
The symbolic colour for wifehood is red. It symbolises fertility and sexuality. The materials used to represent this include the ' <i>kumkum</i> ', the red mark applied on the forehead, and ' <i>sindoor</i> ', the parting of the hair and the red saree worn during the marriage.	The symbolic colour of widowhood is white. It symbolises asexuality. Widows are barred from using ' <i>kumkum</i> ', replaced with ' <i>vibhuti</i> ' (sacred ash) associated with the funeral pyre. Widows' exclusive use of white sarees and ' <i>vibhuti</i> ' indicates their disassociation with sexuality. White is also the colour of death.
As part of the ' <i>Nalangu</i> ' (<i>haldi</i>) ceremony that precedes marriage, the brides are smeared with turmeric (' <i>haldi</i> '). Turmeric is considered an auspicious mark and is strongly associated with fertility and prosperity.	Widows are barred from using <i>haldi</i> as they are considered inauspicious and have no role in reproduction.
In the Brahmanical text, a wife is advised to make themselves attractive to attract the sexual attention of her husband.	On the contrary, a widow is advised to remain a 'chaste' woman to her dead husband and give up all adornments such as flowers in her hair perfumes, wearing jewels, applying makeup and even using teeth cleaning sticks. She is expected to look pale and distressed. She should not embellish her body or eat a full meal but instead remain devoted to the thoughts of her husband.
The marriage ceremony is popularly performed by the husband tying the ' <i>thali</i> ' for the wife, and a married woman must wear the <i>thali</i> .	A ritual of breaking the <i>thali</i> and breaking the glass bangles is conducted for widows.

SECTION II

LEGAL GUARANTEES AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, '*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*'. Article 2 of UDHR and all human rights treaties prohibit discrimination. The Indian Constitution emulated the UDHR and adopted the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution provides equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 15 forbids discrimination against any citizen based only on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Yet,

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

the widows in India are subjected to discrimination and ostracisation. This section explores the legal rights guaranteed to widows and assesses whether the protection laws afford against the socio-cultural and religious practices that degrade and alienate them from society.

IV. Legal Safeguards for Widows in India

The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to equality for all citizens and prohibits discrimination on all grounds, including sex. Further, India has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sex and gender. Thus, the Indian State is obliged to promote gender equality in all aspects and protect women, including widows, from all forms of discrimination. However, except for a few laws enacted during British rule, few legal provisions directly address the widows' concerns. The rights of widows to property and maintenance are mainly drawn from personal laws and other general laws.

1) Abolition of Sati

The Bengal Sati Regulation Act 1829 was the first major social reform legislation introduced to protect widows from the harmful practice of sati, i.e., burning widows alive in the deceased husband's funeral pyre. This Act declared the practice of *sati* as illegal and punishable by criminal courts. Since *sati* was widely present in British India, especially in the lower provinces of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, this Act was introduced despite opposition from Hindu religious fundamentalists.¹⁰³

This Act paved the way for greater awareness and social reformation that reduced later the practice of sati. A century later, nationwide condemnation and protests following the burning of 18-year-old widow Roop Kanwar in the State of Rajasthan on September 4, 1987, led to the promulgation of The Rajasthan Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 and a central legislation known as the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987. This Act, which entered into force on January 3, 1988, aims to prevent the commission of sati and its glorification.¹⁰⁴ It makes the abetment of sati punishable with death or imprisonment for life and glorification punishable with one to seven years imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 5,000 to 30,000. Further, this Act allows for the forfeiture of the funds and property of a person convicted under the Act.

After this law was passed, two incidents of sati were reported, one from Uttar Pradesh in 1997 and the other from Madhya Pradesh in 2002. Only one person was arrested from 1996 to 2002 and was acquitted by the court. Only in the case of Kuttu Bai in Madhya Pradesh in 2002, four people were sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁰⁵ This was possibly due to the involvement of the National Commission of Women.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ S.K.Pachauri, S. K., and R. N. C. Hamilton. "SATI PROBLEM — PAST AND PRESENT." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 63, 2002, pp. 898–908. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Rajesh Thakur, Sagar, *Life term for 4 in Sati case*, *Hindustan Times*, 2006. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹⁰⁶ BBC South Asia, *Outrage over India ritual burning*, BBC News, 2002. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

2) Widow's Right to Re-marriage

After the abolition of sati in 1929, the British–Indian government also introduced The Hindu Widows Re-Marriage Act 1856 as a response to the social reformation agitation by Vidhyasagar and others. As research scholars noted, in those days, the practice of child marriage and prohibition of widow's re-marriage was prevalent among the Hindu 'high' castes. However, *Shudras* and Dalits neither practised child marriage nor prohibited the re-marriage of widows.¹⁰⁷ Comparatively, the situation of widows – especially child widows among the Hindu high castes was dehumanising.¹⁰⁸ As Carroll observed:

*Doomed to a life of prayer, fasting, and drudgery, unwelcome at the celebrations and auspicious occasions that are so much a part of Hindu family and community life, [the widow's] lot was scarce to be envied.*¹⁰⁹

Although this Act was introduced to relieve 'higher' caste widows, some of the clauses were punitive. For instance, a re-married widow lost her claims to the property of her first husband. Chakravarty argues, '*this new clause widened the operation of upper caste patriarchal norms in property arrangements*'.¹¹⁰ Besides, in terms of consent, if the widow was a minor, the marriage was consummated only with the permission of her father, brother or other male relatives in the family – which reflects customary laws derived from *Manusmriti*, where men control women's sexuality. Further, Carroll documented the wide variations in the application of the clauses in the different courts: Allahabad and Calcutta courts gave credence to customary laws, whereas Bombay rejected customary practices as a basis for differences under the 1856 law.¹¹¹

The Hindu Widow's Re-Marriage and Property Act, 1989 repealed and replaced this law. Yet it also upholds the two clauses related to property and consent of minor widows. However, a Hindu Succession Act Amendment 2005 clause prevails to allow a widow to have rights over their late husband's property even after she re-marries. In a landmark judgment in 2015, the Bombay High Court ruled that a widow, even after she re-marries, has rights over her former husband's property. In this case, the court ruled that provisions of the Hindu Succession Act would prevail over the repealed Hindu Widows' Re-marriage Act of 1856.¹¹² In another recent case, in 2021, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court also held that a re-married widow has a right to her deceased husband's property if she was not re-married when the husband passed away.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Lucy Carroll, *Law Custom and Statutory Social Reform -The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856* in Sumit Sarkar & Tanika Sarkar(ed.), *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, Indiana University Press, 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2018. P.118

¹¹¹ Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2018.

¹¹² Shreya Malhotra, *Laws protecting rights of widows*, iPleaders, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹¹³ Sharmeen Hakim, *Hindu Remarried Widow Has Right To Deceased Husband's Property If She Wasn't Remarried On The Day Succession Opens: Bombay High Court*, Livelaw, 2021. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

3) Inheritance and Property Rights for Widows

Due to the patriarchal system that confines women to the domestic sphere, women are left with no property in their name and made economically dependent on their husbands. After a husband's death, it is critical to safeguard widows' rights to inherit their husbands' property. Since inheritance falls under personal law, it is different for different religions. The following laws govern aspects related to inheritance, including for widows.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956, amended in 2005, covers inheritance for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. In the case of a widow, the Act declares the legally accepted wife as class I heir, along with the deceased person's mother and children. The property is divided equally among them. But this is applicable only in situations where the deceased person died without a will. If a choice was made, the inheritance should pass on as per the will.

Further, the 2005 amendments to the Hindu Succession Act bring male and female rights to agricultural land on par for all states, and this may help widows dependent on agriculture for survival. The 2005 Act makes all daughters, including married ones, coparceners in a joint family property with the same birthrights as sons to share and seek partition. The 1956 Hindu Succession Act distinguished between separate property and joint family property. These provisions may also support the widows in acquiring property from their parental houses. The legislation also removed discrimination that barred certain widows from inheriting their deceased husband's property if they re-married.¹¹⁴ However, at the same time, if the widow is a member of the Hindu undivided family of her spouse, she cannot claim the property as she is not a coparcener.¹¹⁵ Although daughters have equal rights as sons now, widows still face discrimination regarding inheritance from the husband's joint family property. As Meera observed, since the widow is not a member of the coparcenary, she will not inherit any share in the joint family property in her own right. But she may be entitled to an equal share with other Class I heirs only from the separate share of her husband.¹¹⁶

Religious laws, or the Shariat, governs inheritance among Muslims. According to Shariat, the inheritance of specific relatives and cases is fixed. Widows inherit one-eighth of the deceased husband's property if the couple has children. The widow's share is one-fourth if they have no children. The rest of the property is shared among his relatives based on the fixed rule. According to Islamic law, a person can will only one-third of his property according to their will. The rest shall be inherited according to the fixed rule.¹¹⁷

Inheritance for Christians is governed by the Indian Succession Act 1925. In the case of a widow, the widow inherits one-third of her husband's property if they have children. If no children exist, the widow inherits half of the deceased husband's property, and the rest goes

¹¹⁴ Meera Khanna, *The Voiceless Millions of Widows of India- Focus On the Rights of Widows within the CEDAW Framework, The Guid of Service*, 2015. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹¹⁵ Shreya Malhotra, *Laws protecting rights of widows, iPleaders*, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹¹⁶ Meera Khanna, *The Voiceless Millions of Widows of India- Focus on the Rights of Widows within the CEDAW Framework, The Guid of Service*, 2015. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹¹⁷ Hammad Habibullah, *Explained: How The Indian Law Ensures That Widows Get Their Share Of Inheritance*, India Times, 2021. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

to other prescribed inheritors. However, the widow may not inherit any property if a valid contract has been made before marriage and if she has been explicitly excluded. Besides, the rules apply only if the person has no will.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, CEDAW obligates the Indian State to guarantee property rights for widows. According to CEDAW General Comment 29:

States parties are obligated to adopt laws of intestate succession that comply with the principles of the Convention. Such laws should ensure:

- *Equal treatment of surviving females and males.*
- *That customary succession to use rights or title to land cannot be conditioned on forced marriage to a deceased spouse's brother (levirate marriage) or any other person or on the existence or absence of minor children of the marriage.*
- *That disinheritance of the surviving spouse is prohibited.*
- *That "property dispossession/grabbing" is criminalised, and offenders are duly prosecuted.*¹¹⁹

4) Right to Maintenance and Protection from Domestic Violence

No single law covers a widow's right to maintenance. In situations when the widow is not permitted to live in a house of a Hindu undivided family after the demise of the husband or if she faces violence from the relatives of her spouse, she may seek protection under Section 2(q) of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. Further, Section 19 of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956 talks about the maintenance of a widowed daughter-in-law by her father-in-law if she cannot maintain herself out of her earnings or other property or where she has no property, she is not able to obtain the maintenance from the estate of her spouse, parents, or kids.¹²⁰

Under Section 21 (iii) of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956, a 'widow' has been defined as 'dependent' and so she doesn't re-marry. In this case, if the widow did not receive any share of her deceased husband's property, under section 22, the lawful beneficiaries of the dead husband are bound to support the widow.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, covers the maintenance and welfare of elderly parents and senior citizens. This Act enables elderly widows to claim maintenance from their adult children in case they are neglected.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *General recommendation on article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Economic consequences of marriage, family relations, and their dissolution)*, 2013. UNDOC CEDAW/C/GC/29. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹²⁰ [Shreya Malhotra](#), *Laws protecting rights of widows*, iPleaders, 2020. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹²¹ Ibid

Under Islamic law, a widow is not entitled to claim maintenance. However, other women may claim maintenance for the dissolution of marriage, divorce until re-marriage, or separation due to cruelty of the spouse.

5) Protection of Widows from Degrading Cultural/Religious Practices

CEDAW recognises the influence of cultural and traditional practices that degrade women's dignity and discriminate against them based on sex. Article 5a requires States *'to modify the cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view of achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles of men and women'*. Similarly, Article 16 asks States to *'take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations'*. Even though India ratified CEDAW in 1993, it made reservations on Articles 5(a) and 16(i) in conformity with its policy of non-interference in the "personal affairs" of any community without their consent.

India has not taken any proactive measure to legally safeguard widows from the degrading practices that alienate them and make them socially dead while physically alive. The Widows (Protection and Maintenance) Bill, 2015, recommended by a Member of Parliament, has not been passed. This Bill, however, has too many limitations as it also seeks protection for neglected and abandoned widows while ignoring various aspects related to degrading cultural and social practices. The State Government of Goa is trying to introduce such legal protection, which is yet to be passed. The Indian Government has no practical strategies to change the social mindset towards widows through legislation or education. In fact, by adhering to principles of non-interference in cultural norms¹²², the state reinforces these practices and upholds the religious sanctioning of such harmful practices. As Meena observed, disregarding the prevalent customs and traditions of discrimination against widows evidences the failure of the Indian State to uphold the right to a life of dignity for widows.¹²³

Conclusion

Enforced widowhood that dehumanises widows is part of the larger Brahmanical patriarchal caste, its production and reproduction structure. Brahmanical ideology and its framework stand in opposition to the human rights framework. While the human rights framework centralises equality, Brahmanical patriarchy promotes inequalities by birth and sex and treats women as 'sexual objects'. Within that, it deprives personhood and social identity to widows. The human rights framework prohibits discrimination on all grounds, including sex and gender. Still, Brahmanical patriarchy is built on the premises of discrimination, and it institutionalises this discrimination against widows through religious sanctioning and cultural practices. The

¹²² Meera Khanna, *The Voiceless Millions of Widows of India- Focus On the Rights of Widows within the CEDAW Framework, The Guid of Service*, 2015. Available at: [Link](#) (accessed 24 August 2023)

¹²³ Ibid

human rights framework provides all women the right to choose a spouse and enter marriage only with their full consent. However, Brahmanical patriarchy denies women the right to choose a spouse and controls their sexuality through endogamy and enforced widowhood. The human rights framework guarantees all women's right to education and participation in political and public life. In contrast, Brahmanical patriarchy denies the right to education, constrains women within the domestic sphere, and treats widows as socially dead. In Brahmanical patriarchy, women are discriminated against, and that discrimination is compounded for widows.

The Indian Constitution, framed on the ideals of the human rights framework, guarantees the right to equality and non-discrimination for all citizens, including widows. However, the Brahmanical ideology continues to dominate the people's behaviour and subjugates women, particularly widows in India. The Brahmanical doctrine that condemns widows to social alienation, deprivation of their personhood, and forceful control of their sexuality is very much alive today. The rituals and symbols that are humiliating and traumatic are performed with a degree of violence that the widows must undergo for the rest of their lives.

Despite this, the Indian government, both at the state and central level, pays no heed to the prevalent customs and traditions that ostracises widows. By adhering to principles of non-interference in cultural norms, the government reinforces these practices. In doing so, it upholds the religious sanctioning of such harmful practices and fails to uphold its obligation to protect widows' right to a life with dignity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on defining the perspective, purpose, objectives, scope, outcomes, sampling and the methodological process of gathering data for this research.

I. Perspective

A three-dimensional perspective was adopted in the data collection process: *(i) human rights, (ii) gender and (iii) experiential dimensions.*

1) Human Rights dimension:

While enquiring into the living condition of the widows, effort was made to understand their concerns related to their basic livelihood, economic resources, independence in managing their day-to-day affairs, social relations, safety measures, political participation and future hopes and expectations. Cutting across all these concerns is the **human rights dimension**, which examines the question of whether the widows have succeeded in accessing their rights and entitlements as human beings and as citizens, and if so, to what extent. In other words, the data collection process sought to know whether and in what ways the widows have faced discrimination and violence while accessing and enjoying all those necessities of life. As citizens they are 'rights-holders' entitled to access and enjoy these necessities. As 'rights-protectors', the state has the duty and responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil the widows' rights and entitlements by way of enabling them to access and enjoy them. Hence, it became necessary to adopt a human rights perspective in the data gathering exercise so as to underline the identity of the widows as persons with dignity and as citizens with rights and entitlements.

2) Gender dimension:

Related to the human rights perspective is the **gender dimension** that encompasses three lenses through which the widow's life situation was enquired into:

- (a) the widow as a woman with a caste identity located in the patriarchal system:* In her day-to-day life, her caste identity, in particular if she belongs to a lower caste group, as well as her social location in the patriarchal system, do not provide her with the opportunity to enjoy the same status as her male counterparts. Given that the fundamental rights in the Indian Constitution bestow the same rights and entitlements on all the citizens, irrespective of gender, the enquiry focused on why and to what extent widows are denied equal rights and entitlements.
- (b) the widowed woman as a worker in the class system:* Having lost her husband, the responsibility of maintaining the family and bringing up the children as well as her participation in public life falls entirely on the widow. This is especially the case for the widows who live alone without any support from the families of their parents or in-laws.

Her situation, therefore, makes it necessary to enquire into the kind of livelihood she faces, the status of her labour condition, the nature of her economic well-being, and the quality of her participation in public life.

(c) ***the woman as a widow***: Systemically located in the patriarchal system, widows, whether they live alone or with their parents or in-laws, are made vulnerable in many respects, especially social, physical, psychological and sexual. Contacts and communications with people who are not blood relations invite suspicious thoughts and gossiping; being physically alone without any support from men, or kith and kin, denies her safety and security as well as endangers her life and property, especially so if she has some material possessions; in addition to the loss of her husband, the reality of living single produces anxiety, even stress and depression, about her life and future; and, finally, all the above mentioned factors lend themselves to a situation where the widow becomes vulnerable to violation of her sexual integrity. The issue to be studied, therefore, is whether the widows have adequate security and safety measures to enjoy a peaceful life.

These three lenses intersect with each other to form a complex web around the widows and impact their day-to-day life. They are forced to struggle in order to find and realize their identity as persons and women, and enjoy their rights and entitlements as full citizens of the country.

3) **Experiential dimension:**

In any enquiry, quantitative data supplies the required information on any subject matter. However, personal experience on any aspect of life provides quality knowledge about the reality being enquired into. Hence, the widows' experiences, apart from presenting quantitative information, makes manifest the processes that went on in their life, thereby providing a quality dimension to the knowledge obtained and adding richness to it. Taking into account, therefore, the importance and significance of experience sharing, three steps were adopted:

- The widows' personal experiences were taken into account when preparing the structured questionnaire for collecting quantitative data and the guidelines questions for the focus group and case study interviews to gather qualitative data.
- The services of field-investigators who were themselves widows or working with widows' movements were found best to gather quantitative data so that they could, besides gathering quantitative data, utilize this opportunity to gather informal case stories of the widows' lived experiences.
- To complement the quantitative with qualitative information by way of getting to know the experiences of widows, face-to-face focus group interviews and case study interviews were conducted.

II. Objectives, Purpose and Expected Outcome

At the consultation held on 30th January, 2022 for the 26 representatives of KALANGARAI and 17 other organisations working in 16 districts among widows in Tamil Nadu, the following objectives, purpose and the expected outcome of the research project were drawn up.

1) Objectives

1. To understand and analyse the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of widows in Tamil Nadu in order to have a better understanding of their situation so as to help them to improve their life situation in future;
2. To analyse the causes and consequences of widowhood, and their impact on the lives of widows;
3. To examine the different forms of discrimination and violence the widows face so as to understand the gravity of denial of their rights and entitlements;
4. To understand the different forms of atrocities/violence committed against the widows so as to find out what safety and security measures can be ensured for them from the social and legal point of view;
5. To assess the extent of widows' access to the state entitlement provisions and mechanisms to protect and ensure their rights;
6. To provide concrete policy recommendations to the state and civil society for protecting and fulfilling the rights of widows.

2) Purpose

1. To raise public awareness on the socio-economic conditions of widows as well as the discrimination and violence faced by them in Tamil Nadu;
2. To provide a strong evidence base for social advocacy in view of obtaining from the state institutions a robust legal and policy framework, matched by adequate budget and action programs, for the welfare of the widows;
3. To generate greater awareness among the widows of their dignity and rights as well as to strengthen the empowerment process of their organisations, movements, networks and alliances so as enable them assert their rights more effectively, thereby enabling them to exercise their influence on state institutions and civil society.

3) Expected Outcomes

1. Dissemination of the research findings through publication of (i) the study report in English and (ii) the executive summary in English and Tamil. This report will reach all organizations and agencies working on the rights of widows, with specific strategies designed in order to ensure that the key findings are also disseminated and discussed among the widows' organizations and movements in Tamil Nadu.

2. Engagement with media to ensure publicity to this study report, thereby increasing public awareness on the current socio-economic conditions of widows as well as the different forms of discrimination and violence faced by them in Tamil Nadu.
3. Development of a policy brief, based on the Study Executive Summary, for engagement in advocacy with the Government of Tamil Nadu on the rights and entitlements of widows.

III. Scope of Study

1) Focus

This study is on widows, that is, the women who have been married but whose husbands have consequently died and who have not married again. Given the caste and class based patriarchal context in which women in general, and widows in particular, are considered as inferior to men in many aspects of life, this study is an exploration of whether widows consider themselves, and are treated as, human persons and as women with dignity, rights and entitlements, and whether they feel safe and secure in their physical and social environment. It is also an enquiry into what needs to be done to uphold and handhold their aspirations and efforts towards enabling them to attain their dignity, safety and enjoyment of their human rights and entitlements.

2) Geographical area

The study covers 495 widows, 30-31 widows on average per district, from across 16 districts of Tamil Nadu – Ariyalur, Chennai, Tiruppur, Dindigul, Erode, Kancheepuram, Ramanathapuram, Karur, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, The Nilgiris, Perambalur, Sivaganga, Theni, Trichirappalli and Viluppuram.

Number of Questionnaires per district		
S. No	Name of Districts	Number of Questionnaires per District
1	Viluppuram	36
2	Karur	33
3	Perambalur	32
4	Trichirappalli	32
5	Ariyalur	31
6	Sivaganga	31
7	Kancheepuram	31
8	Nagapattinam	30
9	Tiruppur	30
10	Theni	30
11	The Nilgiris	30
12	Ramanathapuram	30
13	Mayiladuthurai	30
14	Dindigul	30
15	Erode	30
16	Chennai	29
	TOTAL	495

3) Collaborating Civil Society Organizations

The above listed 16 districts, apart from reflecting the different regions of the Tamil Nadu State, are spaces where active widows' organisations are present. These organisations, falling under one umbrella platform called "WIDOWS FEDERATION-TAMIL NADU", have been active participants in the study. This study is associated with 18 non-governmental organizations working in 16 districts; of these 18 organizations, three are working in two districts each.

S. No.	Name of the Organization	District	Place of Office
1.	Sarvadesa Vidhavaigal Nalavazhvu Maiyam	Chennai	Teynampett
2.	Loyola College Extension Service (Society of Jesus)	Chennai	Nungambakkam
3.	Anal Convent (FMM Sisters)	Tiruppur	Udumelpet
4.	Kalvichudar (St. Annes' Sisters)	Viluppuram	Salamedu
5.	Gansoville (Society of Jesus)	Sivaganga	Devakottai
6.	Chirpi (Congregation of Immaculate Conception Sisters)	Sivaganga	Puliyal
7.	AREDS (Association of Rural and Education & Development Service)	Karur	Veerarakkiyam
8.	Integrated Development Trust – Daughters of Mary Sisters	Kancheepuram	Vadanallur
9.	Integrated Development Trust – DM Sisters	Perambalur	Vadanallur
10.	Loyola School (Society of Jesus)	Kancheepuram	Kuppayanallur
11.	Fatima Charitable Society (SMMI Sisters)	Ariyalur	Jeyankondam
12.	Fatima Charitable Society (SMMI Sisters)	Myladudurai	Tharangambadi
13.	Servite Social Service Society	Trichirappalli	Ambikapuram
14.	SARWODEEP (St. Annes of Trichirappalli Sisters)	Theni	Periyakulam
15.	Kalangarai (Society of Jesus)	Nagapattinam	Nagapattinam (Puthur)
16.	Kalangarai (Society of Jesus)	Myladudurai	Nagapattinam (Puthur)
17.	Nazareth Convent (FMM Sisters)	Nilgiris	The Nilgiris
18.	DEEPAM (Holy Cross Sisters)	Dindigul	Vathalagundu
19.	AMUTHU (Society of Jesus)	Dindigul	Ottanchathiram
20.	Thangachimadam Parish (Sivaganga Diocesan Fathers)	Ramanathapuram	Thangachimadam
21.	Arockia Madha Madam (FMM Sisters)	Erode	Gundri

4) Thematic subjects covered by the study

While focussing on the perspectives of human rights, gender rights and personal experiences, as mentioned above, data have been gathered on the following aspects of the widows' life:

(i) Personal Profile of the Widows - name, age, caste, religion, age at which widowed, cause of widowhood, children, dwelling place, education

(ii) Identity, Independence, and Dignity – observance of socio-religious practices in daily life and at husband's death, status of freedom and independence

(iii) Basic Livelihood Needs – food, health, house-site, housing facility, access to state entitlements, including social security measures like ration card/voter ID/pension cards/ caste certificate, etc.

(iv) Economic Assets, Savings, Loans, Income and Expenditure – occupation, business & related resources, landholdings and other assets, savings and loans, income

(v) Participation in Public Life – membership in organizations, political participation

(vi) Experiencing Emotional life – psychological effects of widowhood, psychological support systems

(vii) Manifestations of Courage and Sustainability – consequences of widowhood in respect of socio-cultural practices, economic practices, political practices, self-respect and dignity practices

(viii) Facing Discrimination and Violence – socio-cultural forms, livelihood forms, economic forms. Political forms, religious forms

(ix) Security and Protection measures – feeling of security/insecurity, awareness & knowledge of security related legislations, level of support received from family, community, state, civil society organisations in terms of security, need of security and protection measures in future

(x) Important Personal Needs and Anxieties about Children in Future – personal needs in future, anxieties about children in future

IV. Research Team

Financially supported by the partner agency ALBOAN-Spain, this research project was undertaken by the field based non-government organization KALANGARAI at Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu in South India, in partnership with Legal Action, Advocacy and Service (LAAS), a legal advocacy related non-governmental organization at Madurai, India.

The Research Team members are:

- (1) Aloysius Irudayam s.j., Program Director, Department of Advocacy Research and Human Rights Education at LAAS, Tamil Nadu, India;
- (2) Rajakumari Michaelsamy, Program Manager, Right to Education Initiative (RTE), Bengaluru, India;
- (3) Paul Michael Raj s.j., Director, People's Education and Action in Kodaikanal (PEAK), Kodaikanal, India;
- (4) Jayshree P. Mangubhai, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Adviser, ChildFund, Australia.

V. Sampling

For the purpose of quantitative data collection through a structured questionnaire and qualitative data gathering through focus group discussions and case study interviews, purposive and snowball sampling has been used to select widows. The 18 widows' organizations were involved in helping to identify widows using the following criteria:

1) General Criteria:

- Age diversity among the sample widows
- Social diversity among the sample widows, that is, caste and religious diversity
- Class diversity, that is, occupation in agriculture, day wage labourer, business, etc.
- Regional diversity, that is, rural and urban background
- Family diversity (widow living single, with children, parents, in-laws, etc.)

2) Specific criteria for sampling of widows-respondents in each district for data collection through quantitative questionnaire:

- a) 30-31 widows from each district
- b) Age-wise representation as far as possible:
 - 40% below 30 years
 - 40% between 30 & 50 years
 - 20% above 50 years
- c) Caste ratio:
 - 60% SCs + 40% non-SCs
 - OR
 - 100% STs, if NGO is working among STs only
- d) Single woman/Family status ratio:
 - 70% living with children only
 - 10% living with in-laws
 - 10% living with parents
 - 10% living alone
- e) Religious affiliation:
 - 70% Hindus
 - 10% Christians
 - 10% Muslims
 - 10% Tribals
- f) Rural-Urban ratio:
 - 60% Rural (Village panchayat)
 - 20% Semi-urban (Town Panchayat, Municipality)
 - 20% Urban (City Corporation)

3) For the sampling of 56 widows-respondents for 8 focus group interviews, the following specific criteria have been used:

- a) Belonging to different religions
- b) Belonging to different castes
- c) Belonging to different age groups
- d) Belonging to different educational status
- e) Belonging to different districts in each zone
- f) Belonging to different social contexts/issues:

- Husbands' death due to liquor, accident, suicide, ill-health, etc.
 - Widows' living alone without children, with children, with parents' family, with in-law's family
 - Widows working as daily wage labourer
 - Widows who have approached police stations
 - Widows who have contested panchayat elections
 - Both mother and daughter are widows
 - Father and Son, both died due to liquor
 - And so on
- g) Widows who have shown exceptional courage in facing life or difficult situations
- Widows owning small/big business enterprise
 - Widows owning and cultivating agricultural land
 - Widows cultivating agricultural lands as tenants
 - Widows who are fighting for property rights with husband's family members /Parents/Siblings
 - Widows who have boldly done inter caste marriage/ inter-religious marriage
 - Women who are fighting for compensation from government from husband's death (e. g. Fishermen who went missing in Rameshwaram)
 - Widows who have approached police stations
 - Widows who have contested panchayat elections
 - ...and so on

When selecting these respondents, importance was given to no. f) and g) so as to give wider representation to thematic areas, following which the criteria from no. a) to e) were considered.

4) For the sampling of 12 widows-respondents for individual case study interviews, the following specific criteria were used:

- a) Belonging to different religions
- b) Belonging to different castes
- c) Belonging to different age groups
- d) Belonging to different educational status
- e) Belonging to different districts in each zone
- f) Belonging to different social contexts/issues – **around 60% widows:**
 - Husbands' death due to liquor, accident, suicide, ill-health, etc.
 - Widows' living alone without children, with children, with parents' family, with in-law's family
 - Both mother and daughter are widows
 - Father and Son, both died due to liquor
 - Widows working as daily wage labourer
 - ... and so on

g) Widows who have shown exceptional courage in facing life or difficult situations – **around 40% widows:**

- Inter caste marriage/ inter religious marriage
- Women who broke socio cultural norms
- Widows owning small/big business enterprise
- Widows owning & cultivating agricultural land
- Widows cultivating agricultural land as tenants
- Widows who have undertaken new jobs
- Widows who won property rights from relatives
- Women who are fighting for property rights with husband's family members / parents/ siblings
- Widows who have approached police stations
- Widows who have contested panchayat elections
- Women who are fighting for welfare benefits from the government after their husband's death.

When selecting these respondents, first importance was given to no. f) and g) so as to give wider representation to thematic areas, following which the criteria from no. a) to e) were considered.

VI. Research Process and Methods

In consultation with the KALANGARAI Team, the Research Team decided on the following process for the research.

1) Preparatory Process

a) Consultation: In view of introducing the research project and the Research Team, gaining acceptance and approval to proceed, and preparing the data collection tools, KALANGARAI organized a consultation on 30th January, 2022 for 26 participants consisting of leaders from the Widows Federation – Tamil Nadu and their widows' representatives. Due to the constraints imposed by the corona pandemic, this had to be an online exercise. After getting the consent of the participants for the research project, the Research Team discussed with them, through a participatory approach, the research objectives, purpose, themes to be explored, districts to be covered, sampling and selection of Respondent-Widows and Field Investigators.

b) Quantitative Research tool – Structured Questionnaire: Based on the input given in the consultation, the Research Team decided on the following mixed methods to gather data: structured questionnaire, focus group discussions, informal case stories and formal case study interviews. A questionnaire (see Annex-1) with close-ended questions was prepared for individual widows, encompassing (i) their socio-economic conditions; (ii) level of access to various state entitlements; and (iii) forms of discrimination and violence faced by the widows.

c) Selection of Field Investigators: 36 women (12 widows and 24 non-widows) who are members of, or associated with, widows' networks in the 16 study districts, were selected as Field Investigators to collect the questionnaire data.

The following were the criteria used for the selection of Field Investigators:

- (i) Women, and as far as possible, widows
- (ii) Two persons for each district
- (iii) Interest in doing the data collection
- (iv) School education partly or fully and should know reading and writing well
- (v) Should be able to relate with people
- (vi) Age-wise within 50 years
- (vii) Should be able to give sufficient time to do the questionnaire work
- (viii) Should be able to travel around to contact widows for collecting data
- (ix) Should do the data collection work by herself and not delegate it to others.

2. Data Collection Exercise

a) Pilot Study Phase: Training Field Investigators and Cross-checking Data Collection

For the eight pilot study Field Investigators (3 widows and 5 non-widows), an orientation training was held on 13-14 May, 2022, where the objectives and purpose of the research were explained. They were also briefed about the content of the draft questionnaire as well as instructions to be followed during the data collection. After five days of data collection, they were assembled together on 20 May to cross-check the filled-in questionnaires and provide their feedback on the questionnaire. Following this pilot study exercise, the Research Team amended the draft questionnaire and finalised it.

b) Post-Pilot Study Phase: Training and Data Cross-checking Exercises

A group of 36 Field Investigators, including the eight Pilot Study Field Investigators, selected on the basis of the criteria mentioned above attended a two-day (4 & 5 June, 2022) orientation training wherein the objectives and purpose of the research as well as the content of the final questionnaire were explained. Districts were assigned and data collection carried out until 9 June, after which on 10-11 June the Research Team did a first phase of cross-checking to validate the data collected. Subsequently, the second phase of cross-checking was done on 8-10 July, and the third and final phase on 11-13 August.

c) Qualitative Research Tools – Focus Group Discussion and Case Study Interviews

To supplement the quantitative survey data with more qualitative information, three additional data collection tools were prepared, namely, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Formal Case Study Interview and Informal Case Stories. Selected widows-respondents were administered these tools from November 2022. Full and informed consent was obtained from them for conducting the interviews. Confidentiality was also assured to them, that their original names would not be mentioned in the research report to protect their privacy and thereby provide safety for them.

(i) Focus Group Discussion: Eight FGDs were conducted in each of the eight districts of Nagapattinam, Karur, Theni, Sivaganga, Viluppuram, Tiruppur, Ramanathapuram and Kancheepuram. The thematic areas covered (see Annex-2) included socio-cultural and religious practices, the discrimination and violence the widows faced, their livelihoods, and their assertion of rights, resilience and support systems.

(ii) Case Study Interviews: Twelve Case Studies of individual widows from 11 districts (Nagapattinam, Mayiladuthurai, Karur, Theni, Kancheepuram, The Nilgiris, Villupuram, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram, Chennai and Dindigul districts) were documented to highlight different aspects of the issues the widows face. The themes touched upon (see Annex-3) include the circumstances of widowhood, safety, security and protection mechanisms, perceptions of identity as women and as widowed women, socio-cultural practices, discrimination/harassment/atrocities experienced, resilience and future aspirations/expectations.

(iii) Informal Case Stories: During the quantitative data collection, Field Investigators were instructed to take brief notes from the widow-respondents on their life experiences and issues faced by them. These informally gathered 'case stories' served as another source of qualitative data to highlight the situation of the widows.

VII. Data Entry, Processing, Analysis and Report Writing

1) Data Entry, Processing and Analysis

With all the filled-in quantitative data of the 495 questionnaires, the qualitative data of the focus group discussions and the case study interviews in hand, simultaneously began the exercise of data entry and processing. The quantitative data processing took the forms of frequency tables and co-relation tables. Besides, all the eight focus groups discussion reports and the twelve case study reports were collated under different headings to enable the writing of the research report.

2) Report writing

Chapterisation of the report was aligned to the themes and sub-themes of the structured questionnaire. Extracts from the collated reports of the focus groups discussions and case studies are used to highlight the findings of the quantitative data. The report chapters are:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – introduces the title and the subject matter of the research.
- **Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework** – presents (i) the ideological underpinnings and the concept of widowhood, and (ii) the legal guarantees and protection mechanisms.
- **Chapter 3: Methodology** – deals with the methodological tools and processes employed in the data collection exercises.

- **Chapter 4: Profile of Respondents** – narrates the personal profile of the widows (age, caste, religion); their schooling and technical educational background; the children and their education.
- **Chapter 5: Identity, Independence and Dignity** – enquires into the age at, and the causes of, their widowhood; their habitat (whether living alone or with children or family members); their observance of socio-cultural practices in daily life and at husband's demise; their freedom and independence in decision-making, participation in public functions and celebrations, and interactions with family members and others in private and public life.
- **Chapter 6: Livelihood Status** – explores into the widows' food practices, health services accessed; house-sites; housing, water, electricity, sewage, toilet facilities; livelihood related records like birth, caste and death certificate, ration card, land deed, voter card, etc.
- **Chapter 7: Economic Assets, Savings, Loans, Income and Expenditure** – discusses their occupation; business and related resources; landholdings and other assets; income, savings, loans.
- **Chapter 8: Participation in Public Life** – deals with their membership in panchayat institutions, women's organizations, village development associations, etc.; their membership in political parties and participation in electoral politics.
- **Chapter 9: Experiencing Emotional life** – enquires into the psychological effects of widowhood and the social support systems available for them.
- **Chapter 10: Discrimination against Widows** – discusses the various forms of discrimination and violence faced by the widows – socio-cultural, livelihood related, economic, political and religious forms.
- **Chapter 11: Security and Protection Measures** – explores into the widows' feelings of security/insecurity concerns, their awareness and knowledge of legal protection measures, the sources of such awareness and knowledge, whether they have accessed law enforcement institutions and how they have been treated by the police, their future needs of security and protection measures.
- **Chapter 12: Manifestations of Courage and Resilience** – speaks about the widows' experiences regarding whether and how they manifested their courage and sustained their determination while performing their socio-cultural practices, carrying out their economic and political life, and upholding their right to freedom, independence, socio-economic development, fight for justice, etc.
- **Chapter 13: Future Household Needs** – discusses the widows' concerns and anxieties about their children's future and their own personal and family needs in future.
- **Chapter 14: Important Findings** – lists the major findings of the study.

- **Chapter 15: Recommendations** – presents certain recommendations to the state institutions and civil society bodies in view of acknowledging, respecting, safeguarding, and upholding the dignity, rights and entitlements of the widows, and of finding ways and means of empowering them towards enhancing their potentials and for development as dignified citizens.

VIII. Strengths and Limitations

An important strength of this research is the pioneering initiative taken by KALANGARAI non-governmental organization in initiating this research and coordinating all the required logistics. The moral as well as the logistical support rendered by the 18 member-strong Widows Federation – Tamil Nadu enabled the effective selection of the 36 Field Investigators and the 495 women respondents for the study. What made the interviews a success is the involvement of women, an appreciable number of whom were widows, to be the Field Investigators. They could listen to the widow-respondents sympathetically and the widows could speak with candour and confidence to them.

To be noted, however, is that there were ‘missing responses’ in the quantitative data, that is, the widows-respondents did not answer certain questions. Whatever be the reasons, their silence in this regard has to be acknowledged and respected.

On the other hand, a special mention needs to be mentioned about the willing collaboration of those widows who underwent the interview process during both the focus group discussions and case study interviews. In fact, when asked to give their feedback at the end of the interview process, all of them invariably said that, despite the long duration of the interview sessions, they were not only satisfied with the exercise but also found this as their long-felt need to share their experiences and concerns as widows and find some relief and solace for their struggles and sufferings. An illustration of this is what the seven widows who attended the focus group discussion in Karur district said: *“During the interview, we felt listened to. We feel light. We felt there is someone to listen to us. We feel empowered. You made us feel at home.”* To add to this is Sneha of Nagapattinam district who said: *“I feel much relaxed. I thought that I would be asked in this interview only about some problems I have faced. But I liked the interview as it had covered the whole of my life.”*

No doubt these women look forward to socio-economic and political empowerment and development as well as some assured safety and security measures for themselves and their children from the state institutions and civil society in future.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

This chapter discusses the personal profiles of the 495 respondents from 16 districts of Tamil Nadu, analysing eight aspects: (1) age, (2) caste, (3) religion, (4) age at widowhood, (5) reason for widowhood, (6) family status of widows, (7) educational qualifications of widows, and (8) number of children and their educational status. These details will serve as background information in our attempt to understand their responses spelt out in the main chapters.

I. Age of the Respondents

Out of the total 495 respondents, 401 (81%) were between the age group of 21 to 50. Of them, 51 (10%) were between the age group of 21 to 30, relatively very young. Only 94 respondents (19%) were above 51 years of age (Table 4.1). The significant point here is that the study has more to do with young and middle-aged widows.

Table 4.1: Age of widows		
Age	No.	%
21-25	9	1.8
26-30	43	8.7
31-35	69	13.9
36-40	86	17.4
41-45	100	20.2
46-50	94	19.0
51-55	58	11.7
56-60	30	6.1
Above 61	6	1.2
	495	100.0

II. Caste background of the Respondents

Concerning the caste composition of the respondents, it is well spread out. Table 4.2 shows that of the 495 respondents, 241 (48.7%) belong to Scheduled Caste (SC), followed by 108 Backward Caste (BC) (21.8%), 68 Most Backward Caste (MBC) (13.7%), 67 Scheduled Tribe (ST) (13.5%), 8 Other Backward Caste (OBC) (1.6%) and 3 Forward Caste (FC) (0.6%).

Table 4.2: Caste background		
Caste	No.	%
SC	241	48.7
BC	108	21.8
MBC	68	13.7
ST	67	13.5
OBC	8	1.6
FC	3	.6
Total	495	100.0

III. Religion of the Respondents

Table 4.3 shows that out of the total respondents, 363 (73.3%) are Hindus, followed by 102 Christians (20.6%) and 30 Muslims (6.1%). Due representation, therefore, is evident in the sample regarding religious diversity and numerical Hindu majority.

Table 4.3: Background of Religion		
Religion	No.	%
Hinduism	363	73.3
Christianity	102	20.6
Islam	30	6.1
Total	495	100.0

IV. Age at widowhood

Table 4.4 illustrates that 14 respondents (2.8%) were widowed before reaching the age of 20, followed by 74 (14.9%) between the ages of 21 to 25, 104 (21%) between the ages of 26 to 30, and 107 (21.6%) between the ages of 31 to 35. If we pool together the above-mentioned statistics, 299 (60.3%) became widows before reaching the age of 35.

Table 4.4: Age at Widowhood		
Age	No.	%
Below 20	14	2.8
21-25	74	14.9
26-30	104	21.0
31-35	107	21.6
36-40	82	16.6
41-45	59	11.9
46-50	31	6.3
51-55	17	3.4
56-60	7	1.4
Total	495	100.0

The point to be noted here is that while the marriage age of women in India is 18, 14 women respondents had become widows before they were 20 years old. In other words, their married life has been very short. Secondly, 440 respondents (88.9%) were widowed before reaching the age of 45.

V. Reasons for Widowhood

Table 4.5 analyses the main reasons for widowhood of the respondents. Out of the total respondents, 188 (38%) attributed their husband's death to addiction to liquor, followed by 171 (34.5%) mentioning illness, 67 (13.5%) accidents, 30 (6.1%) suicide, 12 (2.4%) drug abuse, 9 (1.8%) murder and 3 (0.6%) attributed to Covid 19. No reasons were given for the remaining 15 deaths.

Table 4.5: Main reasons for widowhood		
Reasons	No.	%
Alcohol	188	38.0
Illness	171	34.5
Accident	67	13.5
Suicide	30	6.1
Any other	15	3.0
Drug abuse	12	2.4
Murder	9	1.8
Covid 19	3	.6
Total	495	100.0

Addiction to liquor and illness, mentioned by 359 respondents (72.5%), emerge as the two major causes of widowhood. Discussions with the respondents revealed that though the illness was the immediate cause of their husbands' death, often the illness was caused by addiction to liquor. In short, therefore, primarily 'addiction to liquor' seem to have caused the widowhood of the respondents.

VI. Widows' Family Status

Over half of the respondents (275 or 55.6%) said that they live with their children, while 92 (18.6%) said that they live alone, 69 (13.9%) live with their parents and 47 (9.5%) live with their in-laws.

Table 4.6: Widow's Family Status	No.	%
Living with children	275	55.6
Living alone	92	18.6
Living with parent's family	69	13.9
Living with in-law's family	47	9.5
Any other	12	2.4
Total	495	100.0

VII. Education of widows

With regard to the widows' educational qualifications, Table 4.7 shows that 346 respondents (67.9%) had not gone beyond 8th Standard schooling. Still worse, 126 respondents (25.5%) said they were illiterate. While this illiteracy status is quite alarming, it corresponds with the state female illiteracy rate (26.56%) in the 2011 Census.

Table 4.7: Education level (completed)		
Education status	No.	%
No education and illiterate	126	25.5
No education but literate	18	3.6
1-5 standard	88	17.8
6-8 standard	114	23.0
9-10 standard	95	19.2
11-12 standard	27	5.5
Technical/vocational education	10	2.0
Undergraduate degree	10	2.0
Postgraduate degree	5	1.0
Above Postgraduate degree	2	0.4
Total	495	100.0

VIII. Number of Children and their Education Status

Only 18 (4%) of the 495 respondents said that they do not have any children. As regards the remaining 479 respondents (96%), they have a total of 542 boys and 512 girls, averaging 2 children for each gender.

As per Table 4.8, 78 respondents (15.8%) said that they had to discontinue the education of their children immediately after the death of their husbands. Many widows expressed their feelings of guilt for having stopped the studies of their children.

Table 4.8: Total Number of Children Dropped out of School/College		
Children dropped out of school/college	No.	%
Yes	78	15.8
No	399	80.6
Total	477	96.4
No Child	18	306
Total	495	100.0

Table 4.9 indicates the total number of children who dropped out of school/college and the reasons for it. The 78 respondents who said that they had to discontinue the education of their children revealed that the total number of children who dropped out of school/college was 161. Enumerating reasons, the respondents said that 44 children had to go to work to sustain the family, 35 were unable to pay the school/college fees, 31 had to work to pay off the family's debt, 29 couldn't cope with studies due to mental stress arising out of the loss of their fathers, 13 had to stay at home to nurture the younger ones and nine had to stop education for some other reasons.

Table: 4.9: The total number of children who dropped out of School/college and the reasons for it			
Reasons for children dropping out of school/College	(a) Girls	(b) Boys	Total
Had to work for income to sustain my family	15	29	44
Unable to pay the school/college fees	13	22	35
Had to work to pay off the family's debt	7	24	31
The mental stress of children – couldn't cope with studies – failed exams	12	17	29
Had to stay at home to look after the house and younger children	2	11	13
Security of the children	2	3	5
Any other	2	2	4
Total	53	108	161

To be noted here is that out of the 161 children, 110 had to drop out of their education for such reasons as to sustain the family, inability to pay the educational fees, and paying off the family's debt. Looking at these three reasons, it is quite revealing that all these are related to poverty. Hence, poverty appears to be the main reason for the children of widows discontinuing their studies after the death of their fathers.

Alongside poverty, the mental stress of children arising out of the loss of their fathers is another reason for dropping out of school/college.

IX. Important findings

1. Age of the widows:

Out of 495 respondents, 401 (81%) are between the age group of 21 to 50.

2. Caste composition:

SCs form the largest group of respondents (241 or 48.7%), followed by BCs (108, or 21.8%).

3. Religion:

Of the total number of respondents, the majority (363, or 73.3%) are Hindus, followed by Christians (102, or 20.6%) and Muslims (30, or 6.1%).

4. Age at widowhood:

Of the 495 widows, 440 (88.9%) were widowed before reaching the age of 45. Significantly, while the minimum age of marriage for women in India is 18, 14 of the respondents were widowed before reaching the age of 20.

5. Cause of the death of husbands:

Almost three-quarters of the respondents (365, or 72.5%) said that addiction to liquor and illness were the two major causes of the death of their husbands, with many attributing

the illness to alcohol addiction. In short, primarily 'addiction to liquor' is the cause of the widowhood of the respondents.

6. Educational qualification of widows:

Of the total number of 495 respondents, 346 (67.9%) never crossed 8th standard education. Still worse, of these 346, 126 (25.5%) are illiterate. Only 64 of the 495 respondents have accessed technical or vocational training programs and are holding certificates. Out of these 64, only 22 have managed to acquire jobs in line with their skills.

7. Children of widows:

Out of the 495 respondents, 18 (4%) do not have children. The remaining 96% have an average of 2 children each. Over half of the respondents (275, or 55.6%) live with their children, while 92 (18.6%) live alone, 13.9% live with their parents and 9.5% live with their in-laws.

8. Education of the children of widows:

It is quite disheartening to note that 78 respondents (15.8%) had to discontinue the education of their children immediately after the death of their husbands. The main reasons mentioned were: *'for the sake of sending them for work and earning some income to sustain the family'*, *'unable to pay the educational fees,'* and *'their children were unable to cope with studies due to mental stress'*. When further analysed, it is quite revealing that all these reasons are related to poverty.

CHAPTER 5

LIVELIHOOD STATUS

I never went out of my house for any work while my husband was alive. He took care of everything. After his death, I didn't know how to manage the family, especially my children's food, education, etc. I really struggled. The only help has been my father and mother.

– Thangarani, Nagapattinam District

Drastic changes occur in the livelihood condition of widows after the death of their husbands. While husbands are alive, they often shoulder financial responsibilities for their families. Once they pass away, the entire burden falls on the widowed women. As shared by Tamilselvi from Karur district:

Before our husbands' death, we did not have any jobs for ourselves. We managed everything with the income of our husbands. But now after their demise, we have to earn our income by going for daily wage work to manage the family. Although economic challenges are really difficult for us, we try to manage our day-to-day lives.

The above sharings of the two widows portrays the financial struggles that widows go through to meet their basic livelihood needs.

Against this background, this chapter analyses the living conditions of widows. The focus is on their (1) food security and consumption patterns; (2) housing facilities; (3) access to basic amenities such as drinking water, healthcare, sewage, and electricity; and (4) access to livelihood-related documents (entitlement deeds or certificates).

I. Food Security/ Consumption Patterns

1) Frequency of meals

In Tamil Nadu, eating three meals a day is a normal custom. However, the poor often cannot afford to enjoy three meals. They either have two meals a day or in some cases only one a day. In general, men are given priority when it comes to meals. In many cases, food is served first to men and only the leftover food is served to women. This principle applies to children as well, with boys given priority over girls regarding food.

Table 5.1 shows how many meals widows and their children enjoyed daily. Of the 495 widows-respondents, 311 (62.8%) said that they take three meals a day, 168 (33.96%) said two meals and 16 (3.2%) said only one meal a day. These statistics speak volumes about the poverty situation of widows: just under one-third (31.1%) did not enjoy three meals a day.

Table 5.1: Usual number of meals per day that members of widows' households have							
	The usual number of meals per day	22.1. Widow		22.2. Widow's children (female)		22.3. Widow's children (male)	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	One Meal	16	3.2	2	0.4	1	0.2
2	Two Meals	168	33.9	21	4.2	27	5.5
3	Three Meals	311	62.8	307	62.0	332	67.1
	Total	495	100.0	330	66.7	360	72.7

Concerning the daughters of widows, out of 495 respondents, 307 (62%) said that their daughters had three meals a day, whereas 21 (4.2%) said two meals a day, and two (0.4%) said only one meal a day. In comparison, the sons of widows seemed to enjoy a slight advantage: 332 widows (67.1%) said that their sons had three meals a day, and 27 (5.5%) mentioned two meals a day, and one (0.2%) only one meal a day.

In general, widows living without food security is an indication of poverty. Of the 495 respondents, 184 are not in a position to afford three meals a day. Among them, quite a few are not in a position even to feed their children three meals a day.

The statistics above are reinforced by the sharing of Rani, Nagapattinam district, during a focus group discussion, who said:

I never went out of my house for any work while my husband was alive. He took care of everything. After his death, I didn't know how to manage the family, especially my children's food, education, etc. I really struggled. The only help has been my father and mother.

2) Type of food consumed by widows and their children

Table 5.2 provides details regarding how often in a month widows consume food items such as milk, curd, pulses or beans, vegetables, fruits, eggs, meat, and fish. Regarding food consumed by widows **all 30 days of the month**, milk tops the list (263 widows or 53.1%), followed by vegetables (130 widows or 26.3%), pulses or beans (46 widows or 9.3%), eggs (30 widows or 6.1%), curd (19 widows or 3.8%), fruits (11 widows or 2.2%) and fish (3 widows or 0.6%). No widow consumes meat for all 30 days.

Regarding food consumed by widows **only 10 days a month**, meat tops the list (445 widows or 89.9%), followed by fish (379 widows or 76.4%), eggs (354 widows or 71.4%), pulses or beans (303 widows or 61.1%), fruits (303 widows or 61.2%), curd (261 widows or 52.7%), vegetables (172 widows or 34.7%), and milk (87 widows or 17.5%).

Table 5.2: How often different types of food are eaten in the household																
No. of Days in a Month	Milk		Curd		Pulses or beans		Vegetables		Fruits		Eggs		Meat (Mutton, beef, chicken)		Fish	
	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%	NW *	%
21-31	263	53.1	19	3.8	46	9.3	130	26.3	11	2.2	30	6.1			3	0.6
11-20	68	13.7	43	8.6	142	28.7	189	38	35	7	69	13.9	6	1.2	33	6.6
01-10	87	17.5	261	52.6	303	61.1	172	34.7	303	61.2	354	71.4	445	89.9	379	76.4
Total	495	100	495	100	495	100	495	100	495	100	495	100	495	100	495	100

* NW= Number of Widows

II. Housing Status

1) House ownership

Table 5.3 explains how many respondents have houses of their own. Out of the 495 respondents, 338 (68.3%) said that they owned a house while 157 (31.7%) said that they did not own a house of their own.

Table 5.3: Do you have a house of your own?		
	No.	%
Yes	338	68.3
No	157	31.7
Total	495	100.0

2) Housing status where no house ownership

Of the 157 widow respondents who said that they had no house, 104 (21%) said that they were living in a rented house, while 53 (10.7%) said that they were living either in their parents' house or in-laws' house, or in some kind of housing arrangement (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Housing Status for those without House Ownership		
	No.	%
Living in a rented house	104	21.0
Any other	53	10.7
Total	157	31.7

3) If they owned houses, who built them

Table 5.5 shows that 218 widows (44%) lived in houses they had built and 120 (24.2%) lived in houses built by the government.

Table 5.5: Who Built the Widow's House			
		No.	%
1	Own built/bought house	218	44.0
2	Government built house	120	24.2
	Total	338	68.3

4) Schemes under which houses were built

Table 5.6 indicates the government scheme under which housing was built for the 120 widow respondents. This included the **Old Colony Housing Scheme** (36 widows), the **Greenhouse Scheme** of the State Government (19 widows), the **Prime Minister's Housing Scheme** (18 widows), the **Indira Gandhi Kudiyiruppu Scheme** of the Central Government (17 widows), and other schemes (30 widows). The point to be noted here is that there are four major government housing schemes in operation to address the issue of housing.

Table 5.6: If it is a government-built house, under what scheme is it built?			
	Government-built house, under what scheme is it built	No.	%
1	Previous Colony Housing scheme	36	7.3
2	Any other scheme	30	6.1
3	Greenhouse Scheme (State Govt.)	19	3.8
4	Prime Minister's Housing Scheme	18	3.6
5	Indira Gandhi Kudiyiruppu Thittam (Central Govt.)	17	3.4
	Total	120	24.2

5) Nature of own housing

Table 5.7: If it is your own built house, what is the type of house?			
	Type of house	No.	%
1	Concrete house (Pucca)	87	39.9
2	Brick-cum-tiled house (Semi-pucca)	74	33.9
3	Thatched house (Kudisai/Olai veedu)	57	26
	Total	218	100.0

Table 5.7 shows the 218 widows owned three types of houses: for 87 (39.9%) of them it is concrete houses, for 74 (33.9%) brick-cum-tiled houses, and for 57 (26%) thatched roof houses.

6) Who constructed/bought owned houses

The 218 respondents who said that they had houses of their own were asked who exactly built or bought those houses for them – whether built by their husbands when alive, or whether the houses are their husband's ancestral property, or they were built by the widows themselves, or the houses are their parents' ancestral property. As per Table 5.8, for 90 widows (41.2%), their houses were constructed while their husbands were alive; 54 (23.8%) said that their

houses are their husbands' ancestral property; 42 (19.2%) said that the houses were built by their own effort; and 32 (14.6%) said that their houses were their parents' ancestral property.

Table 5.8: Who constructed or bought the widows' owned houses			
	Person	No.	%
1	Husband when alive	90	41.2
2	Husband's ancestral house	54	23.8
3	Self – by my effort	42	19.2
4	Parents' ancestral house	32	14.6
	Total	218	100

7) Who bought the house sites they owned presently?

Table 5.9 discusses how the widows acquired house sites, either on which the houses were built or the vacant ones with the hope of building houses later.

Table 5.9: How widows acquired their house sites			
	How acquired house sites	No.	%
1	Husband's ancestral land	151	41.2
2	Husband when alive	81	22
3	Parent's ancestral land	40	10.9
4	<i>Poramboke</i> land	24	6.5
5	Self	23	6.2
6	Govt colony land	21	5.7
7	Any other	16	4.3
8	Temple land	8	2.1
9	Estate <i>Pannai</i> house site	2	0.5
	Total	366	100

Out of the 366 respondents who said that they owned their house sites, 151 (41.2%) mentioned them to be their husband's ancestral land; for 81 (22%), the house sites were bought when their husbands were alive; 40 (10.9%) said that it was their parent's ancestral property; for 24 (6.5%), the sites were government *poramboke* land (i.e., government waste land); 23 (6.2%) said that they themselves bought the house sites; for 21 (5.7%), the sites were Government colony land; for 16 (4.3%), the sites were obtained through unknown persons; eight (2.1%) mentioned the sites were temple lands; and two (0-5%) said that the sites were estate *pannai* house land (i.e. belonging to estate owners), etc.

Two facts are noteworthy here: one is that out of 495 widows, 366 have house sites; second is that despite the poor socio-economic situation of the widows in general, a significant achievement for 23 widows is that they bought their house sites.

8) Size of house sites

The data in Table 5.10 speaks about the size of the house sites of the 366 respondents who owned them. For the majority of them (179 or 48.9%) the size is above two cents, while for 139 (37.9%) it is one to two cents, and for 48 (13.1%) it is less than one cent.

Table 5.10: House site size in cent			
	No. of cents	No.	%
1	Above 2 cents	179	48.9
2	One to two cents	139	37.9
3	Less than one cent	48	13.1
	Total	366	73.9

9) House site registration

Quite a number of widows struggle to get their due share of property from their husbands' families because the proper registration of any transfer of property/house sites is not done on time. Malliga from Kancheepuram district indicates the importance of understanding in whose name the house sites are registered. She said:

In our family, the house site patta is in my father-in-law's name. My father-in-law divided the property equally among both sons and obtained their oral consent. However, he did not make efforts to implement the decision through proper registration. We all took the matter lightly as it was between two siblings. Unfortunately, though, both my husband and my father-in-law passed away one after another. After these sudden causalities, my brother-in-law changed his mind and refused to give my husband's share to me. I had no other way but to file a complaint at the police station and the case is still pending in court.... If only we had done the division of our house site properly and registered the transfer of property on time, the ordeal that I face now could have been avoided.

Table 5.11 indicates in whose names the patta of the house sites of the 366 widows are registered. Only 92 widows (25.1%) said that the pattas (ownership deed) of their house sites are registered in their own names, while for 64 (17.4%) it is still in their husbands' names. While for 17 (4.6%) widows it is a joint patta, that is, in the name of the widow and the husband, in the case of the majority (193 or 52.7%) of them, the patta is in others' names and this means it would be very difficult, even impossible, for these widows to transfer the patta to their names.

Table 5.11: House site patta in whose name?			
	Name on house site patta	No.	%
1	Widow	92	25.1
2	Husband	64	17.4
3	Others' name	193	52.7
4	Jointly: husband & wife (widow)	17	4.6
	Total	366	100

10) Whether widows had applied for any new government housing scheme

As per Table 5.12, of the 495 widows, only 88 (17.8%) have applied for a new housing scheme from the government.

Table 5.12: Have you currently applied for any new Govt. housing scheme?		
	No.	%
Yes	88	17.8
No	407	82.2
Total	495	100

Table 5.13 shows which government housing scheme the 88 widows had applied for. Just about half the number of them (41 widows or 46.5%) said that they had applied under the Prime Minister's Housing Scheme, 39 (44.3%) under the Greenhouse Scheme, four under the former Colony Housing Scheme, and two under the Indira Gandhi Housing Scheme.

Table 5.13: If yes, under what scheme? (One response only)			
S.No	Housing Schemes	No.	%
1	Prime Minister's Housing Scheme (Central Govt.)	41	46.5
2	Greenhouse Scheme (State Govt.)	39	44.3
3	Previous Colony Housing Scheme	4	4.5
4	Indira Gandhi Housing Kudiyruppu Thittam (Central Govt.)	2	2.2
5	Any other	2	2.2
	Total	88	100

As for the remaining 407 widows who had not applied for any new housing scheme, 143 (35.1%) said they had no extra house sites, 113 (27.7%) did not need another house, 71 (17.4%) have no money to buy a house site, and 36 (8.8%) have house site without patta (Table 5.14) and therefore there is no possibility of applying for a house.

Table 5.14: Reason for not Applying for a Government Housing Scheme			
S.No	Reasons	No.	%
1	I have no additional house site	143	35.1
2	I don't need another house	113	27.7
3	I have no money to buy any house site	71	17.4
4	Any other	44	10.8
5	I have a house site but no patta	36	8.8
	Total	407	82.2

III. Basic Amenities

Access to basic amenities is a measure to assess whether a particular section of people, like the widows, live a secure and dignified life. Here, basic amenities refer to (a) drinking water, (b) health care, (c) toilet facilities, (e) electricity. The following tables analyse access by widows to the aforementioned amenities.

1) Drinking water source

The widows were asked to indicate their current water sources. As per Table 5.15, 334 widows use a common well, borewell or water tap closer to their house, while 149 use separate or own well, borewell, or water taps. Seven widows fetch water from village ponds or *Kanmai*. In other words, almost all widows have easy access to drinking water sources.

Table 5.15: Current drinking water sources		
S.No.	Drinking Water Sources	No.
1	Common well, borewell, or water tap	334
2	Separate/own well, borewell, or water tap	149
3	Village <i>kanmai</i>	7
4	Any other source	19

2) Healthcare

When it comes to accessing healthcare facilities, 243 widows said they were going to government hospitals, 214 to primary healthcare centres, 192 to private clinics, and five widows used native medicine centres (Table 5.16). The point to be noted here is that most of them had access to medical facilities, especially the government facilities.

Table 5.16: Main healthcare facilities accessed by household		
S.No.	Healthcare Facilities	No.
1	Government hospital	243
2	Primary healthcare centre/sub-centre	214
3	Private clinic/doctor/hospital	192
4	Any other	7
5	<i>Naattu Vaithiyar salai (Native medicinal clinic)</i>	6

3) Toilet facilities

In contrast, access to toilet facilities shows a very different picture. As per Table 5.17, 258 widows (52.1%) have toilet facilities, while 156 (31.5%) do not, and a further 81 widows did not answer the question. One has every reason to believe that out of embarrassment, these 81 respondents skipped the question and likely do not have these facilities. In sum, at least half of the widows are without toilet facilities in their homes.

Table 5.17: Availability of toilet facility at home		
	No.	%
Yes	258	52.1
No	156	31.5
Total	414	83.6

Having no access to toilets, many widows are forced to move out of their houses early in the morning to either use public toilets often situated at the edge of the village, or to look for a secure place for open defecation. When they go outside early in the morning, the neighbours and villagers who consider them ill-omen would not like to see them, especially at that early hour. As a result, widows often hide in their houses until there are no passers-by on the streets along which they might need to walk. As narrated by Sundari from The Nilgiris district, “I do not even wake up in the morning to go to the store because they used to see me as an ill-omen, so I avoid going out early in the morning.”

4) Sewage facilities

Sewage facilities are essential to maintain a clean and healthy environment. However, as Table 5.18 shows, only 164 widows (33.4%) mentioned they have these facilities as compared with 234 widows (47.3%) who said they do not, and 97 (19.6%) abstained from answering. It may be that the last category of respondents was hesitant to accept the absence of that facility in their houses. The fact that nearly 50% of the respondents have no sewage facility in their houses would tend to suggest their poor economic condition does not permit them to acquire these facilities.

Table 5.18: Availability of sewage facility		
	No.	%
Yes	164	33.1
No	234	47.3
Total	398	80.4

5) Electricity

Electricity has become an essential amenity for people today. As shown in Table 5.19, out of 495 respondents, 391 (79%) stated they have electricity connections, while 25 (5.1%) do not. A further 79 widows (16%) abstained from answering the question. However, it is clear that at least three-quarters of the widows have electricity in their houses.

Table 5.19: Electricity in the Home		
	No.	%
Yes	391	79.0
No	25	5.1
Total	416	84.0

IV. Accessing Entitlement Documents

Accessing entitlement documents/cards/certificates from government offices is often a difficult task, as the following sharings of three widows illustrate:

Government officials made me run up and down to obtain the death certificate of my husband. Having got it now, I am after them to do a correction to it. They have written my name wrongly on the certificate.

Jhubetha Bhanu, Theni district

When I applied for a destitute widow certificate, I was told several times that I didn't look like a widow. Further, they asked me 'How could I wear a gold chain and apply for a widow's pension?' To date, my application has not been processed and on my part, I keep re-applying, again and again, putting forth my appeals to the District Collector.

- Meenakshi, Ramanathapuram district

When I approached the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) for a destitute widow certificate, he looked at me with disgust and told me that I looked physically good and why I needed this certificate, and why couldn't I work?

- Indira, Dindigul district

Despite facing ill-treatment from government officials such as verbal abuse, sexual abuse, and belittlement, widows have to run from pillar to post to obtain formal documents to access their welfare entitlements.

Table 5.20 shows the number of respondents who possessed key government documents. A positive sign is that 490 widows (99%) have Aadhar card, and 485 (98%) Smart card. The former is essential to prove that one is an Indian citizen and the latter is necessary to buy essential food items from the government-run ration shops at a subsidized price. Further, 478 widows (96.6%) said they have voter cards required for casting their votes. Less common are caste/community certificates, which 305 (61.6%) have obtained and which are essential to access education and job opportunities for their children.

Table 5.20: Widows with Livelihood, Citizenship and Election-Related Documents			
S.No.	Type of Documents	No.	%
1	Aadhar Card	490	99.0
2	Smart Ration Card (Family Card)	485	98.0
3	Voter Card	478	96.6
4	Registered bank account	467	94.3
5	Husband's death certificate	451	91.1
6	Widows destitute certificate	308	62.2
7	Caste Certificate	305	61.6
8	ATM card	290	58.6

9	MNREGA Card	261	52.7
10	Health Insurance card (Kalaingar Card)	249	50.3
11	PAN Card	247	49.9
12	Legal heir certificate	224	45.3
13	Widows pension card	191	38.6
14	Health Insurance Card (Modi Card)	169	34.1
15	House site <i>patta</i>	157	31.7
16	Unorganized Labourers Welfare Card	98	19.8
17	Birth Certificate	97	19.6
18	Old Age Pension Card	24	4.8
19	Agricultural land patta	19	3.8
20	Kisan credit card	18	3.6
21	Fishery card	12	2.4
22	PLF card (Panchayat Level Federation membership)	8	1.6
23	PLF Membership Passbook	7	1.4
24	Differently Abled Person Identity Card	7	1.4
25	Any other	6	1.2
26	Pension Card for Differently Abled Persons	4	.8

It is interesting to note that 467 widows (94.3%) said they have registered bank accounts, and among them, 290 have ATM cards too. Almost half of the widows (247 widows or 49.9%) said they have a PAN card. The government's directive to pay the wages of the MNREGA scheme only through banks may be one of the reasons for such a big number of widows having opened bank accounts.

As regards the death certificates of their husbands, only 451 widows (91.1%) have managed to access; the remaining 8.9% are unable or are still trying to get that vital certificate. Again, in the case of the 'Widows Destitute Certificate' which is essential for accessing the monthly widows' pension of Rs. 1,500/-, only 308 widows (62.2%) have managed to get it; as a result, only 191 respondents (38.6%) could access the Widows' Pension Card. In addition, 24 widows (4.8%) have 'Old Age Pension Card', which would entitle them to a monthly pension of Rs. 1,500/- each.

Another positive sign is that 249 widows (50.3%) said that they have Kalaingar Health Insurance Card and 169 (34.1%) have Modi Health Insurance Card. These cards are of great help when widows are in a serious health crisis.

It is also heartening to note that 224 respondents (45.3%) have the Legal Heir Certificate. Further, 157 (31.7%) have *patta* for their house sites. Further, 98 widows (19.8%) have Unorganized Labourers Welfare Card, 18 have *Kissan* (farmers) Credit Card, 12 have Fishery Card and eight have Panchayat Level Federation Membership Card.

Out of the total number of respondents, only seven mentioned they have Differently Abled Person identity cards, and four have Differently Abled Person Pension Card.

However, it is disheartening to note that only 97 widows (19.6%) have their Birth Certificates and only 191 (38.6%) possessed Widows' Pension Card.

Overall assessment of the widows' access to the various kinds of entitlement cards or certificates brings to light three conclusions:

- First, in general the widows have been able to access these documents, some of which are very essential for maintaining or improving their livelihood;
- Secondly, all the documents may not be necessary for all the widows and therefore some widows would have accessed whatever was necessary for them;
- Thirdly, there are some documents which are necessary for all of the widows and which could not have been accessed by them for various reasons, and this is what the government needs to pay attention to and the civil society institutions can facilitate the process of enabling the widows to access these essential documents.

V. Important Findings

1) Food intake

- Immediately after the death of the husbands, the entire financial burden and responsibilities of the family fall on the widows. They are often forced to take up any jobs available for the sake of feeding themselves and their children and running the family. In this situation, a sizable number of respondents (184 widows or 37.1%) do not enjoy three square meals.
- One to ten days a month a majority of widows (445 or 89.9%) consume meat, fish (379 widows or 76.4%), and eggs (354 widows or 71.4%).

2) Housing facility

- Just under one-third of the widows (157 or 31.7%) have no houses of their own. They either live in rented houses or their parents' or relatives' houses.
- In terms of the type of housing, 120 widows (24.2%) are in government-built houses while 218 are in houses built either by themselves or their husbands or their close relatives.
- Almost three-quarters of the women (366 or 73.9%) have house sites of their own. Of them, 92 are registered under the widows' names, 64 under the names of the bereaved husbands of widows, 17 under the names of widows and their husbands jointly, and the remaining 193 under other relatives' names.
- Concerning the size of the house sites owned by them, 179 widows own above two cents, 139 widows one to two cents and 48 widows below one cent.
- In this situation, only 88 widows have applied for a new housing scheme. When asked why others did not apply for such schemes, 113 said that they did not need yet another house, whereas others said that they either had no house sites or did not have the required financial resources to buy new house sites.

- 3) **Basic amenities:** The majority of widows have access to drinking water, access to health care facilities, and electricity. However, 156 widows (31.5%) do not have toilet facilities and 234 (47.3%) do not have sewage facilities.
- 4) **Possession of formal entitlement documents:** The vast majority of the widows have documents related to entitlements such as Aadhar cards, Smart cards, Voter cards, etc. Further, it is heartening to note that a sizable number of respondents have bank and health insurance-related documents. However, only 191 widows (38.6%) have their widow pension cards, meaning that many widows are losing out on their basic entitlement as widows. Moreover, 398 widows (80.4%) do not have birth certificates, which is a vital document to prove one's citizenship in the country.

In conclusion:

Widows live amidst economic hardships with minimum housing facilities and some significant gaps in access to basic amenities. However, many seem to have been prudent enough to obtain needed legal documents such as patta for the lands that are in their possession and other basic entitlement documents. The absence of significant numbers with widow pension cards points to a significant gap in support to enjoy their right to an adequate standard of living.

CHAPTER 6

IDENTITY, INDEPENDENCE AND DIGNITY

The customary practices are made mandatory and forced on us. When these practices were performed, I was only physically alive, but emotionally dead. I was forced to wear a white saree and was made to stay inside the house for more than four months. In those days I saw no one and talked to no one. It took some time for me to come to normal terms. I felt isolated from the society. It made me feel that I have no life in the aftermath of my husband's death.

- Sundari, Nagapattinam district.

Identity, independence, and dignity are related concepts essential for one's life. If one is denied, the other two will cease to exist. Moreover, all three are so important that without them, one cannot enjoy a decent and respectful life. This chapter analyses three important aspects of the process of widowhood: 1) the socio-religious rituals performed at the husband's death; 2) the socio-cultural day-to-day practices imposed on them; and 3) the level of the decision-making power retained and exercised by widows. The aim is to examine how these three aspects influence the assertion of their identity, independence, and dignity.

I. Socio-religious rituals performed at husbands' death

Following the death of a husband, the wife is forced or pushed into a transitional process from 'wifedom to widowhood' through a series of ceremonies and socio-cultural practices. These ceremonies are one-time rituals. All widowed women go through them, however inhuman, cruel, and exclusionary they may be.

On the day of my husband's death, when the body was still in our house, my 'thali' (marital necklace or mangal sutra) was removed and tied to my husband's toes. Then they kept flowers on my head and a dot on my forehead only to remove them immediately. During the performance of these ceremonies, my sorrow over my husband's death was so strong that I spontaneously did whatever I was asked to, without realising that I was losing my birth rights all of a sudden.

– Ponnuthayi, Theni district

Many of the widows interviewed for this study shared the same sentiment as Ponnuthayi. Such ceremonies are done in the form of a socio-religious ritual – in the name of God and secondly, at a time when widows are in the thick of their grief and a vulnerable state. As a result, often they are unable to resist and instead accept all that is done without any consideration that they are shedding their rights in the process.

1) Number of widows who had undergone rituals

Out of 495 widow respondents, almost all (452 or 91.3%) had undergone the rites before the funeral of their husbands. Regarding the 8.7% of widows who said that they had not undergone

the rites, the reasons may include extraordinary situations such as their husbands' deaths due to accidents, murder, or contagious diseases.

The funeral-related ceremonies do not end on the day of the husband's funeral. In most cases, it is prolonged for about a month to one year. Narrating her experience, Christina from Ramanathapuram district said:

They made my husband's sister tie a thick yellow thread (thali) around my neck and then cut it and tied the same around the toes of my bereaved husband. I fainted at that moment. After that, they poured cold water on my head and covered me with three white sarees, gifted by 3 male relatives. On that night, they removed all my jewels including my mangal sutra chain, toe rings, earrings, rings on my fingers, anklets, bangles, etc., and dropped the mangal sutra alone in a bowl containing milk. After that, I was not allowed to wear any ornament, step out of my room, or see anyone for the next 40 days. This particular ceremony was so strictly and cruelly followed that even when my son died within 9 days of my husband's death, I was not allowed to see him and be with his body which was kept in the hall of our house. I couldn't attend my son's funeral. I didn't know how his body was taken, what they did to him, and how his funeral was performed.

On the 40th day, they relaxed some restrictions and allowed me to go out of my room. However, they still insisted that I shouldn't step out of my house for one year. While those people were keen on fulfilling all those rituals, none of them, including my husband's family members, were bothered to take care of the food and other basic needs of my 9-month-old daughter and myself. Hence, after two months I decided to break the norms imposed on me, free myself, and live a life of my own for myself and my daughter. I came out of my house, and found a job, breaking the norm of a year-long 'house arrest'. I was the first widow from my community who stepped out of the house before the stipulated period of confinement, breaking the custom... Of course, that was not easy... it required immense courage and willpower.

2) Varying nature of these rituals

The rituals performed at the time of the funeral of husbands are not similar in all the places. They vary from region to region, and community to community. For example, in the Theni region, the 'thali' of the widowed woman is removed and tied on the toes of the bereaved husband, while in the Nagapattinam region, it is simply removed and put into a vessel containing cow milk. Similarly, after the funeral of their husbands, widowed women of Kancheepuram are forced to confine themselves at home for 40 days, whereas the widowed women of the Ramanathapuram region are forced into confinement for one year.

3) Meaning ascribed to these rituals

Though the ways of performing these rituals vary from region to region, the attributed meaning for them is the same all over. They are meant to reinforce the Brahminical patriarchal values. For example:

- The ceremony of ‘removal of *thali*’ from the neck of the widowed woman and tying it on the toe of the bereaved husband’ symbolizes two things: the transition in the life of the woman from ‘wifehood to widowhood’; and her loss of honour and dignity because of she is bereft of her husband.
- The ceremony of ‘restricting the widow’s mobility and preventing her from seeing anyone’ symbolizes that ‘she is an inauspicious being and would bring bad luck to others if she faces them or they see her.’
- The ceremony of ‘removal of ornaments, bindi, flowers and imposition of a white saree’ is to symbolize that a widow is ‘socially dead and sexually inactive’.

All these ceremonies reinforce the mindset that ‘widows are not worth getting remarried’. Other ceremonies include exchanging of garlands by widows with that of the dead body of their husbands; pouring of water from the same pot on both the dead body of the husband and the heads of widows; and covering widows with new clothes that covered the body of their dead husbands. These practices also reinforce the thinking that ‘widows are socially dead and should never think of getting married again’.

Here, it is to be noted that the status of ‘widowhood’ is not voluntarily accepted, but rather an imposed one. Socio-cultural rituals are used as tools for this imposition. They emanate out of the deep-rooted notion that ‘**women cease to have the right to live, the moment they are widowed... the moment they become single**’. In short, the plight of widows is intertwined with gender discrimination and superstition – issues that have deeply penetrated the ethos of Indian culture.

4) Impact of these rituals on the lives of widows

These rituals have a devastating impact on the lives of widows. Table 6.1 records the predominant feelings of the widow respondents when the funeral rites were performed. Of the 452 respondents who had undergone funeral rites, 247 (49.9%) said that they had no other way but to accept them as it was the tradition. A similar response was recorded by 201 respondents (40.6%), who said that they were helpless/powerless to do otherwise. In other words, 90.5% of the widows felt that they were powerless to oppose these rituals based on ancient traditions. The following sharing indicates the power of ‘tradition’.

While they performed the rituals, I had to fold my hands, bend my head, and accept it without any resistance. I was not allowed to even cry. I was told that if I cried, that would affect our siblings and society in general.

- Jyotsna, Ramanathapuram District.

Only 39 widows (7.9%) openly said that they were angry and annoyed. However, they would not have expressed their feelings because the timing, while their husbands’ dead bodies were still kept in the house, would not have been appropriate.

Table 6.1: Predominant feelings while funeral rituals performed			
S. No.	How did you feel when these rituals were performed	No.	%
1	Tradition, hence accepted	247	49.9
2	Helpless or powerless	201	40.6
3	Angry or annoyed	39	7.9
4	Any other feeling	8	1.6
	Total	495	100.0

Several widows shared their true feelings experienced during the time of the funeral rites. They mentioned such feelings as (i) helplessness, (ii) anger, (iii) immense grief and the resulting inability to be oneself, (iv) fear, (v) subservience, (vi) feeling of being dead, (vii) agony arising out of the concern for the safety of one's brothers (because they were told that if they refuse to do those ceremonies, the curse would fall on their brothers).

Those 40 days were like hell. We had to wear white sarees for 40 days and cover our heads all the time. We were treated like toys with no life. We had to follow all instructions with no resistance.

– Mangala, Kancheepuram district.

Mostly the relatives and family members of the husband were keen on performing all the ceremonies rather than the widows' parental family members. Widows shared instances where their family members stood by them and safeguarded them from performing some, but not all, ceremonies.

Along with the performance of rituals, comments are passed against widows attributing reasons for the demise of their husbands that compounded their traumatic experiences.

My husband died because of alcoholism and drug abuse. However, I was blamed for his death. It will take at least 3 days for us to come to normal. How could we resist?

– Periyannayaki, Theni district

In short, the rituals forcibly performed on widows as part of the funeral rites of their husbands are inhuman, cruel, and exclusionary in nature rather than consoling, accommodating, supportive, and assertive of their continued right to life. They create an indelible psychological scar in them.

5) Widows' Opinion on Stopping/ Banning these Rituals

To the question of whether the widow respondents would like to see the funeral rites banned in the future, the majority (417 widows or 84.2%) said 'yes'. In their opinion, those rituals (1) agonize them; (2) are akin to 'piercing a spear in the wound that is already burnt' (வெந்தபுண்ணில் வேல்பாய்ச்சுவதாக உள்ளது); (3) degrade women (பெண்களை இழிவுபடுத்துகின்றன); (4) aggravate their suffering; (5) psychologically wreck them; (6) make

them lose hope in life; (7) push them towards isolation; and, therefore, 8) the respondent widows felt that other widows should not experience the agony that they had gone through.

For those widows who spoke in support of the funeral rites, some mentioned the following reasons: (1) they are traditions that need to be protected and followed; (2) they are caste practices and need to be followed; (3) they have to do these sorts of rituals so that their descendants would be well off; (4) if they do not perform these rituals the elders in the village would isolate them; 5) if they do these rituals, the men would not disturb them; 6) if they do not practice these rituals, there will not be any difference between women living with their husbands and widowed women.

II. Day-to-day socio-cultural practices imposed

I am not able to attend functions. I can't wear design blouses or decorative sarees. I am not able to keep flowers or apply turmeric. I don't step out of the home early in the morning as people might curse me if they happened to see me first in the day. Now I avoid talking to anyone, including relatives and extended family members.

– Devi, Theni district.

With regard to day-to-day socio-cultural practices, these are imposed in the form of prescribed norms that change the attitudinal and behavioural patterns of widows. These are unwritten laws rooted in culture and religion and passed down from one generation to the next. They aim to make widows internalise and exhibit their 'inauspiciousness' to the general public around them, thereby making them physically segregated and socially isolated. Hence, widowed women are expected to (a) always wear white sarees; (b) not keep bindi (dots) on their foreheads; (c) not adorn themselves with jewellery; (d) not beautify themselves with cosmetics; (e) not keep flowers on their heads; (f) not apply turmeric powder on their faces; (g) not talk to strangers, especially men; (h) not move outside their houses freely; (i) not visit public places; and (j) not take part in auspicious functions.

1) Ornamental Practices

Table 6.2 highlights the variety of practices widows have to follow. On the positive side, almost all widows (462 out of 495 or 93%) mentioned that at present they could wear coloured or flower-printed sarees. Similarly, just less than two-thirds (310 or 62.6%) could put a bindi (dot) on their forehead, and just over half the number of them (265 or 53.5%) could wear jewellery such as bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe rings, and nose studs.

Analysing their responses, the change appears to have happened concerning the dress code of widows: from the mandatorily prescribed white sarees to sarees of their choice. Similarly, a sizable number of respondents now keep dots on their foreheads, breaking social norms. Moreover, roughly half the widows continue to wear jewellery. The remaining number of widows continue to conform to the socio-cultural practices, hesitating to challenge them in view of the comments that might be passed by others.

Table 6.2: Ornamental practices					
S.No.	Ornamental Practices	Yes	%	No	%
1	Wearing colour/flower-printed sarees	462	93.3	33	6.7
2	Putting a <i>bindi</i> on the forehead	310	62.6	185	37.4
3	Adorning with jewellery –bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe rings, nose studs, etc.	265	53.5	230	46.5
4	Beautifying face with cosmetics (eg. eye liner, talcum powder, etc.)	134	27.1	361	72.9
5	Adorning head with flowers	25	5.1	470	94.9
6	Applying turmeric on the face & and the body, applying <i>kumkum</i> on the forehead	8	1.6	487	98.4

In contrast, therefore, fewer widows were able to beautify their faces (134 or 27%), and adorn their heads with flowers (25 or 5.1%); however, only a very small number (8 or 1.6%) dare to apply turmeric on their face and *kumkum* on their forehead which in general is prohibited for them as these are associated with sexuality and fertility. This shows that although many widows observed less strict dress codes and application of *bindi* to their foreheads, only few widows were able to beautify themselves even with ordinary beauty products as cosmetics and flowers. This points to their conformity to social norms and expectations that once their husbands are dead, they become ‘nobody’.

2) Public functions

My relatives may invite me to the functions but would expect me to stay in one corner. There were times when I was told to my face, “Sister-in-law, don’t do anything! Stay away segregated!” (“அண்ணி, நீ எதுவும் செய்யாதே. கொஞ்சம் ஓராமாக ஒதுங்கி இரு.”)

- Malliga, Kancheepuram district

Table 6.3 indicates the willingness of the widow respondents to attend both inauspicious events (e.g., death-related gatherings) and auspicious functions (e.g., marriages or ear-boring ceremonies) of either relatives or friends, with some difference, however. In general, most widows felt free to attend the **death-related events** of relatives (88.7% of widows) or friends (88.5%). In contrast, concerning **auspicious functions** such as marriages, ear-boring ceremonies, or baby shower ceremonies (*valai kaappu*), fewer widows stated they would attend those of relatives (62.8%) or friends (57.4%).

Table 6.3: Attending public functions					
S.No	Public functions practices	Yes	%	No	%
1	Attending own family’s/relatives’ death and memorial functions, etc.	439	88.7	56	11.3
2	Attending others’ death and memorial functions	438	88.5	57	11.5
3	Attending own family’s auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony when pregnant (<i>valai kaappu</i>), etc.	311	62.8	184	37.2
4	Attending others’ auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony when pregnant (<i>valai kapu</i>), etc.	284	57.4	211	42.6

In sum, widows feel relatively freer to attend death-related events than the auspicious functions of both of relatives and friends. The explanation lies in their inauspicious status as perceived by society.

3) Meeting people and utilizing public spaces

Table 6.4 highlights another trend concerning widows meeting or visiting people and utilizing public spaces. Of the 495 widow respondents, only 286 (57.8%) said that they continued to regularly visit their relative's houses and only 229 widows (46.3%) had routine conversations with men. In the Indian context of strict gender norms restricting interactions between women and men, the fact that almost half of the number of widow respondents had routine conversations with men/ neighbours appears noteworthy.

Regarding the use of public ponds, lakes, wells, etc. like other women, only 151 widows (30.5%) said that they use them, thereby indicating that over two-thirds do not feel free to exercise their rights.

Table 6.4: Meeting people and visiting places					
S.No	Social interaction practices	Yes	%	No	%
1	Visiting relatives' houses routinely	286	57.8	209	42.2
2	Having routine conversations with men in general (neighbours or others)	229	46.3	266	53.7
3	Visiting people in the early mornings	198	40.0	297	60.0
4	Taking baths in public ponds, lakes, wells, etc. like other women	151	30.5	344	69.5

Fewer widows felt at ease visiting people in the early morning hours (198 or 40%). Early morning hours are considered to be auspicious and precious and hence during that time people, in general, do not want to face the so-called 'inauspicious' widows. Against this background, the fact that 40% of the widows were able to meet people in the early morning hours without any difficulty is an encouraging sign manifesting a change in the public mindset about the widows. The majority of them (60%), however, are yet to be freed from the social stigma of being 'inauspicious' or of 'ill omen'. As reported by Kanaga from Kancheepuram district:

I have to be cautious of the fact that I am a widow and I shouldn't go in front of people when they go to work or for any important events. They would scold me if they saw me in the early morning or when they stepped out for any important work/events. Often, I hear 'people saying, 'நம்ம ஒரு நல்ல காரியத்துக்கு போறோம். அறுத்த முண்டச்சி எதுக்க வர்றா பாரு... போற காரியம் விளங்குமா?' (We are going for an auspicious purpose. Look here, why does this woman with snapped marital necklace come in front of us? Will what we plan to do get fulfilled?)

As women and widows, we are silent, silenced, and suppressed. From the very moment of the death of our husbands, in the name of culture and religion, we are socially ostracized and

deprived of all our rights – the right to live a dignified life, right to mobility, right to assume leadership, right to property, right to re-marry, right to dress and beautify ourselves in the way we want, etc. Our very presence is perceived to be inauspicious, abominable, and unwanted. We are considered and treated as ‘ill-omen’, ‘unlucky’, and as ‘living corpses.’

However, there are a few widows who are challenging these dehumanising practices. Kamali, Chennai district is one such person:

Right from my childhood, I have loved to adorn myself with jewels and cosmetics such as turmeric, kumkum, flowers, good dresses, etc. But, after becoming a widow, I had to give them up for fear of the society around me. Even my mother and mother-in-law forced me to get rid of them. On my part, in the beginning, I was quite submissive and accepted all that was told.... But now, with the new awareness gained, I have started doing all that I had stopped. Further, being part of the widow’s collective, I have conducted 17 re-marriages of widows. On such auspicious occasions, I would stand in front to perform the rituals and bless the couples. I don’t stay in a corner as I used to do earlier. Now, I am not afraid of anyone. I keep my head high while going out.

III. The level of decision-making power retained by and provided to widows

The level of decision-making power widows retained with them, especially on economic matters and public relations, tells of their independence in the true sense of the term.

Table 6.5: Who mainly contributes financially to the day-to-day household needs of widows

N O	Household item	Widow herself		Mother- in-law		Father- in-law		Widow’s mother		Widow’s father		Eldest brother		Eldest brother’s wife		Any other person	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Purchase of food, and other basic necessities	384	77.6	10	2.0	4	.8	19	3.8	14	2.8	37	7.5	4	.8	23	4.6
2	Payment of major medical expenses (above Rs.1000/-)	365	73.7	11	2.2	3	.6	19	3.8	14	2.8	43	8.7	4	.8	30	6.1
3	Children’s education – how long, what costs	344	69.5	10	2.0	2	.4	13	2.6	11	2.2	25	5.1	2	.4	17	3.4
	Average for all three items		73.6		2		1.8		3.4		2.6		7.1		0.6		4.7

1) Financial Management of the Household

Table 6.5 portrays who contributes financially to the household needs of widows. Asked who mainly contributes financially to the expenses on three major items, i.e., food, medical, and education of children, on average 73.6% of widow respondents spoke of themselves doing the contribution, followed by their elder brothers (7.1%). Less than 5% of widows on average were supported by other people (4.7%), their mothers (3.4%), fathers (2.6%), mothers-in-law (2%), fathers-in-law (1.8%), and eldest brother’s wife (0.6%).

The point to be noted here is that almost three-quarters of the widows manage their own households' financial needs. The second supporters are their elder brothers, followed by others. That non-family members might extend major help to the widows over the other close family members is noteworthy, especially in the Indian cultural context. When probed about the details of those non-family members, the answer given was that they were philanthropists/NGOs.

2) Decision-makers in the household matters of widows

Table 6.6 speaks about those who make important decisions in household matters of widows that require finance. Widows were asked who mainly makes important decisions in three major areas, i.e., (a) attending both auspicious and inauspicious events, (b) going out for touring, pilgrimage, etc., and (c) purchasing clothes, jewelry, etc. An average of 66.7% of widows said that they themselves made decisions, followed by their elder brothers (7.1%), other persons (4.2%), their mothers (2.9%), mothers-in-law (2.4%), fathers (2.3%), fathers-in-law (0.4%) and brother's wife (0.3%).

Table 6.6: Who makes important decisions in Household matters that require finance

No	Area for decision-making	Widow interviewee herself		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law		Widow's mother		Widow's father		Eldest brother		Eldest brother's wife		Any other person	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Attending auspicious/ inauspicious events (marriage, engagement, ear boring ceremony, death, memorial service, etc.)	370	74.7	13	2.6	3	0.6	16	3.2	13	2.6	40	8.1	2	0.4	19	3.8
2	Going on pilgrimages, tours, etc.	327	66.1	14	2.8	2	0.4	12	2.4	12	2.4	34	6.9	2	0.4	22	4.4
3	Purchase of personal clothing, jewelry, ornamental things, etc.	294	59.4	10	2.0	2	0.4	16	3.2	10	2.0	34	6.9	1	0.2	22	4.4
	Average for all three items		66.7		2.4		0.4		2.9		2.3		7.3		0.3		4.2

Again, a large percentage of widows themselves made decisions on important matters of the household, though the percentage was less than for daily household needs. Again, the elder brothers of the widows also played a significant decision-making role. Again, persons other than close family members were a small but significant percentage of key decision-makers, more so than other close family members.

3) Main financial contributors to capital investments of widows' households

Table 6.7 depicts those who made financial contributions to major capital investments in four major areas of widows' households, i.e., (a) building of new houses and making house repairs,

(b) doing purchase/sale of assets (land, house site, livestock), (c) procuring loans and savings, and (d) engaging in commercial/business/agri-enterprises, etc. Out of 495 respondents, on average 53.6% said that they themselves manage/contribute in these areas, followed by widows' elder brothers (6.7%) and other persons (5.3%). Other family members again were lesser contributors: the widows' mothers (2.9%), fathers (2.7%), mothers-in-law (2.6%), fathers-in-law (1.9%), and elder brother's wife (0.2%). To be noted here is that on average, a quarter of the widows did not respond to this question.

Table 6.7: Who *mainly* contributes financially to major capital investments of widows' households

No	Area for major capital investment	Widow interviewee herself		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law		Widow's mother		Widow's father		Elder brother		Elder brother's wife		Any other person	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Building of new house, house repairs	273	55.2	15	3.0	3	0.6	15	3.0	16	3.2	37	7.5	1	0.2	30	6.1
2	Purchase/sale of assets – land, house site, livestock	224	45.3	14	2.8	2	0.4	15	3.0	15	3.0	31	6.3	1	0.2	28	5.7
3	Getting loans (from banks, moneylenders, SHGs); Depositing savings (in SHGs, banks...)	348	70.3	12	2.4	1	0.2	14	2.8	14	2.8	39	7.9	1	0.2	23	4.6
4	Engaging in commercial/business/agri-enterprises (small/medium/big)	217	43.8	12	2.4	2	0.4	14	2.8	10	2.0	25	5.1	1	0.2	25	5.1
	Average for all four items		53.6		2.6		1.9		2.9		2.7		6.7		0.2		5.3

When widows make major capital investments for their households, it is significant to note that over half do not depend on others. Among the ones who come forward to help in such investments, their elder brothers again are principal contributors, followed by others who are not close family members, and then their mothers. Equally significant is that one-fourth of the widows are not in a position to undertake these larger investments for their households.

4) Decision-makers regarding public involvement of widows

Finally, Table 6.8 shows who makes decisions regarding the participation of widows in public life in four areas: (a) contesting panchayat elections or joining political parties or doing election campaigns; (b) joining *sangham/iyakkam*/SHGs and attending meetings; (c) participating in protest events, *dharnas*, etc.; and (d) participating in training, conferences or political/*sangam/iyakkam* meetings outside the village/town of residence. On average 55.9% of the widows said that they themselves made the decision, followed by their mothers (2.6%), elder brothers (2.5%), mothers-in-law (2.5%), fathers (2.4%), people other than close family

members (1.9%), fathers-in-law (0.6%), and eldest brother's wife (0.1%). On average just under one-third of the widows did not respond to these areas, which might indicate they were not in a position to involve themselves in such public initiatives.

Table 6.8: Who decides on matters pertaining to the public involvement of widows

No	Areas for Public Involvement	Widow interviewee herself		Mother-in-law		Father-in-law		Widow's mother		Widow's father		Eldest son		Eldest son's wife		Any other person	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Women contesting in panchayat elections or joining political parties/any election campaigns	212	42.8	13	2.6	3	0.6	12	2.4	13	2.6	13	2.6			12	2.4
2	Women joining sangham/iyakkam / SHG and attending meetings	349	70.5	9	1.8	3	0.6	14	2.8	10	2.0	11	2.2	1	0.2	8	1.6
3	Participating in protest events, dharnas, etc.	288	58.2	14	2.8	3	0.6	13	2.6	12	2.4	12	2.4	1	0.2	8	1.6
4	Participating in training, conferences, or political/sangam/iyakkam meetings outside the village/town of residence, etc.	258	52.1	14	2.8	4	0.8	14	2.8	13	2.6	14	2.8	1	0.2	10	2.0
	<i>Average for all four areas</i>		<i>55.9</i>		<i>2.5</i>		<i>0.6</i>		<i>2.6</i>		<i>2.4</i>		<i>2.5</i>		<i>0.1</i>		<i>1.9</i>

Again, the positive factor here is that over half the number widows are making their own decisions regarding their involvement in public affairs, starting from contesting elections, being a member of a movement, or attending training and other meetings. This may in part be due to their involvement in the widow's *sangams/iyakkam*. However, that just under a third on average do not make these decisions to engage in these areas also indicates the potential competing challenges of earning their livelihoods as well as the continuing social isolation of widows.

IV. Important findings

1) Almost all of the widow respondents (91.3%) have undergone **ritual ceremonies as part of their husbands' funeral rites**. However, 85% were for banning those rites because they felt that they in no way helped them come out of their suffering and, instead, humiliated and dehumanised them.

2) 90% of respondents who had undergone those rituals cited **(a) traditional compulsions and (b) their helplessness as reasons** for their acceptance of those rituals. It is clear that those rituals were imposed upon them and hence not voluntarily accepted. Therefore, one can conclude that these cruel rituals segregated widows more from the society at large, rather than consoling, accommodating, and supporting them in the process of their assertion of their right to life.

3) Regarding day-to-day socio-cultural practices, in general, the widows feel that they have to accept them. However, a sizable percentage of them seem to be setting aside some of such practices as strict dress code, keeping bindi (dots) on the forehead, and wearing ornaments. However, most are not yet able to bypass the social norms that prohibit them from beautifying themselves: using cosmetics, keeping flowers on their heads, and especially turmeric and *kumkum* which are associated with sexuality and fertility.

4) On matters related to mobility and attendance in family-related events, more attendance is noticeable in inauspicious (88.6%) than in auspicious (60.1%) functions; even while participating in auspicious functions, widows experience discriminatory treatment.

5) Concerning meeting and conversing with people such as relatives and men, and facing people in early mornings, over 50% of the widows said that they were either obstructed or feel hesitant to engage in these matters.

6) Regarding decision-making on household matters: In relation to (a) basic needs, (b) social matters that involve finance, (c) needs involving capital investment, and (d) participation in public events, over half of the number of widows said that they made these decisions or contributed financially. In other words, many widows seemed to be self-reliant and independent. A caution, though, in reading too positively into women being the major financial contributors is that often this might be because they received no other support. Among the ones who came forward to help the widows regarding all the above-mentioned needs, be it financial or decision-making, the elder brothers of widows topped the list followed by other persons who were not close family members. Apparently, these are, as mentioned by the widows in the focus group discussions, none other than NGOs.

In conclusion:

Though society in general attempts to destroy the very identity of widows via dehumanising social, religious, and cultural rituals and practices, they keep moving forward in life, defying some practices at times while incorporating others. Significantly, many widows are struggling their best to be self-reliant on household financial matters. Amidst their struggles, their aspiration as widows is the assertion of their identities, independence, and dignity, which demands great support from the state and the wider society.

CHAPTER 7

ECONOMIC ASSETS, SAVINGS, LOANS, INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

My husband committed suicide. I was left abandoned overnight with no financial resources. When my husband was alive, I never left my house for work. He took care of everything. I had a six-year-old son with mental disabilities who required 24-hour care and attention, and an infant daughter to look after. On the one hand, I have to overcome the shock of my husband's death and challenge the social stigma and restrictions, which are so new and cruel. On the other hand, I have to care for my two young children and find ways to meet my livelihood needs. Amidst all these challenges, I must start my work for livelihood from scratch.

- Janani, Ramanathapuram.

For the widow, the loss of a husband involves several changes in her household's financial arrangements and subsequent economic management. This is even more so if the husband is the family's primary breadwinner. The widows are left with economic insecurity and emotional distress, further aggravated by patriarchal customs, patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, and the gendered division of labour in society. Inadequate social security policies, unavailable or inaccessible welfare schemes, and lack of access to employment opportunities further deprive them of the right to work, so essential for a dignified life.

Most of the widows who were interviewed echoed the expression of Janani. Quite a few even said words to the effect, *"We are worried about our children's education and future. We were left with no financial means for our livelihood"*. Besides their livelihood needs, quite a few are burdened with considerable debt at widowhood. Most of them juggle balancing child care, repaying debts, and securing financial means for livelihood while facing social and cultural restrictions.

I. Occupation

The data in Table 7.1 shows a high rate of women's work participation, with 99.5% of widows enquired engaged in some form of employment. Of the 495 women interviewed, 393 (79.4%) work as labourers in the informal sector, including agriculture, garment factories, service industries, and domestic households. Nearly one-fifth (94 women or 18.9%) have multiple jobs, including labour, small business, and own farming; 49 (9.9%) are involved in small or medium-level businesses; 45 (9%) engage in other works like fishing, coal making, and firewood cutting, depending on the geographical location; and 13 (2.2%) are involved in own farming (agricultural work). Despite most being engaged in some form of work, they do not have secure jobs as most rely on the informal sector.

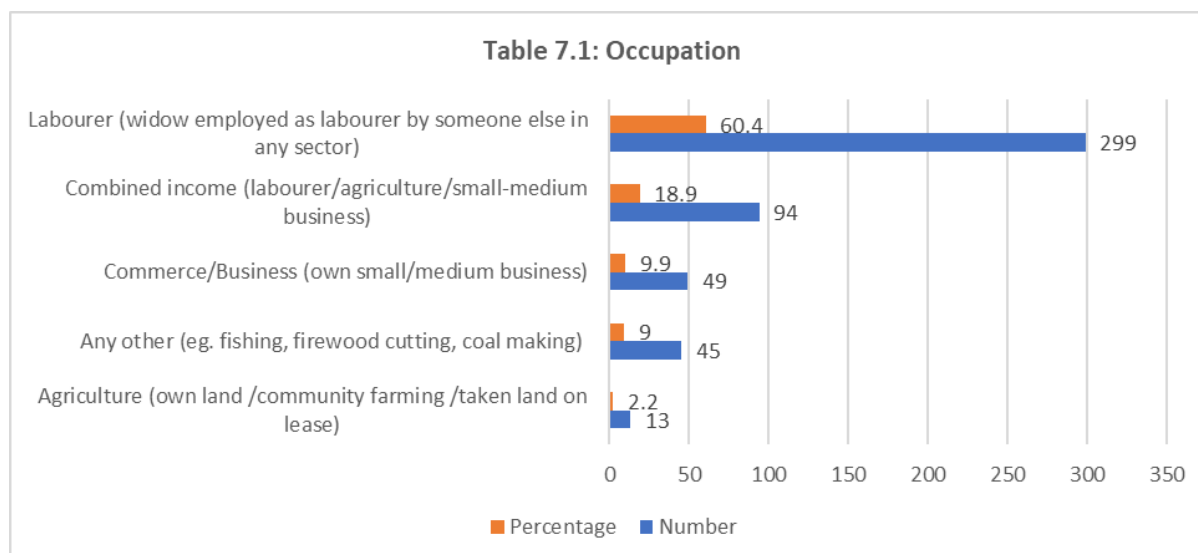
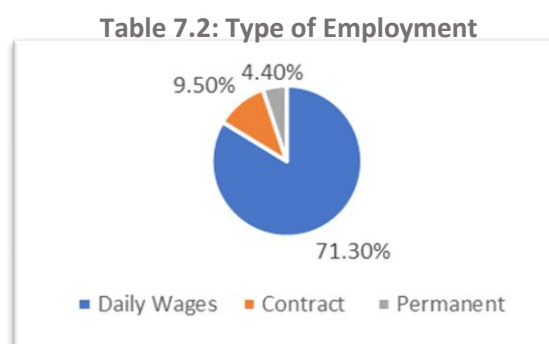


Table 7.2 indicates that nearly 353 (71.3%) of the 393 labourers' work is based on daily wages in the informal sector. Only a paltry number (22 women or 4.4%) of women have secure or permanent jobs. Another 47 widows (9.5%) work on contract basis.

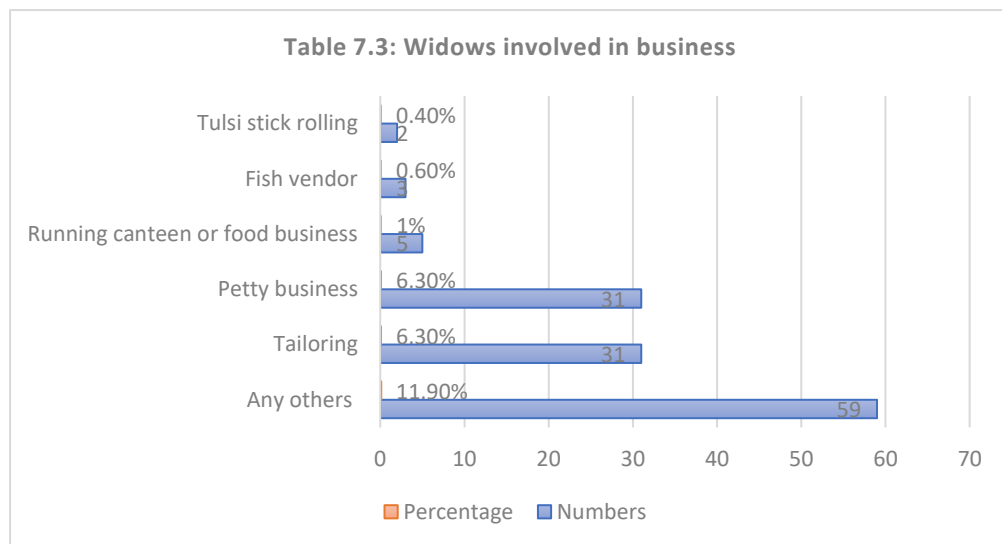


This indicates that, despite the high work participation rate, job security is one of the significant challenges that widows continue to face. First, since most widows were not engaged in any incoming generating activities before their husband's death, they face difficulty in acquiring a secure job in the formal sector after their husband's death. Secondly, widows have limited access to employment opportunities due to restricted mobility because of the social stigma around widowhood and the need to look after young children. For example, widows in rural areas depend on agriculture coolie (day labourer) or work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MNREGA), which does not provide work throughout the year. Women in urban areas work in domestic households, factories, and private firms without job security. Thirdly, the inadequate social security policies and weak welfare schemes do not provide any opportunities for the widows to acquire jobs in the public sector. Further, administrative lapses and corruption in the public sector do not seem to create a conducive environment for widows to secure stable employment. For instance, Mallika, who applied for an Anganwadi teacher's position, said, *"I applied for Anganwadi teacher's work. But I was asked for a bribe of 2 lakhs. Since I didn't have that much money, I gave up."* Fourthly, widows experience discrimination and stigma associated with widowhood, which hinders specific job

opportunities. Some of the women interviewed shared experiences of workplace discrimination and sexual harassment, which are discussed in detail in chapter 10.

Finally, inadequate educational qualifications and vocational training seem to limit women's job opportunities. As indicated in Chapter 4 (see Table 4.7), out of the 495 respondents, a majority of 346 widows (67.9%) have never completed secondary education. Still worse, 126 respondents (25.5%) are illiterate. At the same time, women who acquire a degree and postgraduate degree find it difficult to acquire a job due to other reasons mentioned above.

Table 7.3 shows that women involved in small businesses focused predominantly on tailoring and small petty business. A few other women also sold fish and flowers and ran small eateries. Some women seem to have started this small business with the support of other family members, especially mothers who are mostly widows themselves. Women engaged in small businesses face various challenges mainly due to the stigma associated with widowhood, lack of financial resources for investment, difficulty getting bank loans due to lack of property documents in their name, and lack of support system for child care and other household responsibilities.

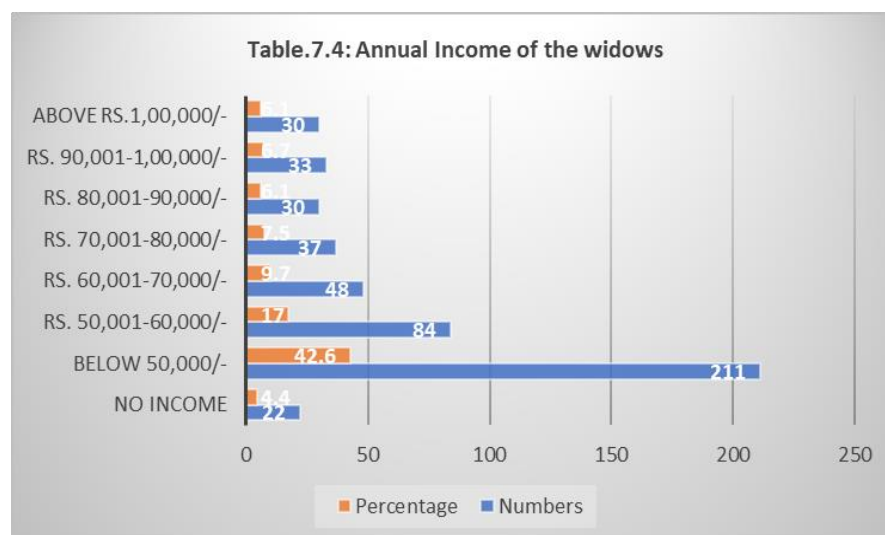


For example, Mallika, who started a petty shop, said:

After my husband's death, I started a small business – a petty shop for my livelihood; my paternal aunt scolded me for opening a petty shop as I will have to deal with men in my business. She used abusive language, indicating that I shouldn't talk to any man as a widow, instead stay in the corner of the house. She said, "முக்குல முடங்கி கிடக்க வேண்டிய நீ, கடை போட போறியா? கடைக்கு நாளு ஆம்பள வருவான். ஆவன பாத்து பல்லிளிச்சுகிட்டு நிப்பியா?" (Are you, who should stay crouched in a corner, going to open a shop in public? Men will visit your shop and are you going to glee before them and seduce them?) I responded, "Sure, I won't start a shop. I will stay in the corner. But will you give me 100 rupees daily to look after my family and children?" After that, the woman went off and stopped criticising me.

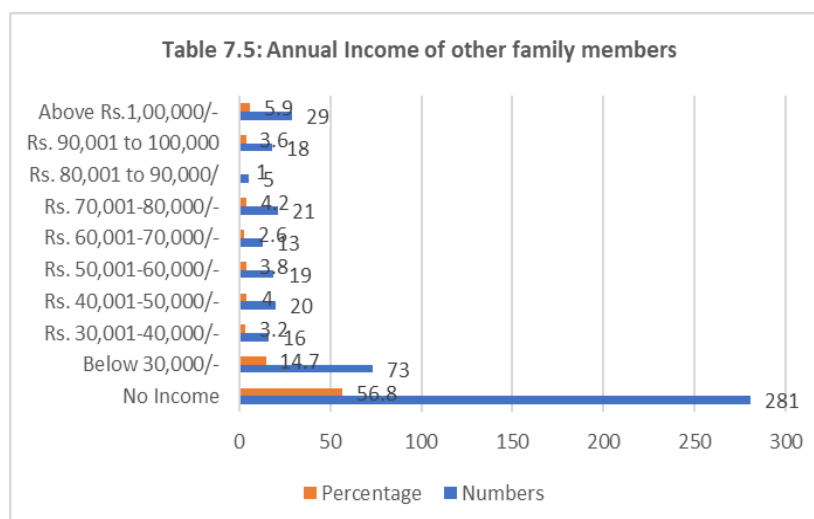
II. Annual income

The income data in Table 7.4 shows that most of the widows live in poverty. Nearly 211 widows (42.6%) earn less than Rs.50,000/- per annum, and 84 (17%) make between Rs.50,000/- to Rs.60,000/- per annum. Only 6.1% (30) earn more than Rs. 1,00,000/- per annum. Table 7.4 shows the wide annual income range of the widows. Only 22 widows (4.4%) do not earn and solely depend on their family members.



As per the data in Table 7.5, among the 495 widows, 214 (43%) also get financial support from other family members, mainly from unmarried children or parents who live with them. However, it is obvious from this data that the income level of other family members is also low. Very few widows (29 or 5.9%) had family members who earn more than 100,000/- per annum.

Most of them (185 or 37.4%) reported about family members who earn less than 1 lakh per annum, and 73 (14.7%) earn less than Rs. 30,000/- per annum. Nearly 281 widows (56.8%) do not have any financial support from family members and run the household with just their own income.



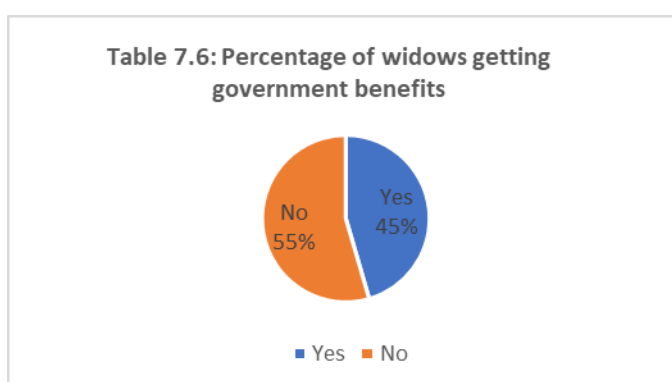
The overall data indicates that most widows live in poverty, and the main reasons widows cited include (a) lack of job security; (b) exploitation of their labour; (c) discrimination in wages for men and women; (d) lack of support system for child care, especially for very young children; and (e) dependence on informal sector which does not safeguard workers' rights. While some get support from their natal family, especially the mother's support in looking after their children, some do not have any support system whatsoever.

Working Hours	Nature of Work	Salary per day
7 am to 11 am	Agriculture coolie	Rs.140
10 am to 03 pm	Construction	Rs. 130
09 am to 2 pm	Others	Rs. 130
09 am to 6 pm	Domestic Help	Rs.120 (with tea and leftover lunch)

The exploitation of labour emerged clearly in the interaction with widows. For instance, widows in Viluppuram district, predominantly from tribal background, mentioned in the focus group discussion, that they get employment only for five days a week and their weekly income is only around Rs.600 to Rs.700/-. Another young widow who works as an administrative staff in a women's college in Theni district earns only Rs. 5000/- per month for full-time work from 08.30 am to 5.00 pm.

III. Access to Government Entitlements

The widows do not seem to benefit much from government schemes. As per the data in Table 7.6, only 225 (45%) have accessed a government welfare scheme. Out of this number, as per the data in Table 7.7, only 207 (41.9%) receive a widow's pension, 15 (3%) receive a government employed husband's pension, and three receive other kinds of pensions (disability, etc.).



S.No.	Table 7.7: Type of Government Benefits	Number of widows
1	Widow's pension	207
2	Husband's pension	15
3	Any other (specify)	3
	Total	225

Getting access to government benefits is a gruesome ordeal for widows. Women across all districts shared the difficulties they went through in getting a widow's certificate, and after a while most of them gave up. For instance, Shanta from Kancheepuram District said:

I have applied for a widow's destitute certificate. After going there continuously for six months, chasing the officials, I asked when I would get it. The RDO (who was in a position then) said, 'If you stay one night with us, then you will get all you want.' I gave up, and to date, I don't have the certificate.

A group of widows in Theni District said:

We 20 widows jointly met the District Collector and handed over a petition requesting widows' pension. Later, when we approached the Taluk officer as a follow-up of the petition, he used abusive language ... Further, he said, 'Here, we don't do anything without getting money'.

Women also said they had given bribes from Rs.5000/- to Rs.7000/- to obtain a widow's pension. They also said they had been treated like 'dogs' when repeatedly visiting government offices with the request for a pension.

Women also shared that their applications were rejected because they were told their appearance did not 'look like widows'. For instance, women who wear a *thali* (*mangalsutra* chain) (even if it is not gold) or those who do not look pale and distressed are denied a widow's destitute certificate. Also, a woman who lives with their elderly parents was rejected despite the widow taking care of her parents.

Corruption and the percolation of prejudice/stigma about widowhood in the district administration, and gender discrimination in public institutions seem to prevent widows from accessing government benefits.

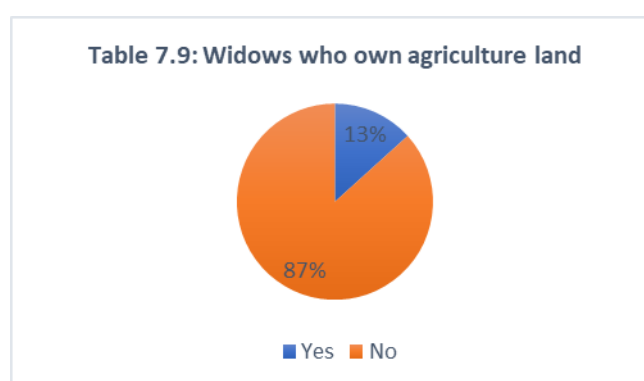
IV. Annual Significant Expenditure

While most widows live in poverty, they spend much of their income repaying loans. An analysis of the data in Table 7.8 indicates that of the 495 widows enquired, nearly 314 (63.4%) spent an average of Rs.62,200/- per person per annum on repaying loans. This is almost double of what they pay for the entire household's subsistence, which is around Rs.31,063/- per annum per person. Other significant expenditures include an average of (a) Rs.17,360/- on events such as marriage, ear-boring ceremonies, puberty functions and funerals; (b) Rs.15,452/- for health; (c) Rs.14,378/- on education; (d) Rs. 8,901/- on rent, tax and electricity bills; and (e) Rs.5,900/- on cooking fuel. Only 58 widows (11.7%) invested an average of Rs.90,155/- in new business, property purchase, repairing the house, etc.

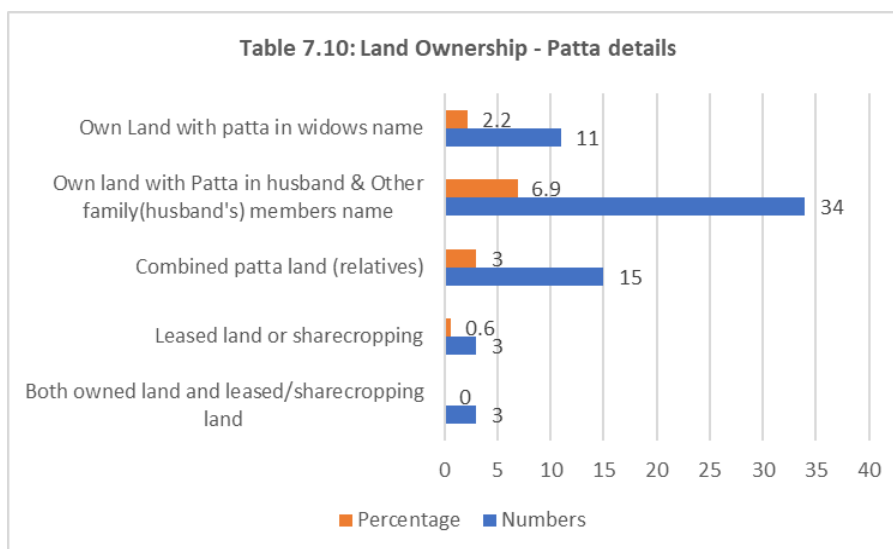
Table 7.8: Major Household Expenditures				
No.	Major Household Expenditure	No. of widows out of 495	%	Total Amount paid by the widows.
1	Repayment of loans	314	63.4	1,95,37,100
2	Household expenses for food	491	99.2	1,52,52,250
3	Marriages, ear-boring ceremonies, funerals etc.	426	86.1	73,95,200
4	Household health – Illnesses/ medicines/ treatment	368	74.3	56,86,500
5	Investment in properties: new business (including advance payment to a shop) or purchase of livestock/ a new property (land, shop, house)/ House construction/ House repairs etc.	58	11.7	52,29,000
6	Education: School fees, school books, uniform	256	51.7	36,80,850
7	Rent, Taxes to government, incl. electricity bills	398	80.4	35,42,762
8	Cooking fuel (firewood/gas)	429	86.7	25,30,925
9	Average costs per year for agriculture: cultivation (seeds/ fertilisers/ pesticides/ labour wages/ hiring machines/ etc.) on owned/ leased/ sharecropped land	46	9.3	6,82,890
10	Elections	6	1.2	30,800

V. Land assets

Table 7.9 shows that of the 495 widows enquired, only 66 (13.3%) own agricultural land. Of these, only 49 (9.9%) use the land for income-generating activities. Among the 66, as per the data in Table 7.10, only 45 have a patta for their land; within that, only 11(2.2%) have a *patta* registered in their name. On average, these women own only one acre of *nanchai* (wet land) or *punchai* (dry land). The rest have a patta registered in their husband's name, the husband's family members or a combined patta with the relatives.



The number of widows owning agricultural land is less, as most of the families of the widows who participated in research do not own agricultural land. However, as indicated in the focus group discussions, in some cases the widows do not seem to have access if the property is undivided and patta was not transferred into their husband's name. Although widows are entitled to get a share of the land from the husband's family, the family either refuse to give husband's share to them or change the patta into the widow's name.



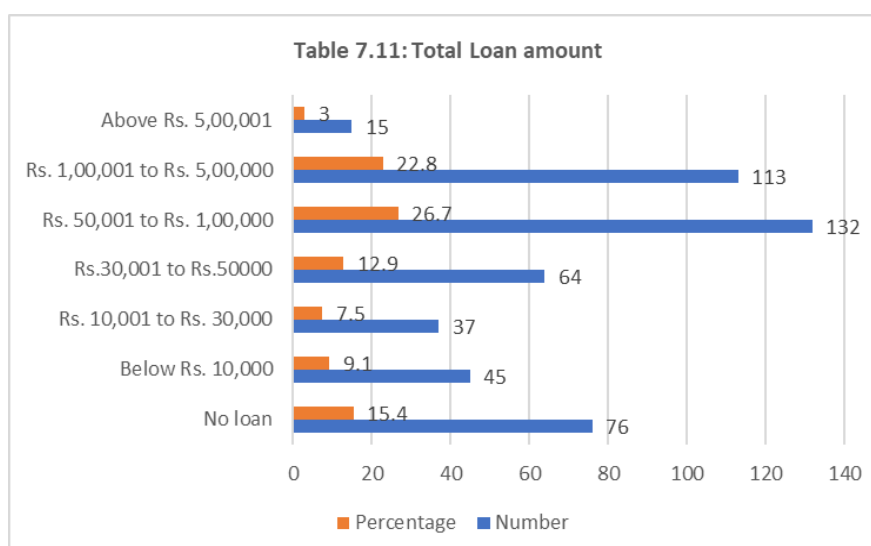
On the natal family side, they do not get access to any property as they were often told their share was given to them already in the form of jewellery and dowry at the time of marriage.

VI. Assets and livestock owned by households

In terms of livestock, only 33 widows (6.7%) own cattle like cows and buffaloes; 34 (6.9%) own goats; and 13 (2.6%) own poultry. The maximum value of the livestock is around Rs. 20,000/- and the maximum income they earned from livestock is around Rs.2000/- to Rs.3000/- per month.

VII. Loans and Savings

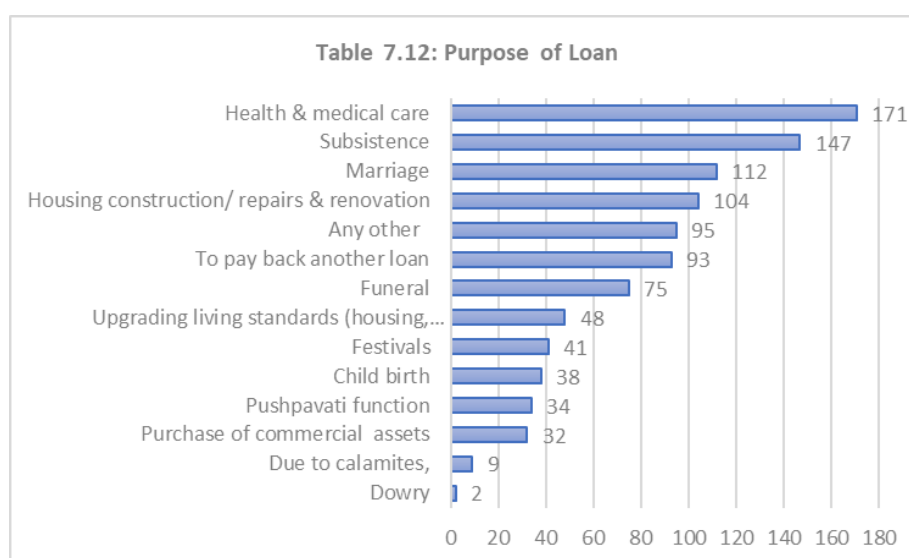
Compounding the situation of most widows living in poverty, they also have huge loans. Of the 495 widows enquired, Table 7.11 indicates that a majority of 419 (85%) widows have loans. Among them, 15 (3.0%) have loans above five lakhs, 113 (22.8%) owe above 1 lakh in loans, and 132 (26.7%) have loans between Rs.50,000/- to 1,00,000/-. In total, 260 (52.5%) have loans above 50,000/-.



While the widows took loans for various purposes, as per the data in Table 7.12 the top reasons included: (a) health and medical care; (b) subsistence needs; (c) marriage costs; (d) house construction or renovation; and (5) repaying other loans. Without adequate job security, many widows do not have access to health care benefits. A significant number of 171 widows took loans for healthcare purposes.

The story of 35-year-old Khatijeeja from Theni district reveals what many widows go through if they or someone in the family becomes sick, or meets with an unexpected accident, and as a result are pushed to the brink of getting loans by mortgaging their belongings:

All of a sudden, my husband was diagnosed with a tumour in his head. Initially, he was treated at the local hospital in Batlagundu, and later, we had to take him to a hospital in Trivandrum. We all thought that the tumour would subside with the medicines given. But even after three years of treatment, the tumour, instead of subsiding, had grown bigger. Hence, they suggested an operation lest the brain get affected. For the operation, they quoted a sum of Rs. 5 lakhs. As we did not have that much money, we delayed about six months and paid the amount to the hospital after mortgaging jewellery and borrowing money. Immediately, the operation was done. After the operation, he was all right for about 20 days. But all of a sudden, he had a heart attack and died. Two years have passed since my husband died. I couldn't recover the jewellery I mortgaged and repay the debt we borrowed for his treatment.



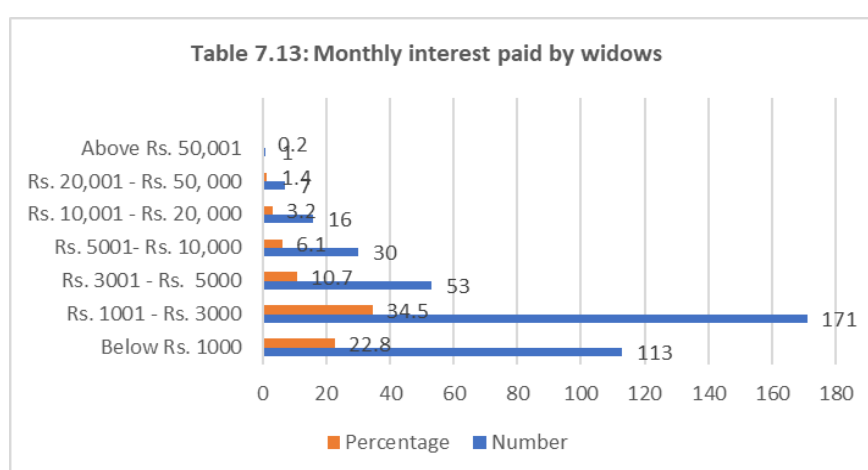
The data of widows borrowing loans for subsistence is a worrisome trend. As widows shared, although Covid-19 greatly impacted their livelihood, the lack of job security and access to employment also contributed to this situation. Widows are also expected to repay the debt borrowed by their husbands. The stories of Chellamma from Sivagangai district and Jecinta from Ramanathapuram district show how women struggle to repay debts without any job. Chellamma said:

My husband borrowed Rs. 2 lakhs to bribe someone hoping to obtain a job. Later he realised that he was cheated. Then being unable to repay the loan, he committed suicide. After his death, the entire burden of paying back the loan fell on my head

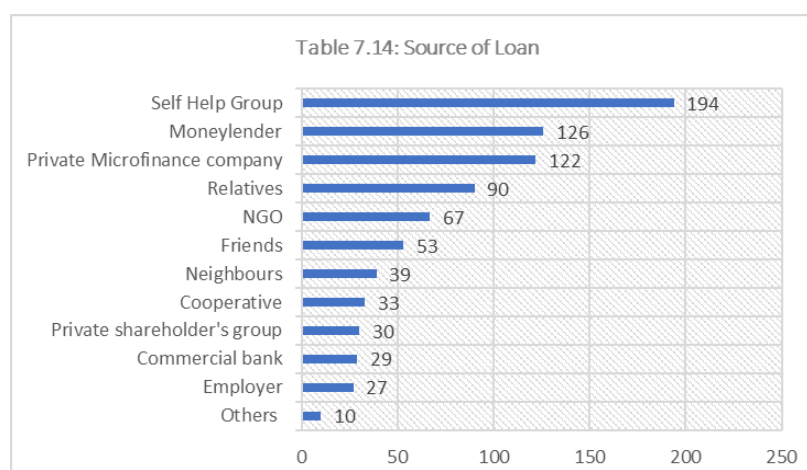
... Somehow, I managed to repay the loan... Now I am struggling hard to retrieve my mortgaged jewellery. I am doing all sorts of jobs such as coolie work, basket making, etc.

Similarly, Jacintha mortgaged all jewels, and her husband borrowed money from relatives and paid nearly eight lakhs to secure a job in a shipyard. But he was killed when he was about to start earning. Jacintha said, *"I am not able to sleep. It's more than three years since I slept properly. Thinking about paying the debt troubles me all the time."*

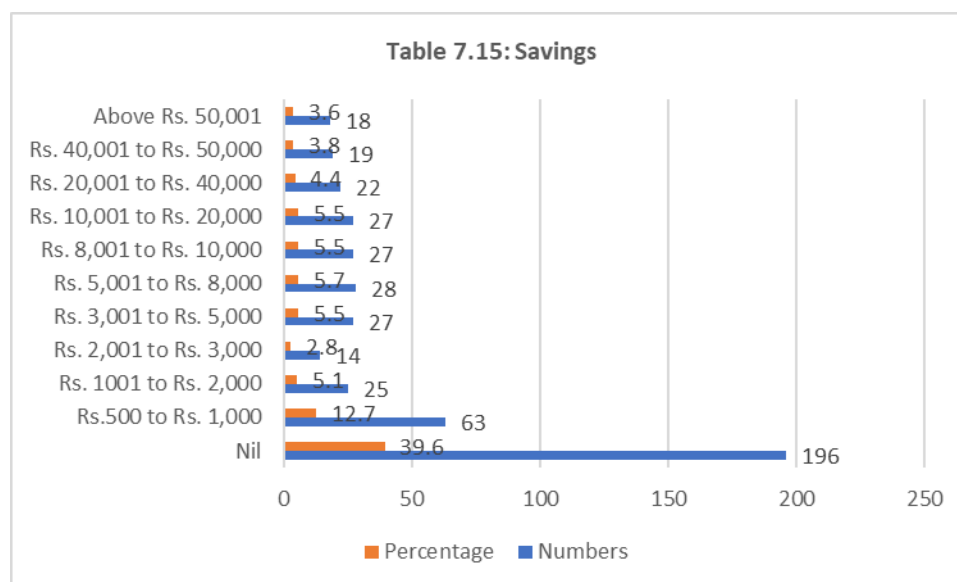
Besides repaying loans, as per the Table 7.13, 391 widows (78.98%) pay a lump sum amount towards interest. While 113 (22.83%) of them pay around less than Rs. 12,000/-, majority of them (278 or 56.16%) pay Rs. 12000/- to 6 lakhs rupees as interest per annum. The graph below shows the monthly range paid by the widows.



One of the main reasons for paying high interest is probably because of the source of the loan. Table 7.14 highlights, while 194 widows took loans from self-help groups, a substantial number (248, or nearly 50%) borrowed money from moneylenders and private microfinancing companies which is a worrying trend. Only 29 women accessed loans from a commercial bank and 33 from cooperatives. Women also shared their difficulty getting loans from banks due to their lack of permanent jobs and their names not being on property documents. Lack of such documents is a great hassle to access bank loans.



Contrary to the large loans, widows have very little savings. As per the data in Table 7.15, only a small number of widows (18, or 3.6%) have savings above Rs. 50,000/-. In contrast, 196 (39.6%) do not have any savings. The graph shows the amount of savings the widows have, and that, too, made possible because they participate in self-help groups, mainly initiated by non-governmental organizations.



VIII. Important Findings

1. Nearly 353 widows (71.3%) work for daily wages in the informal sector without job security and access to employment benefits. Despite the high work participation rate among widows, only 22 (4.4%) have secured permanent jobs. The main reasons include lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector, inadequate social security policies and weak welfare schemes, administrative lapses and corruption in the public sector, lack of prior work experience, inadequate educational qualifications and vocational skills, childcare responsibilities, and restrictions regarding social and physical mobility due to the stigma attached to widowhood.
2. Income data reveals that most widows live in poverty. Nearly 211 widows (42.6%) earn less than Rs.50, 000/- per annum, and 84 widows (17%) make between Rs.50,000/- to Rs.60,000/-. Only 30 widows (6.1%) earn more than Rs. 1,00,000/- per annum. The main reasons that emerged include: (a) lack of job security; (b) exploitation of labour; (c) discrimination in wages for men and women; (d) lack of support system for child care, especially for very young children; and (e) working primarily in the informal sector.
3. The widows do not seem to benefit much from government schemes. As per the data, only 225 widows (45%) have accessed government welfare schemes. Out of this number, only 207 (41.9%) receive widow's pension, 15 (3%) receive their husband's pension, and three receive another type of retirement payment. Corruption, prejudice/stigma about

widowhood in the district administration, and gender discrimination in public institutions seem to prevent widows from accessing government benefits.

4. Data shows that most of the widows do not own any agricultural land. Of the 495 widows enquired, only 66 (13.3%) own agricultural land. Among them, only 45 have *patta* for their land; within that, only 11 have *patta* registered in their name. On average, these women own only one acre of *nanchai* or *punchai* land. The rest of them have *patta* either registered in their husband's name, husband's family members, or combined *patta* with relatives.
5. Debt is one of the significant burdens among widows. Of the 495 widows enquired, 419 (85%) have loans. Among them, 15 (3.0%) have loans above five lakhs, nearly 113 (22.8%) owe above 1 lakh, and 132 (26.7%) have loans between Rs.50,000/- to 1,00,000/-. In total, 260 (52.5%) have loans above 50,000/-. Nearly 314 widows (63.4%) have spent an average of Rs.62,200/- per person per annum repaying loans, which is almost double of what they paid for subsistence needs (Rs.31,063/- per person per annum) of the entire household. The top reasons for borrowing loans included (a) health and medical care; (b) subsistence needs; (c) marriage; (d) house construction or renovation; and (5) repaying other loans. Although 194 widows benefit from taking loans from self-help groups, nearly 248 (50%) have borrowed from moneylenders and private microfinancing firms. Consequently, 391 widows (79%) pay interest ranging from Rs.12,000/- to 6 lakhs per annum.

In Conclusion:

The data shows widows struggle to enjoy their basic rights – shelter, food, education, and health care, with a meagre income and insecure jobs in the informal sector. Denial of the right to education, limiting women's space within the domestic sphere, Brahminical patriarchy and denying equal property rights to women are some of the underlying root causes that leave widows in a state of despair. As many widows expressed, they need a secure job with a decent salary. Economic empowerment is critical for widows to live dignified lives, without which they cannot challenge other socio-cultural practices. Economic empowerment gives them self-confidence and the capacity to manage the household single-handedly. As many said, "*The state should prioritise widows in employment and ensure social security benefits.*"

CHAPTER 8

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

While going to work every day, I must pass through two convention halls near our street. Quite often, auspicious functions such as marriages are held in those halls. Once, while I was walking along the street, one of the family members who had organised the function in one of the convention halls openly passed a comment, 'Alas, while having an auspicious function, I have happened to face this woman' ('நல்ல காரியம் நடக்கும்போது இவ் முஞ்சில் முழிக்க வேண்டியதா போச்சே') From that day onward, I don't feel free to walk on that street. I often try to hire an auto to cross the street, which incurs more expense for me.

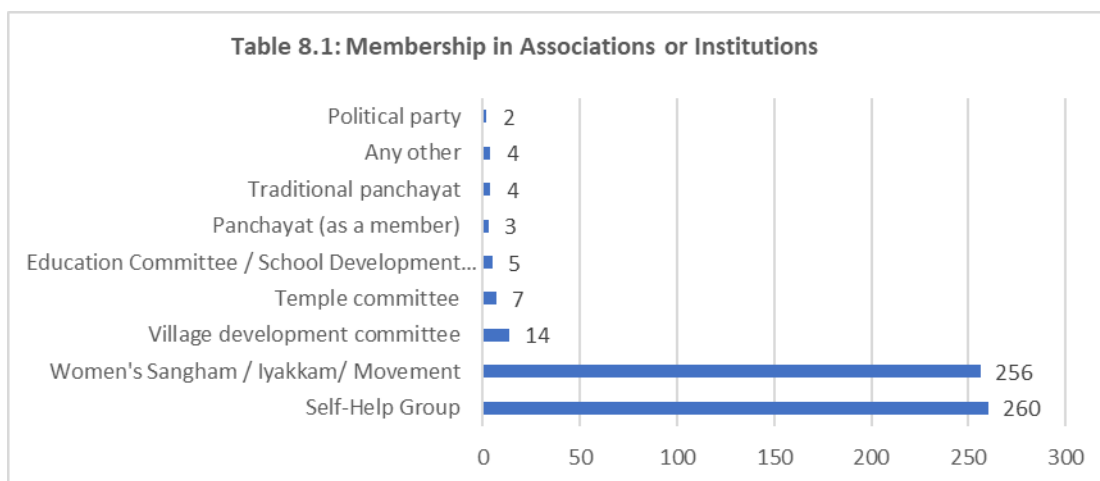
- Sophia, Ramanathapuram district.

In most societies, women have been assigned to the private or domestic sphere, associated with homemaking, reproduction and raising children. As highlighted in General Comment 23 of CEDAW, the cultural framework of values and religious beliefs and gendered household roles inhibit women's ability to participate in public life and decision-making processes. While women are constrained within the domestic sphere, socially excluded widows often find it challenging to participate in public life despite their involvement in economic activity. The portrayal of Sophia above points to the day-to-day hurdles faced by widows, even walking on a public street. In this situation, one can imagine how difficult it would be for widows to participate in public life. This chapter attempts to analyse the participation of widows in public life and the challenges they face.

I. Membership in Institutions and Associations

The study shows a negligible representation of widows in public life, except for their involvement in either Self-Help Groups or the Women's *Sangam/Iyakkam/Movement*. Table 8.1 shows that out of 495 respondents, 260 said they were members of self-help groups, followed by 256 who were part of a women's sangam or movement. Further, it is interesting to note that 14 respondents said they were part of the Village Development Committee. Lesser numbers mentioned they were part of a temple committee (seven widows), education committee (five widows), formal elected panchayat (three widows), traditional village panchayat (four widows), and a political party (two widows).

This data shows how widows are being excluded from public life. They face challenges from various fronts including survival of the family, countering social and cultural practices that exclude them, and child-rearing responsibilities. Hence, they do not find the space and/or dare to challenge social norms in order to participate in public life. At the same time, it is significant to note, though minimal, that some widows are actively involved in village development committees, temple committees and education committees.



The only avenue where most widows seem to be involved is self-help groups and widows' movement/Iyakkam. In interaction with the widows, most said that their involvement in the widow's movement is empowering them in many ways: (i) boosting their emotional well-being significantly; (ii) helping them to challenge some customary practices; and (iii) instilling awareness about their entitlements and making available financial support to start small businesses along with skills training. For instance, Haseena from Ramanathapuram said:

My life was transformed after I joined the trust that supports widows. It played a significant role in my life. I feel empowered and able to go for second marriage despite opposition from my husband's family. Now, being part of the Trust involved in social development, I help other widows and become a role model.

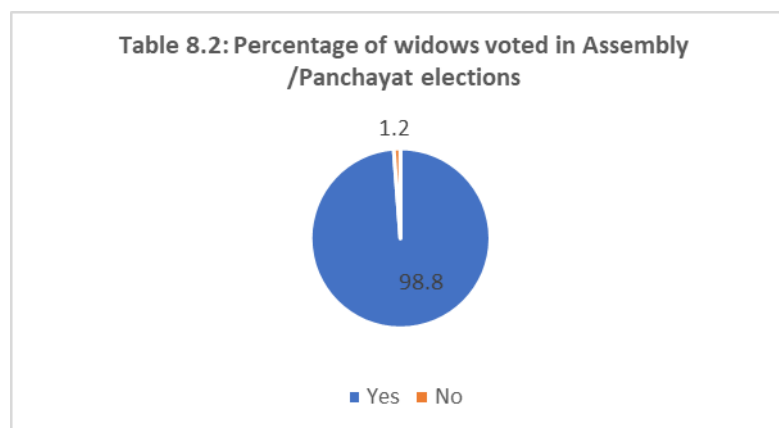
In the focus group discussion with widows in Nagapattinam District, they said:

Kalangarai has given us identity in our lives. It boosted our confidence. Kalangarai is our strength and support. It has had a tremendous impact on us psychologically, economically, and socially. The values and principles we have imbibed by being part of Kalangarai has helped us assert our rights. It enabled us to break some of the customary practices, play a leadership role, and succeed in life.

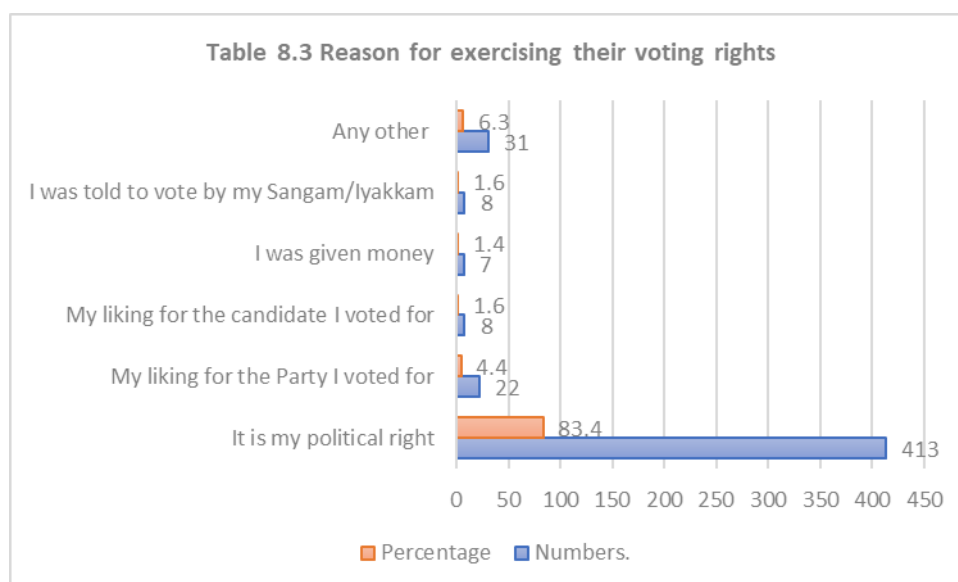
II. Accessing Political Rights

1) Exercising their voting rights

Table 8.2 illustrates the number of widows who reported voting in the last Assembly/Panchayat elections. This study reveals that except for the negligible number of widows (six widows or 1.2%), all others (489 widows or 98.8%) had exercised their voting rights in both the Assembly and Panchayat elections.



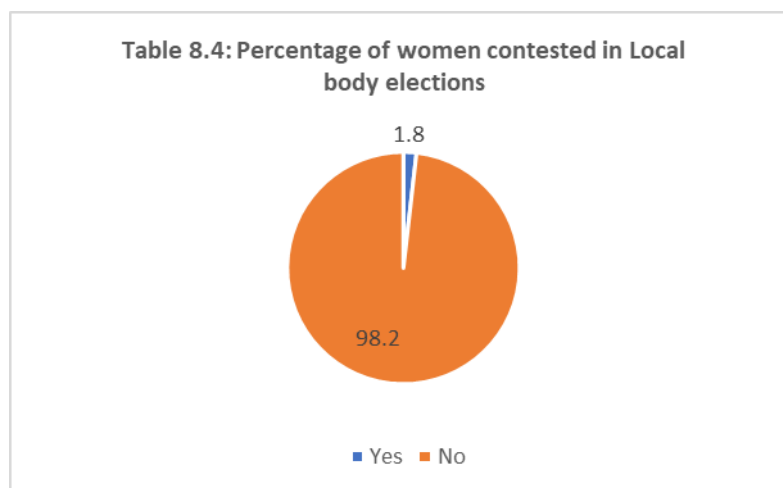
Most widows believed it was their political right to vote. Table 8.3 illustrates the main reason for casting votes in the Assembly and Panchayat elections. Of the total respondents, 413 (83.4%) said that voting was their political right. In comparison, 22 widows (4.4%) said that ‘they liked the party they voted for’; eight (1.6%) said ‘they liked the candidate they voted for’; seven (1.4%) said ‘the money given to them for voting particular political party’ motivated them to vote; and eight (1.6%) said ‘following the instruction of the Sangam/Iyakkam’ they decided to vote.



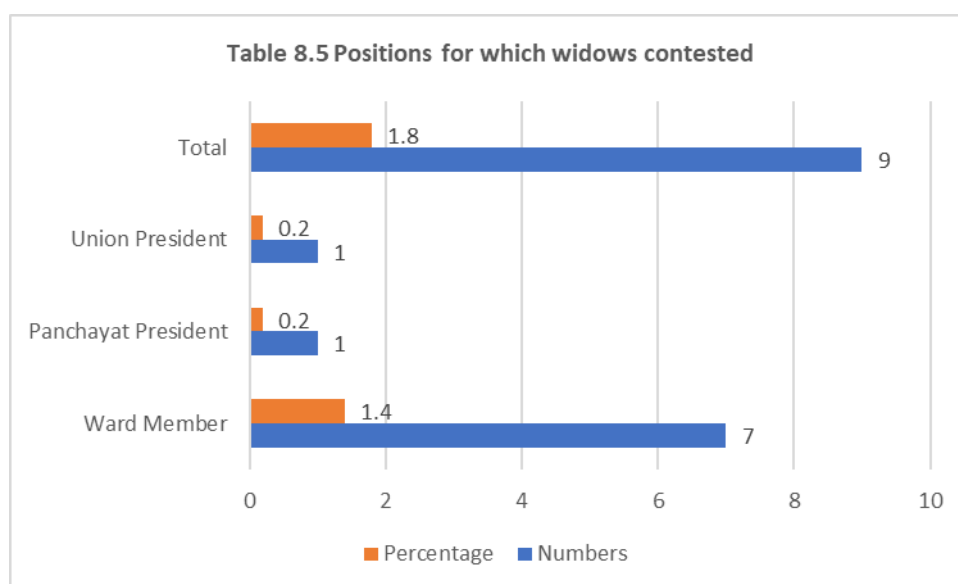
Of the six widows who said that they did not cast their votes in both elections, one said that she was not interested; another said that ‘nothing good will come out of the polls’, and the remaining four said they lacked adequate electoral documents to cast their votes.

2) Contesting the recent Panchayat Elections

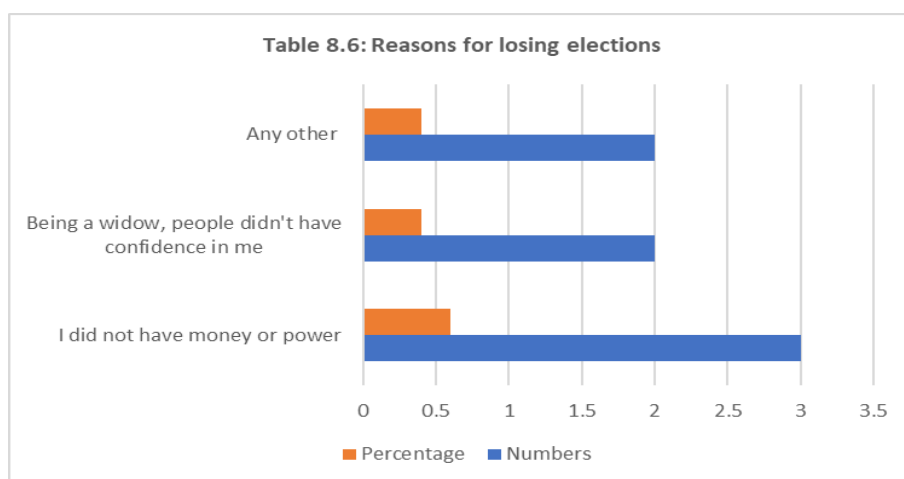
While most widows exercised their voting rights, only nine widows (1.8%) had contested panchayat elections (see Table 8.4).



Of the nine respondents who contested the recent panchayat elections, eight did so for rural, and one for urban, constituencies. Table 8.5 shows that the nine respondents who contested the recent panchayat elections, seven contested for the position of Ward Member, one for Panchayat President, and one for Union President.



Seven of the nine respondents who contested the elections lost, and two won. The two candidates who contested and won the election said people's confidence in them was the main factor for their victory. Table 8.6 illustrates the primary reason for the loss of the candidates in the recent Panchayat elections. Of the seven respondents who contested and lost the elections, three said they did not have the needed money or power, two said that people did not have confidence in them because they were widows, and two abstained from answering.

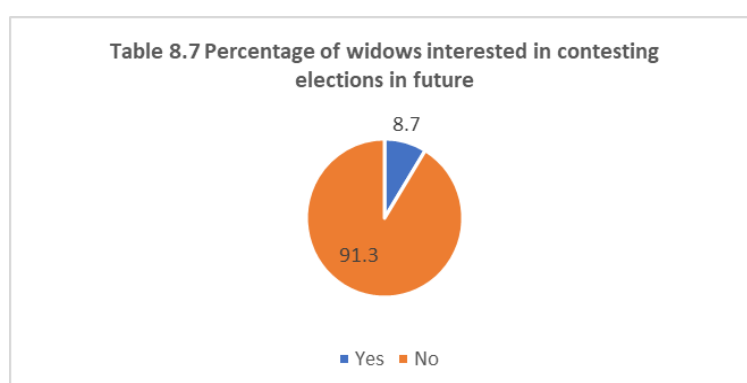


Answering whether they could exercise their governance responsibilities effectively, both the respondents who won the elections said they could. One mentioned that ‘her ability to influence government officials and party leaders’ was the main reason for her success. However, it must also be noted that in general it is difficult for a widow to contest any election and be a successful leader. The following experience shared by Sundari from Kancheepuram district explains their challenges while contesting elections.

I contested in the last panchayat election in our constituency, which was reserved for women under the symbol ‘ladder’. Before filing the nomination, while waiting in the office, I was harassed by some men who had come there to file a nomination for their family woman. Looking at me, they ridiculed and teased me to my face, saying, ‘How can you, an uneducated woman, contest the election? What are you going to do without even basic education?’. The fact is that among the crowd standing for filing nominations, there were quite a few uneducated nominees too. But, since they were there in the company of their family men, nobody dared to comment on them. On the other hand, as I was a widow, I became an easy target for them.

3) Interest in contesting in elections in future

Table 8.7 illustrates whether the widows-respondents were interested in contesting elections in the future. Out of the 495 widows, the majority (452 or 91.3%) said they were not interested in contesting panchayat elections for any post.



However, while only nine widows contested the last panchayat elections, 43 widows also expressed their willingness to contest elections in the future. Though a small number, this indicates a positive trend.

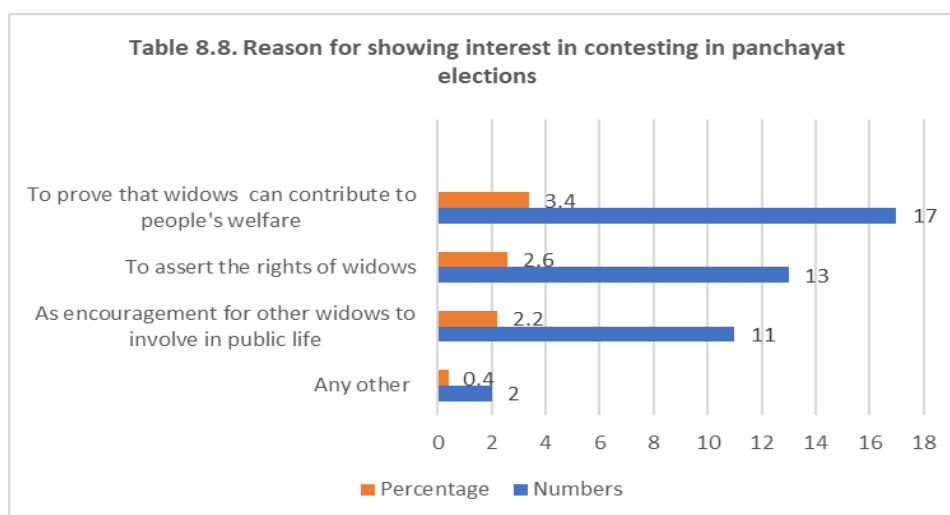
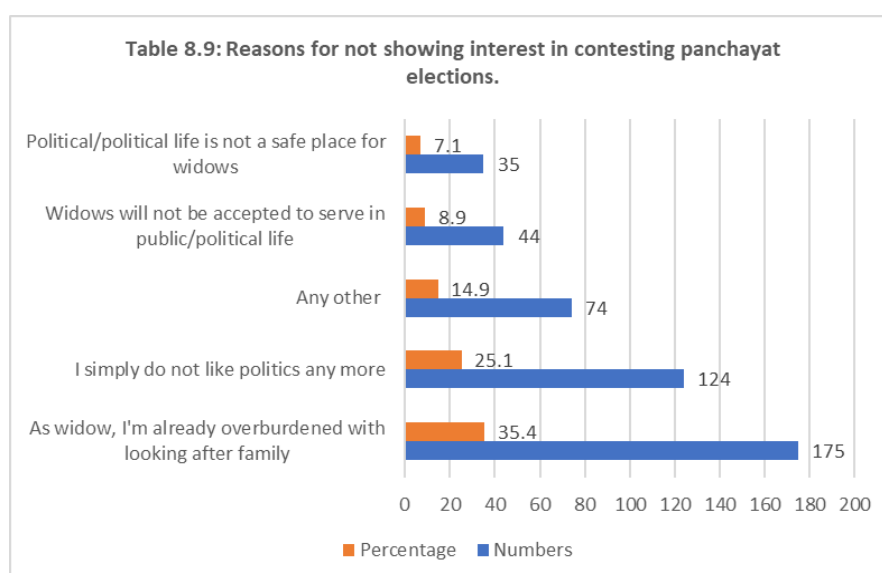


Table 8.8 shows the main reason for the widows' interest in contesting elections. Of the 43 widows who said they were interested in contesting elections, 17 said they wanted to prove that widows could contribute to people's welfare. Thirteen said they wanted to assert the electoral rights of widows. Eleven said that they wanted to establish role models to encourage and involve widows in public life.

In contrast, Table 8.9 indicates the main reason for disinterest in contesting elections. Of the 452 (91.3%) widows who said that they were not interested in contesting elections, 175 (35.4%) said they were already overburdened with looking after their families; 44 (8.9%) said they would not be accepted to serve in public life; and for 35 (7.1%) politics was not safe for widows.



While most of the widows responded to this question from their experiences, 124 (25.1%) responded that 'they were simply not interested in politics'. Similarly, 74 (14.9%) mentioned other reasons.

III. Important findings

1. Almost all the respondents are involved in either a self-help group or widow's movement. Their involvement in these spaces seems to empower them, significantly boosting their emotional well-being, helping them to challenge some customary practices, gain knowledge about their entitlements, and acquire skills and financial support to start small businesses.
2. Almost all the widow respondents (489 or 98.8%) cast their votes in both Assembly and Panchayat elections, with 413 (83.4%) mentioning that it was their political right.
3. Despite a vast majority exercising their voting rights, only nine widows contested the panchayat elections, the majority (eight women) from a rural constituency. Out of the nine widows, only two won the election, and they could exercise their governance and authority without interference.
4. Of the 495 widows, only 43 (8.7%) are interested in contesting elections in the future. Their disinterest, for 254 widows (51.3%), stemmed from the experiences of discrimination they had faced as widows, while 124 (25.1%) said they were not interested in politics.

In Conclusion:

Various factors confine women within the domestic sphere. In the case of widows, this is worse as they are overburdened with the challenges of widowhood. While they struggle to fulfill the livelihood needs of their families, the religious and cultural framework treats them as 'inauspicious' and excludes them from social and public life. This hinders their entry into public or political life.

While the reservation for women in the panchayat elections opens up avenues for women's political representation in India, it is a distant dream for many widows as they are not 'accompanied by family men'. They feel that political life is not safe for them.

The widows' participation in the widow's movement and self-help group seems to be the only avenue that provides an empowering experience for widows. In this regard, the state should create opportunities for widows to strengthen their movements and actively participate in public life, especially in politics.

CHAPTER 9

EXPERIENCING EMOTIONAL LIFE

I got married at the age of 13. My husband was addicted to alcohol and abused me. However bad he was, there was a regular income, and he cared for my children and me. After his death, I felt abandoned with my children. There was no one for us. I didn't have a job. I didn't have any exposure to the outside world. I don't have education. There was fear about my future and my children's education. My children dropped out of school. I suffered from mental depression. There was a time when we didn't have anything to eat. I had to survive, but wherever I went searching for livelihood options, I faced sexual harassment. The men in the workplace took advantage of my vulnerable situation. Initially, I was so scared. It affected my mental health. I used different tactics to escape problems. But, later, I started confronting them to their face. In one incident, I got angry and slapped a guy who harassed me.

- Nandhini, Chennai

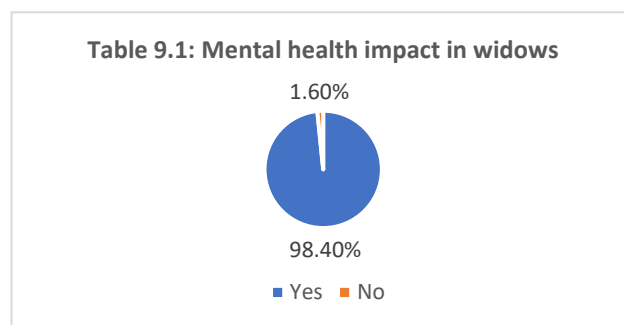
Emotional well-being is crucial at every stage of life as it impacts our thoughts, actions, and interactions. As the World Health Organisation¹²⁴ highlights, mental health is a basic human right and integral to health and well-being. And it is crucial to personal, community, and socio-economic development. Widows in India undergo emotional distress as their lives change drastically after the death of their husbands. The experience of profound grief, loss, or trauma combined with economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatisation, and humiliating cultural practices, leaves widows in emotional distress and isolation.

Widowhood practices exclude them from socio-cultural life, making them feel that they are 'socially dead' and have no life after their husband's death. This stigmatisation, which deprives their personhood and marks their identity as 'inauspicious', continues to humiliate them daily. Notably, the lack of financial and physical well-being makes their life too stressful, leaving them in constant anxiety and with no adequate support system. It adversely affects their mental health, yet this mental depression often goes unnoticed. This chapter highlights the need to focus on the emotional health concerns of widows, based on their sharing.

I. Psychological effects of widowhood

Table 9.1 reveals that almost every widow suffers mental health impacts on widowhood. Of the 495 widows enquired, 487 (98.4%) mentioned that their widowhood has had a major impact on their mental health. The following reveals some of the psychological issues that widows undergo.

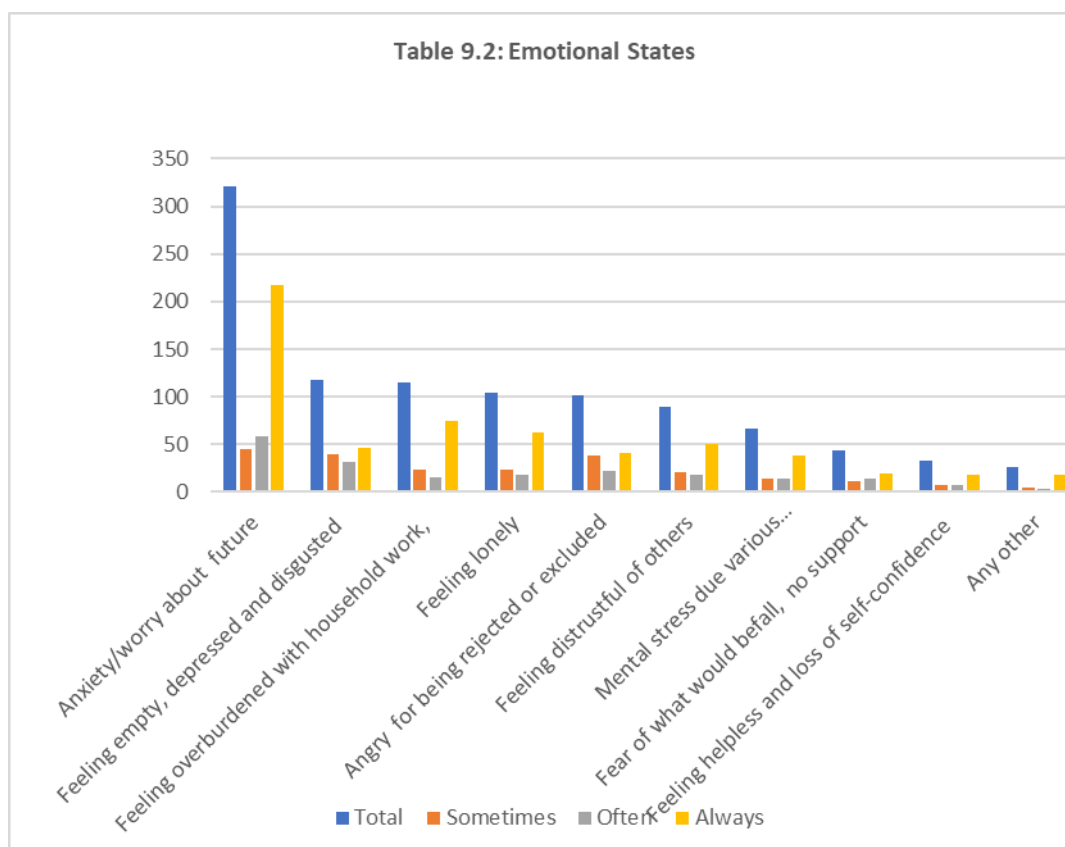
¹²⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>



1) Anxiety and Insecurity about the Future

Among the various factors adversely affecting widows is anxiety about their own and their children's future. This insecurity stems from many being financially dependent on their husbands when the latter were alive. As Table 9.2 indicates, of the 495 widows interviewed, a large number of 321 (64.8%) widows expressed anxiety about their future. For instance, Valarmathi from The Nilgiris district said:

When my husband died, the first thought that crossed my mind was, 'What would be my future? How will I raise my children? What kind of employment will I get? How can I provide education to my children? We don't even have a house of our own.'



Especially if the children are very young, the anxiety level remains high permanently, as expressed by Chandra from Theni district:

I was in a very depressed mind. I was very much worried about my two daughters, who are just 8 and 10 years old. To date, my main concern is my two daughters' future, which bothers me a lot.

Although anxiety is a dominant emotion, a few widows did not mention it as the primary factor. This was either because they lost their husbands some years back and therefore have overcome their anxiety in course of time, or because their husbands were alcoholic and abusive and hence, they were not affected much with anxiety after the demise of their husbands, or their households were fully managed by the widows themselves even when their husbands were alive.

2) Depression

Another factor affecting widows is the general feeling of being depressed, as expressed by 118 (23.8%) (see Table.9.2). For example, "Kannagi from Karur district said: *"My husband's death broke me. I never thought I would survive. The life I am living right now is a second one."* Begam from Theni district said: *"I have lost love and concern. I am just living for the sake of my children"*.

Widows are often blamed for their husband's death. Constantly they are projected as 'inauspicious' and made to feel 'guilty' about it. This experience also leaves women in depression. Rani from Karur district said:

My mother-in-law thinks and says I am the reason for my husband's death. Often her sarcastic comment is: 'I don't know at what inauspicious time she entered into my family; she came and killed my son' (என்ன நேரத்துல வந்தாளோ.. வந்து என் புள்ளைய கொன்னுட்டா'). As a result, I vacated my in-law's house and went to my mother's.

Widows also go into depression when their husbands' death is sudden either due to suicide or accidents. The experience of Janani from Ramanathapuram district shows this:

I was in total shock that my husband committed suicide. I was blamed for my husband's death. My husband's sisters and his close relatives scolded me, beat me, and put sand on my head. My son was sick and continuously crying in pain. I was shattered and felt physically weak. I couldn't even realise what was happening to me. I could not mentally understand what they were doing to me and couldn't resist. The cruellest part was that my son died nine days after my husband's death. I was not allowed to be in the hall where my son's body was kept. I was not allowed to see him as I had to be in isolation for 40 days as a widow. It took some time for me to recover.

3) Overburden with multi-tasking

Another important factor that affects 115 widows (23.2%) is being overburdened with household work, caring for children, and earning for life (see Table 9.2). Some even try to equip themselves with education and skills training to get better job prospects. While some widows

get the support of their parents in childcare, most do not have any support system. The story of Jenifer from Ramanathapuram District reveals this:

I used to do tailoring when my husband was there. But now my life is too stressful. I get up at 3 am every day. I study for writing competitive exams and then attend tutorial classes and do tailoring work till 10 pm. In between, I have to cook, look after my three young children, and prepare them for school. I don't have any break. At times, I don't have time to eat.

4) Loneliness

As per the data in Table 9.2, 104 widows (21.1%) also expressed feeling lonely as they have no one to support them after losing their life partner. Especially women who do not have children, senior widows who live alone, or widows who do not have a parental family support system expressed this concern. Gangamma from Kancheepuram district said:

My husband was so kind to me. He was my cousin and took care of me so well. I am worried about my survival without a partner in my old age. My sons are settled with their families and don't care for me. I feel lonely, like an orphan with no one in life.

5) Isolation and social exclusion

Another significant physiological impact that affects widows is the feeling of being isolated. During the interaction with widows, while 101 (20.4%) expressed this as the primary concern, almost every widow mentioned this factor as affecting them. The rituals performed during the husband's funeral and the widowhood practices in the aftermath isolate widows as 'inauspicious'. This affects their day-to-day life and widows expressed how it makes them feel annoyed or angry towards in-laws, parents, and society. While interacting with a group of widows in Nagapattinam district, they said:

We were already in pain and agony at the loss of our husbands, and all these customs made us feel isolated and excluded. Society makes us feel that we are nobody once our husbands die.

A widow from Nagapattinam District who was kept in isolation in a room for the first 40 days after her husband's death said:

Those 40 days of isolation were like hell. I had to wear a white saree during those 40 days, cover my head all the time, and stay isolated.

Widows also feel isolated and abandoned as their gold assets are often taken away and they are chased out of their husbands' families after their death. In a few situations, they are neither accepted by their in-laws nor by their natal family. Mallika from Ramanathapuram said:

My husband was an alcoholic and addicted to drugs even before marriage. Hiding this fact, they arranged our marriage. After my marriage, they took my gold ornaments (around 40 grams) but never returned them to date. At the same time, after his death, my in-laws forcefully took the six grams gold thali given to me at

the time of marriage by my husband and forcefully sent me back to my parent's place along with my 3-year-old child. My brother didn't want to accept me and said I had no right as I was married off and my share of the property was given already in gold and other household items during the marriage.

Similarly, widows in Sivaganga districts said:

Once our husbands die, we are not accepted by our in-laws. They will take away every right and abandon us. If we return to our parental home, we are also not accepted as family members. They will call us 'free meal eaters' ('ஓசிச் சோறு') and they ensure we don't have any rights. They will also say that our share was given already during marriage. But in reality, we would have lost in our in-law's house all the valuable assets like gold that our parents gave us at the time of marriage, and are just left with cooking utensils, which is good for nothing." ("உங்களுக்கு செய்ய வேண்டியது எல்லாம் செஞ்சு கல்யாணம் பண்ணி கொடுத்தாச்சு", என்பாங்க. ஆனா அவங்க செங்க நகை புருசன் வீட்ல பறி போயிருக்கும். கொடுத்த பாத்திர பண்டத்த வச்சு ஒண்ணும் பண்ண").

6) Distrust towards others

Distrust of others was mentioned by 90 widows (18%). Some shared experiences of being cheated by the husband and the husband's family. For instance, Meena from Ramanathapuram said:

I am an MA post-graduate. My husband had a serious health issue, and his family had a huge debt (30 lakhs). Hiding this fact, they arranged our marriage. Immediately after the wedding, they took 125 grams of my gold and spent it on his treatment and to pay the debt. My husband died within 1.5 years of marriage. To date, they haven't returned my jewellery. Moreover, at the time of his death, I was at my parent's place with my newborn baby. They hid the information of our marriage and mentioned in his death certificate as unmarried. That way, they prevented my daughter and me from getting any entitlement as his heir.

Many widows shared how they were victimised twice while their husbands were alive and after their death.

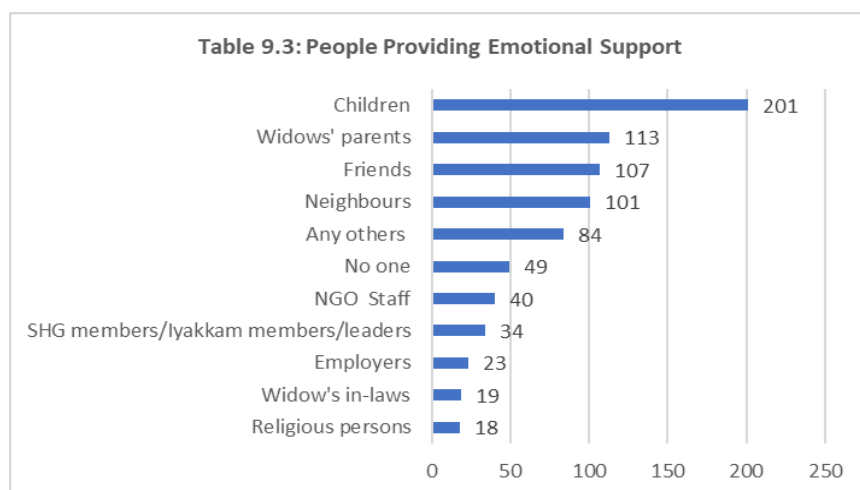
7) Other factors

The other factors affecting women include mental stress due to facing various difficulties/obstacles, feeling helpless, and loss of self-confidence in oneself. Around 20% of widows mention these as primary factors affecting their mental health.

II. Psychological Support Systems

1) People providing emotional support

As per the data in Table 9.3, of the 495 widows enquired, a majority (314) depend on their close family members for their emotional solace, primarily their children (201) and then their parents (113).



The other three significant categories of people whom they rely on for emotional support include friends (107), neighbours (101) and movement/self-help group members and NGO staff (74). Only 19 widows mentioned that they get support from their in-laws.

2) Support required for emotional well-being

Among the various factors that affect women's mental health, the lack of financial well-being seems to be a prominent factor. As the study indicates, given financial anxiety and insecurity, many widows feel that reducing their financial burden will help them emotionally. They also think that economic well-being will help them overcome the other factors that affect their emotional well-being. Most widows worry more about their children and their future than themselves. Therefore, in order of priority, the widows suggested the following five aspects that would help them overcome their economic distress:

- Secure employment either to the widows or their children in the public sector that provides fair and regular income to the family.
- A bank loan with no or less interest to either widows or their children that supports them to start a business.
- Ensuring an equal and quality education for their children.
- Social security policies that ensure the welfare of the widows and their children and support them to address their livelihood needs. In line with this, a widow said, *'Having three meals a day will help me to be emotionally sound'* and requested to take care of the livelihood needs of widows as a priority.
- Sanctioning of widow's pension.

The other supporting aspects that widows feel would improve their mental health include:

- a ban on customs and rituals that discriminate against widows;
- a house of their own;
- registration document (*patta*) for their home;
- counselling service;
- and skills training with career guidance.

III. Important Findings

- 1) Of the 495 widows enquired, almost all (487 or 98.4%) mentioned that their widowhood has significant mental health impacts. Among the various factors affecting widows, the highest was anxiety about their and their children's future, negatively affecting 321 women (64.8%).
- 2) The other important factors affecting a widow's mental health include the overall feeling of being depressed, overburdened by multiple responsibilities, isolation and exclusion, loneliness, and lack of trust in others.
- 3) A vast majority of widows (314) rely on their close family members for their emotional solace, primarily their children (201) and then their parents (113). The other three significant categories of people who support widows in emotional distress include friends (107), neighbours (101), and movement/self-help group members and NGO staff (74). Only a paltry number (19) said they get support from their in-laws.
- 4) Many widows feel the reduction of financial insecurity will help them emotionally, as well as help them overcome the other factors affecting their emotional well-being. Widows pointed to five areas of economic support required: (a) secure employment for the widows or their children; (b) financial aid (bank loan with no or less interest) to start a business; (c) educational support for their children; (d) social security policies; and (e) sanctioning of widow's pension. The other factors that they seek include: (f) ban on the customs and rituals that discriminate widows; (g) a house of their own or the registered title deed (*patta*) for their house; (h) counseling service and support; and (i) skills training and career guidance.

In Conclusion:

In Indian society, the mental health of women in general, and especially the mental health of widows, is often ignored. The emotional distress of widows who live in a 'humiliating condition of existence' goes unnoticed, and they are conditioned to tolerate it as part of life. The welfare approach of the State does not seem to give adequate importance to the widows' mental health needs. Hence, the State should focus on addressing the mental health needs of widows including addressing the factors that affect their emotional well-being, such as their financial security.

CHAPTER 10

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WIDOWS

Yes, I have experienced discrimination in adopting socio-cultural practices and accessing government welfare schemes. I am disallowed from wearing ornaments. I had to pay a bribe to get a widow's pension. I experienced sexual harassment on various occasions including in government offices. It is the power equation. The men think they have the authority and power. They also think the widows are powerless. They also take advantage of our vulnerable situation.

– Thangam, Chennai district

This statement of Thangam is replete with insights. In the caste based Indian context, discrimination between individuals or groups is not simply a matter of age or colour, status or ranking. It has to do with power relations between individuals and groups. From her lived experience, she has indicated two contexts, cultural as well as political. By preventing her from exercising her right to wear ornaments like other women because she is a widow, patriarchy punishes her for the alleged crime of 'killing' her husband and thus subjugating her to the control of male-dominated society.

Again, because she happens to be a widow, she becomes the object for the sexual harassment when she approaches government officials for her livelihood needs and entitlements. Daily discrimination, and its extension 'violence', therefore, is a matter of power relations wherein widows' agency is denied and, therefore, they are made powerless and vulnerable. Understanding the range of their experiences of discrimination and violence helps to assess the implications for their safety and protection as well as for their development and welfare as dignified citizens in society.

This chapter attempts to describe and analyse the phenomenon of discrimination faced by widows in various forms and situate these in five different contexts: socio-cultural, livelihood, economic, political and religious.

Overview

The data on the various forms of discrimination, presented in Tables 10.1 to 10.5, are to be seen in three respects:

- first, the different forms of discrimination presented under five headings: socio-cultural practices, livelihood matters, economic matters, political matters and religious matters;
- secondly, the number of widows who have indicated what forms of discrimination they have faced;
- thirdly, the perpetrators of such discrimination: family members, relatives, neighbours, elected panchayat officials, government officials, police officers, *archakar* (Hindu priests)

in temples/priests (Christian clerics) in churches/*imam* (Muslim clerics) in mosques, and finally ‘any others’ from the general public.

An overview of the data for all the five contexts shows three trends:

- First, when comparing these five contexts, a greater number of widows seem to have suffered discrimination in the socio-cultural context, followed by the religious context, thereby indicating the predominant role played by culture and religion. As meaning-giving systems with ideological underpinnings, culture and religion shape the mindsets, influence the attitudes and determine the behaviour of people and, therefore, any change in the perspectives about widows would require significant transformation in the cultural and religious sphere.
- Secondly, the perpetrators for the socio-cultural context are overwhelmingly family members, relatives and neighbours and for the religious context the perpetrators are predominantly families, relatives, neighbours and religious actors (*archakars/priests/imams*). This is not surprising as in the normal course of human affairs, the familial and the religious sectors serve as the repository of traditional elements of culture and religion which are not so permeable to liberal transformation.
- Thirdly, as regards the data concerning livelihood, economic and political matters, it is quite spread out for all categories of perpetrators but with slight preponderance for government officials since these are the actors whom the widows necessarily approach for matters concerning their livelihood, economic development and political involvement.

I. Discrimination in Socio-Cultural Practices

Widows have faced all the 15 forms of discrimination linked to socio-cultural practices, as shown in Table 10.1., and the majority of perpetrators of this discrimination have been relatives, especially from the in-law’s families, followed by natal family members and then neighbours.

Over 300 of the widows have been prevented from putting dot/*bindi* on the forehead and adorning their head with flowers, or wearing jewellery like bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe ring and nose stud, or barred from visiting people or walking along certain roads in the early mornings as alleged to be inauspicious in their sight, or stopped from attending the auspicious functions [marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony at pregnancy (*valai kaappu*)] of their own or relatives’ or others’ families.

Table 10.1: Forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence faced by widows: Socio-Cultural Practices

	Forms of Discrimination	Whom								
		Total number of respondents	Family members	Relatives	Neighbors	Elected Panchayat Officials	Govt. Officials	Police Officers	Archakars/ Priests / Imams in temple/church/ mosque	Any other
1	For putting dot/bindi on forehead & adorning head with flowers	360	109	153	92					6
2	For walking along certain roads at certain time of day (v.g. morning) or visiting people in early mornings in routine manner as alleged to be inauspicious in sight	355	64	104	186					1
3	For wearing jewelry like bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe ring, nose stud, etc.	352	113	155	80	1				3
4	For attending others' (not family/relatives) auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony at pregnancy (<i>valai kaappu</i>), etc.	335	79	154	96					6
5	For attending own family's/relatives' auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony at pregnancy (<i>valai kaappu</i>), etc.	315	92	166	53					4
6	For beautifying face with cosmetics	298	94	128	73					3
7	For having conversations with men in day-to-day life	251	73	103	74					1
8	For sitting in main places (instead of sitting separately) at functions/festivals	203	36	93	64	2			1	7
9	For walking freely along village roads during weddings or festivals	192	48	68	69				1	6
10	For wearing colour/flower sari	180	71	64	42					3
11	For desiring second marriage with partner of one's own choice	167	50	94	14					9
12	For participating in such socio-cultural functions as village dance, sports, competitions, etc.	163	28	96	37					2
13	For desiring second marriage with partner fixed by others (family, relatives, etc.)	83	36	33	6					8
14	For attending own family's/relatives' funeral/memorial functions, etc.	74	32	25	15					2
15	For attending others' (not family/relatives) funeral/memorial functions	64	27	23	11					3

While neighbours were more averse to seeing the widows in early mornings for fear of encountering bad luck during the day, family members and relatives, especially those in the in-laws' families have been very particular about the widows observing all these restrictions. As narrated by three widows in the focus group discussion in Nagapattinam district:

- **1st widow:** *After the death of my husband, I had no difficulty in relating with my parents' family members, that is, my mother, father, brother and sisters. But I found it very difficult to relate with my mother-in-law and her family members. They were more worried whether or not I keep dot on my forehead, flowers on my head or wear bangles and so on. They also never liked my presence on special occasions or public functions of the family or in the local surroundings. They did not want to give me my share of my husband's property. They never*

cared for my children. They even tried to chase me away. They spread false accusation and assassinate my character with their disparaging talks and gossips.

- 2nd widow: *I was 24 when my husband died. I was harassed by my in-law's family members who said, 'You came to this family and put off the lamp of this family. You are a curse to our family.' But I am determined to go through all this pain and discrimination because I have to live by myself and nobody else can take care of my child as much as I do. When I think of these socio-cultural ceremonies, I feel, 'Do we really need this kind of ceremony? I never want these things to happen to any other girl in this society.'*
- 3rd widow: *In my own in-law's family, I was isolated and was not introduced to anyone in any common functions because my in-law's family members think that I am a source of curse in any happy function.*

As presented in Table 10.1., in the case of over 200 and below 300 widows, beautifying their face with cosmetics, or sitting in main places at functions and festivals, or walking freely along village roads during weddings and festivals have been a taboo. More than 100 widows have been discriminated against wearing colour/flower sarees, or desiring second marriage with partner of their choice, or participating in such socio-cultural functions as village dance, sports and competitions. Widows numbering below 100 have said that they were discouraged from desiring second marriage even with partners fixed by their families and relatives, or from attending own or relatives' or others' funeral and memorial functions.

In the final analysis, socio-cultural practices, especially those relating to adorning oneself with dot on the forehead or wearing jewellery, or participating in the auspicious functions, or walking in public in the early mornings, raise the obvious question of why the widows are forbidden to engage in such practices? Entrenched attitudes reflect Brahmanical caste-based patriarchal ideology that views a woman as having no individual or separate identity and dignity of her own either before or after her marriage. Before marriage, she is dependent on her father or brother, and after marriage she is dependent on her husband or her son or her in-law's male family members. She also has no rights of her own but only duties to be performed for the male members and their families. In other words, pre-or-post marriage, her identity, dignity and duties are defined and determined by the male members. When husbands die or disappear, the widow also loses her identity, dignity and rights. Even the natural death of the husband is alleged to be his wife's murder, as is illustrated by the widows in the focus group discussion in Karur district:

According to the group of widows: *As far as our parents' family is concerned, we feel at home there and we feel accepted. But this is not the case in our in-laws' family as most of us feel ignored or discriminated. More than the discrimination, we are blamed to be the cause for the death of our husbands no matter how evident the deaths are for other reasons.*

One widow said: *My mother-in-law thinks and says that I am the reason for the death of my husband. Often her sarcastic comment is: 'I don't know at what inauspicious time she entered into my family; she came and killed my son' ('என்ன நேரத்தல வந்தாளோ... வந்து என் புள்ளைய கொன்னுட்டா'). Therefore, I vacated my in-law's house and went to my mother's house.*

Another widow said: *My husband was very normal but suddenly he collapsed and died. But my mother-in-law blamed me saying, 'You killed my son. You either poisoned my son or beat him up and killed him' (நீ தான் என் புள்ளைய விஷம் வச்சோ... அடிச்சோ கொன்னுட்டே').*

Yet another widow said: *At least outsiders have some sympathy for us. But relatives always hurt us by saying, 'He is dead and when he is dead and gone, why not she also go away, why does she have to live as a burden to the earth?' (அவன் போயிட்டான், இவளும் போக வேண்டியதுதானே? ஏன் இவ மட்டும் இடத்துக்கு பாரமா, பூமிக்கு சுமையா இருக்கா?) It is difficult and very painful for us when we are ill-treated. But in course of time, we have learnt to tolerate all such things as we couldn't do anything to challenge the society.*

II. Discrimination in Livelihood Matters

Widows-respondents affirmed 11 forms of discrimination related to livelihoods. Foremost among the perpetrators were government officials under whom falls the administrative jurisdiction of distributing the livelihood services.

As per Table 10.2, as many as 101 to 19 widows have indicated the denial of various livelihood items for them, that is, preventing them from accessing or trying to access – (i) government owned shops as first person in the morning or in the day to buy basic livelihood items, (ii) house sites, (iii) government development schemes, (iv) basic amenities for one's domestic use – water, toilets, electricity, etc., (v) house patta, (vi) water from public source by being made to wait until other married/unmarried women have accessed, (vii) government disaster relief schemes, (viii) house construction projects, (ix) participation in self-help groups or any organization/committee, (x) food items in government ration shops while others received, and (xi) public grazing grounds for feeding cattle.

Table 10.2: Forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence faced by widows: Livelihood

	Forms of Discrimination	Whom								
		Total number of respondents	Family members	Relatives	Neighbors	Elected Panchayat Officials	Govt. Officials	Police Officers	Archakars/ Priests / Imams in temple/church/ mosque	Any other
1	When accessing or trying to access private shops as first person (போனிய வாங்குதல்) to buy basic livelihood items	101	17	25	18		7			34
2	When accessing or trying to access house sites	67	9	8	8	4	30	1		8
3	When accessing or trying to access govt. development schemes	62	1	3	1	7	48			2
4	When accessing or trying to access basic amenities for one's domestic use— water, toilets, electricity, etc.	55	2	4	18	10	20			1
5	When accessing or trying to access house <i>patta</i>	53	5	5	4	5	32			2
6	When participating in SHG or any organization/committee	47	28	6	9			2		2
7	When accessing or trying to access water from public source, being made to wait until other married/unmarried women have accessed	45	2	3	39					1
8	When accessing or trying to access govt. disaster relief schemes	41	2	1	3	4	31			1
9	When accessing or trying to access house construction	40	6	4	6	5	17			2
10	When accessing or trying to access PDS, being denied of provisions while others received	33	8	16	2	1	5			1
11	When accessing or trying to access public grazing grounds	19		3	6		10			

Among them, however, the largest number (101) have suffered discrimination when they were accessing or trying to access private shops as the first of the consumers (போனிய வாங்குதல் = to be the first person in the day to purchase in a shop) in the morning, or during the day, to buy the basic livelihood items. The reason is widows are considered to be cursed and a bad omen who allegedly bring ill-luck to the shop keepers if they appear as the first consumers resulting in poor sale and income that day. As regards the perpetrators of this discrimination, these widows point to family members (17 widows), relatives (25 widows), neighbours (18 widows) and 'any others' from the general public as the main responsible persons.

The explanation for why family members, relatives and neighbours prevent the widows from approaching the private shops as first consumer in the morning or in the day may be found in their fear of the widows being turned away without purchasing anything, as mentioned by a widow in the focus group discussion in Tiruppur district: *"We are not allowed to go to any shop early in the morning and buy anything for the sole reason that we are widows and will be sent away without purchasing anything if our identity is known. And it is painful to think that we cannot go to any store to buy even the most essential things"*.

Even if the widows dare to go to do purchasing in the shop early morning, their fate could be that of Kamatchi of Kancheepuram district who said: *"In the Ration Shops (or Public*

Distribution Shops or PDS shops), although I stand in the queue to get the ration like others in the morning, at times the other villagers would ask me to stand behind and get the stuff later. They would say, 'What is the hurry? Who is there for you to look after? Why don't you wait?' They think I am a powerless woman as my husband is not there to defend me."

And that is the reason why the widows themselves hesitate to go out to the stores to purchase in the morning, as Sundari of The Nilgiris district said: *"I do not even wake up in the morning to go to the store because they used to see me as ill omen, so I avoid going out early in the morning. Discrimination like this stems from women themselves misrepresenting women. Many are the indignities a woman faces after losing her husband. Hence, I think that if a widow wears a new saree or talks to anyone, women should be the ones who must first stop talking bad about it"*.

The widows have also faced discrimination from another quarter, that is, from the government officials while accessing or trying to access government development schemes (48 widows), house patta (32 widows), government disaster relief schemes (31 widows), house sites (30 widows), basic amenities for one's domestic use – water, toilets, electricity, etc. (20 widows), house construction projects (17 widows), public grazing grounds for feeding cattle (10 widows), government shops as first consumer in the early morning or in the day (7 widows), and ration shops wherein widows are denied of food provisions while others received (5 widows). Although the grounds for discrimination by the government officials may be the assumption that the widow-applicants of government schemes and projects are unworthy of benefitting from the government services, there are also other factors like bribes and sexual favours expected from the widows, as reported in the focus groups discussions in a few districts:

- Ramanathapuram district: One widow said, *"I went to the Collectorate Office with my 3 children seeking some kind of employment. Although the Collector directed the Village Administrative Officer and the Revenue Inspector to look into my application, the former asked how I could ask for a job with just 12th standard school qualification, despite me having secured nearly 90% marks. Secondly, he also questioned why I stepped out of the home within a year as widows are supposed to stay indoors for a year. When my aunt confronted him about his statement, he just ignored us. Then to apply for a job, these two officials also said that I have to apply for a destitute widow's certificate, which I am not able to get even to this day"*.
- Azhagu of Dindigul district: *When I approached the Village Administrative Officer for the destitute widow's certificate, he looked at me with disgust and told me: 'You look physically fit and good and so, why do you need this certificate? Can't you work and earn your income?' And later when I went to get a loan, the government officials said that they would give the loan only if I have a surety signature.*

- Tirupur district: A widow said, *“When I went to get a patta (land title deed) for my own dwelling place, I was made to come to the office again and again and still I could not get the patta”.*
- Theni district: Speaking about their varied experiences with the government officials, the widows said:
 - *“For them, money is everything; if I give money, they will respect me. I managed to get my widows’ pension after bribing them with Rs. 10,000/- for obtaining the death certificate of my husband to prove that I am a widow. However, at any time, they could stop my widows’ pension, citing reasons such as ‘Your son is working. You are using two cylinders in your house, etc.’ Yes, they treat us worse than dogs.*
 - *We, 20 widows, jointly met the District Collector and handed over a petition with a request for widows’ pension. Later, when we approached the Taluk Officer as a follow-up to the petition, he used abusive language. Further he said, ‘Here we don’t do anything without getting money.’*
 - *One of us bribed Rs. 5000/- and another Rs. 7,000/- for obtaining widows’ pension. Even after providing pension for six months, the government officials may stop it and if they do, then again, we need to bribe. When we repeatedly visit government offices with the request for pension, they treat us as they treat dogs.*
 - *In my case, I had to go to another district for obtaining the death certificate of my husband. There I had to bribe Rs. 20,000/- merely for obtaining the death certificate of my husband.”*
- Nagapattinam district: What the widows said in this district illustrates the perspective the government administration officials have of the widows who approach for their needs and entitlements:
 - *The government officials always say that we cannot fight for our rights because we are weak. They also discourage us saying that whatever happens, at the end we will be the losers. Most of the time, we are cheated by the government officials, political leaders and community leaders. Sometimes we have been man-handled and even treated derogatively.*
 - *A government official humiliated me saying, ‘You are a woman, after all you are a widow, and so what can you do? You cannot do anything by yourself!’*
 - *For us, justice always remains unreachable. We may get some compensation when we make complaint for some wrongs done to us but not justice for the violation of our rights. Most of the time, for example, we are deprived of our property rights.*

III. Discrimination in Economic Matters

Table 10.3: Forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence faced by widows:

	Forms of Discrimination	Whom								
		Total number of respondents	Family members	Relatives	Neighbors	Elected Panchayat Officials	Govt. Officials	Police Officers	Archakars/ Priests / Imams in temple/church/ mosque	Any other
1	For accessing or trying to access housing loans from govt./bank/other sources	44	15	3	2	1	16		1	6
2	For accessing or trying to access loans from govt./banks/other sources for any other purposes (specify):	24	3		2		16			3
3	For accessing or trying to access agri. land ownership	22	3	3	2		13		1	
4	For cultivating already owned agri. land	16	3	4	1		7		1	
5	For accessing or trying to access one's new commercial/business enterprise for oneself or for running commercial/business enterprise already owned & run by self	14	1	1	6	1	5			
6	For accessing or trying to access agri. land as tenant	13			7	1		5		
7	For putting up or trying to put up commercial infrastructure building or shed	13	2			3	5		3	
8	When being paid wages for similar agri. work/other works done by other women	12		5			7			
9	For accessing or trying to access agri. loans or commercial/business loans from govt./bank/other sources	11					11			

Of the nine forms of discrimination linked to economic matters, as per Table 10.3, the widows were denied access to housing loans from the government/bank/other sources (44 widows), loans for various other purposes from the government/bank/other sources (24 widows), agricultural land ownership (22 widows), cultivating already owned agricultural land (16 widows), starting new commercial/business enterprise for oneself or for running commercial/business enterprise already owned and run by self (14 widows), and agricultural land as tenant (13 widows). Obstruction to putting up commercial infrastructure building or shed (13 widows), discrimination in wage payment for similar agricultural work/other works done by other women (12 widows) and denial of access to agricultural loans or commercial/business loans from the government/bank/other sources (11 widows) have also been cited as forms of discrimination faced by the widows.

The perpetrators of these different forms of discrimination under the economic matters, as seen in Table 10.3, is spread out among the families, relatives, neighbours, elected panchayat officials, police officers, *archakars/priests/imams* and 'any other persons'. However, government officials are the main perpetrators especially in the area of accessing housing loans from the government/banks/other sources (16 widows), getting loans from the government/banks/other sources for any other purposes (16 widows), procuring agricultural

land ownership (13 widows) and accessing agricultural loans or commercial/business loans from the government/banks/other sources (11 widows). As explained by the widows, they are unable to access these economic services due to such factors as lack of credible persons who could stand as guarantee, government officials demanding bribes and sexual favours, their prejudices against and lack of respect for the widows, etc. The following instances illustrate what the widows have experienced:

- Saritha of Nagapattinam district: *Govt. has sanctioned a loan for me but I am unable to get it since I couldn't get any surety from any of my relatives.*
- Savithri of Theni district: *Despite having submitted all the necessary documents, the authorities didn't issue my husband's death certificate and they kept it on hold for more than a month and only after I paid Rs.1000/- as bribe to the peon, I got the certificate.*
- Kamatchi of Kancheepuram district: *I have applied for an electricity connection and the response from the concerned government officer has not been positive. Since I am a powerless woman, he didn't care to see my application. Similarly, I experienced discrimination when I applied for the widow's certificate. I got it after a long struggle and persistent follow-up. Accessing government schemes is one of the most difficult things.*
- Meenakshi of Ramanathapuram district: *When I applied for the destitute widow's certificate, I was told several times that I didn't look like a widow. They asked me how could I wear a gold chain and at the same time apply for the widow's pension. Moreover, the application didn't get processed and I had to re-apply several times and make appeals to the Collectorate Office. I confronted the Revenue Inspector in the Taluk Office. I had to tell him very curtly I would give the gold chain to him and in return he could assure our family livelihood for life. Then only he stood up from his seat and realized his mistake of making offensive remarks at me.*
- Thangam of Chennai district: *I experienced sexual harassment on various occasions including in government offices. For instance, When I went to the Thasildar Office to apply for a welfare fund (Rs.10000/-) given to widows immediately after the death of the family head, the clerk of the Revenue Inspector (RI) put me in a difficult situation and harassed me. He took me to an isolated room. It was so dark and I got really scared. He inquired about my age and insisted that I buy a phone as it was required for getting OTP (One-time Password). I mortgaged my jewel and bought a phone for Rs.2500/-. After that he called me continuously on the phone and harassed me. One day he asked me to come to the office on a Saturday to meet the Revenue Inspector. I didn't have any clue that it was a holiday for the office. When I went there, there was no one. He made me wait in the office till the evening saying the Revenue Inspector would come soon. It was already getting so late and he then started switching off the lights. I sensed a risk and, therefore, immediately used a tactic to escape. I acted as if I was talking to my brother, and then told him that my brother*

would come to pick me up. He got angry and scolded me for informing my brother that I am visiting the Tahsildar Office. Then he asked me to leave immediately.

After that, I was scared to go there. He used to call me continuously and harass me. Then I started giving the phone to my sons and asked them to respond. After that, he stopped calling. Then I went there with my sons and got the welfare fund sanctioned after repeatedly following up more than 6 times. Even then, he took Rs.2000/- as a bribe and advised me saying, 'I wouldn't have taken this money if you had adjusted with me. You should have fulfilled my wish and needs. As a widow, you need to adjust and then only you can survive in life.'

III. Discrimination in Political Matters

Referring to the nine forms of discrimination regarding political matters, as presented in Table 10.4, the widows affirmatively said they had experienced discrimination in all of them: when invited to attend gram sabha meetings (39 widows), when campaigning in panchayat or assembly elections (31 widows), when participating in any protest meetings/social conferences (29 widows), when contesting in panchayat elections as ward member/president (23 widows), when approaching or trying to approach government administration officials after being elected as ward member/president (17 widows), when entering into panchayat office with some project application (16 widows), when accessing panchayat office after winning panchayat election as ward member/president (16 widows), when exercising authority in office as panchayat ward member/president (14 widows) and when approaching or trying to approach police stations for filing complaints regarding problems faced by the elected widow in her constituency (10 widows).

Perpetrators were predominantly panchayat officials, government officials, family members and the general public ('any other' category). Discrimination from the panchayat officials and government officials can be explained by such consideration as political rivalry and gender discrimination. As regards discrimination from family members, the widows' involvement in public life would have seemed unacceptable from social and moral point of view as something to be avoided. While this same argument may also seem applicable in the case of the general public, there could also be other additional reasons, as for example, lack of education, which could have been used to discourage the widows from exercising their right to participate in active electoral politics, as was noted by Sundari of Kancheepuram district (see Chapter 8)

**Table 10.4: Forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence faced by widows:
Political matters**

	Forms of Discrimination	Whom								
		Total number of respondents	Family members	Relatives	Neighbors	Elected Panchayat Officials	Govt. Officials	Police Officers	Archakars/ Priests / Imams in temple/church/ mosque	Any other
1	Being invited to attend Gram Sabha meetings	39	13	6	2	5	7		2	4
2	For campaigning in panchayat or assembly elections	31	13	7	5	1	5			
3	For participating in any protest meetings/social conferences	29	7	1	2	5	4			10
4	For contesting in panchayat elections as ward member/president	23	4	2		7	4			6
5	For approaching or trying to approach govt. administration officials after being elected as ward member/president	17				3	13			1
6	For entering into panchayat office	16	4		1	7	4			
7	For accessing panchayat office after winning panchayat election as ward member/president	16				2	7			1
8	For exercising authority in office as panchayat president/ward member	14		1		8	4			1
9	For approaching or trying to approach police stations for filing complaints regarding problems faced by the elected woman in her constituency	10			1	2	3	3	1	

But what is noteworthy about Sundari is what really made her contest the panchayat election, that is, it was not simply her desire to access political power but rather her reaction against the social system which she felt has been suppressing women's dignity in general, and widows' identity in particular. In her own words:

Yes, initially I didn't react much against all repressive measures against me and against women and widows. But, thanks to the non-government organization and the Widows' Sangam with which I am associated currently, now I have learnt to respond to them immediately. The experience of being part of the Widow's Sangam and the training I received in the non-government organization helped me to gain courage. When the people standing in the queue before the PDS shop told me to move far behind the line because I am a widow, I told them, 'Whether I have someone (my husband) at home or not, what does it matter to you? It is my right to stand in the queue since I too pay the same money as you and, therefore, why should I go and stand far behind you all?'

Similarly, when they scolded me for seeing them in the morning, I got angry and responded by saying: 'If a male dies, then I, a woman, am called a 'mundachi' (a derogatory term used for widow whose marital necklace is snapped or removed at widowhood); but if a female dies, then shouldn't the male be called a 'mundachi' (a widower)? If your sight falls on him, you claim it to be a blessing; why not the same for me?' ('ஆம்பள செத்தா நான் முண்டச்சி. அப்ப பொம்பள செத்தா ஆம்பள முண்டச்சி இல்லையா? அவன் முகத்தில் முழிச்சா போற காரியம் விளங்கும் போது என் முகத்தில் விளிச்சா விளங்காதா?') It is because of such demeaning experiences that I contested in the election. I thought that would empower me and allow me to do good for other women who suffer like me.

V. Discrimination in Religious Matters

In the early part of this chapter, mention was made of the co-relation between the socio-religious practices and religious system in maintaining traditional beliefs and culture without allowing any liberal changes in favour of making widows' life dignified and self-respecting, freer and more independent. This section examines how widows are discriminated in religious matters in such a way as to maintain widowhood as a subjugated and subservient reality in their day-to-day life.

Table 10.5: Forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence faced by widows: Religious

	Forms of Discrimination	Whom								
		Total number of respondents	Family members	Relatives	Neighbors	Elected Panchayat Officials	Govt. Officials	Police Officers	Archakars/ Priests / Imams in temple/church/ mosque	Any other
1	For going to temples dressed in colour sari/ decked with flowers/ornaments	205	44	100	36				22	3
2	For performing religious ceremonies in public temple	71	5	7	8				47	4
3	For observing religious vows related practices to gain divine favours (carrying milk pots, fire pots, paddy sprouts and kavadi; doing holy fire walk; pongal preparation)	61	9	6	7				36	3
4	For participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around temples/churches on temple/church festivals	59	4	5	3	1			38	8
5	For receiving prasadam from temple priests	50	4	2	2				41	1
6	For giving offerings inside the temples	45	4	3	1				34	3
7	For entering public temples	36	3	2	6				25	
8	For allegedly being possessed by evil spirits (witch)	29		6	2				21	

Of the eight forms of discrimination listed under religious matters, presented in Table 10.5, an overwhelming number of 205 widows said that they felt discriminated for going to temples dressed in colour sarees/decked with flowers/ornaments. Those who perpetrated this discrimination were those who had close association with them [their relatives (100 widows), family members (44 widows), and neighbours (36 widows)]; following this list are the *archakars*-temple priests (22 widows) and the general public (3 widows).

Table 10.5.1: Comparative data on discrimination by Temple Priests and Others				
S. No	Forms of discrimination	Number of widows who experienced discrimination	Number of widows who pointed out temple priests as offenders	Number of widows who point out family members, relatives, neighbours, elected panchayat officials and general public as offenders
1	Performing religious ceremonies in public temple	71	47	24
2	Observing religious vows related practices to gain divine favours (carrying milk pots, fire pots, paddy sprouts and <i>kaavadi</i> ; doing holy fire walk; Pongal preparation)	61	36	25
3	Participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around temples/churches during temple/church festivals	59	38	21
4	Receiving <i>prasadam</i> from temple priests	50	41	9
5	Giving offerings inside the temples	45	34	11
6	Entering public temples	36	25	11
7	Allegedly being possessed by evil spirits (witch)	29	8	21

With regard to the other temple practices, Table 10.5.1 shows temple priests as perpetrators more than others for each form of discrimination against the widows. Discrimination is said to be practised by the temple priests or their associates when entering public temples, performing religious ceremonies in public temples, observing religious vows related practices to gain divine favours (carrying milk pots, fire pots, paddy sprouts and *kaavadi*; doing holy fire walk; *pongal* preparation), participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around temples during temple festivals, receiving *prasadam* from temple priests, giving offerings inside the temples, and exorcizing the allegedly possessed persons by evil spirits (witch). This is because of the fact that the temple priests or their associates are the ones who perform these rituals of worship in the temples and hence follow the codes of worship as to who should or should not, and at what level participate or not, in these rituals of worship.

Referring to this mode of functioning in the temples, Kamatchi of Kancheepuram said: *“In the temples, the temple priest gives the widows only the sacred ash (வெபூதி) and not the ‘kumkum’ (red turmeric power). Similarly, when people claim that the deity had descended on them (சாமியாடும் போது), the priests will carefully avoid distributing ‘kumkum’ to us in the crowd”.*

One of the widows of Theni district narrated similar ritual practices in her focus group discussion: *“When I was participating in the ‘light-pooja’ (திருவிளக்கு பூஜை) ceremony in the temple, people refused to give me the offerings, as I am a widow.”* Another widow said: *“When*

we go to the temples to participate in the 'bhajan singing' (hymn chanting), the devotees would distribute offerings to the participants. While doing so, some people would not give them to widows, if they were to know them to be widows"

VI. Important findings

1. Discrimination in socio-religious practices

Widows experienced a range of socio-cultural discrimination, prominent amongst which were five forms, as told by more than 300 widows: (i) for putting dot/*bindi* on their forehead and adorning their head with flowers; (ii) for walking along certain roads at certain times of the day (v. g. morning) or visiting people early mornings as these activities are alleged to be inauspicious in sight; (iii) for wearing jewellery like bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe ring, nose stud, etc.; (iv) for attending own family's/relatives' auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, etc.); and, (v) for attending others' (not family's or relatives') auspicious functions. The majority of those who perpetrated these discriminations have been the relatives, especially from the in-law's families, followed by the parental family members and then the neighbours.

2. Discrimination in livelihood matters

As regards livelihood matters, the widows were given 11 forms of discrimination to respond to. The three foremost forms of discrimination happened when they were trying to access (i) private shops as first person in the day to buy basic livelihood items as this is being alleged to be an ill-omen for a better sale and income that day in the interest of the business people; (ii) house-sites from the government, and (iii) various development schemes from the government. Numerically the foremost among the perpetrators are the private business dealers, and the government officials under whom falls the administrative jurisdiction of distributing development and welfare schemes.

3. Discrimination in economic matters

Of the nine forms of discrimination listed under economic matters the widows responded to all of them saying that they were subjected to discrimination regarding all these forms. The foremost among them, however, were denial of housing loans or loans for any other purposes from the government, banks and other sources as well as denial to access to ownership of agricultural land. While the perpetrators of these different forms of discrimination is thinly spread out among the families, relatives, neighbours, elected panchayat officials, police officers, *archakars/priests/imams* and the general public ('any other persons'), the government officials are pointed out as the main actors.

4. Discrimination in political matters

Referring to the nine forms of discrimination regarding political matters the widows affirmatively said they had experienced discrimination in all of them. However, they referred to some as the prominent forms – not being invited to attend the Gram Sabha

meetings, and the obstructions or denial they experienced of their right to campaign in the panchayat or assembly elections, to participate in any protest meetings or social conferences, and to contest the panchayat elections as ward member or president. The perpetrators are found predominantly among the panchayat officials, government officials, family members and the general public ('any other persons').

5. Discrimination in religious matters

Of the eight forms of discrimination listed under religious matters, the widows responded by saying that they underwent discriminatory experiences as per all these forms. An overwhelming number of 205 widows said that they felt discriminated for going to temples dressed in colour sarees/decked with flowers/ornaments and those who perpetrated this discrimination were their relatives, family members, neighbours, *archakars* (temple priests) and the general public ('any other persons'). With regard to the other temple practices - performing religious ceremonies in the public temples; observing religious vows related practices to gain divine favours (carrying milk pots, fire pots, paddy sprouts and *kavadi*; doing holy fire walk, *pongal* preparation); participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around the temples and at festivals) - the number of temple priests as perpetrators is said to be more than others.

An Overview of the Five Contexts

- 1) First, when comparing these five contexts, a greater number of widows seem to have suffered discrimination in the socio-cultural context, followed by the religious context, thereby indicating the predominant role played by culture and religion.
- 2) Secondly, the data on the perpetrators for the socio-cultural context is outweighed by family members, relatives and neighbours and for the religious context the perpetrators are predominantly from the sector of families, relatives, neighbours and religious actors (*archakars/priests/imams*).
- 3) Thirdly, as regards the data concerning livelihood, economic and political matters, it is quite spread out for all the categories of perpetrators but with slight preponderance for the government officials since these are the actors whom the widows have to necessarily approach for matters concerning their livelihood, economic development and political involvement.

CHAPTER 11

SECURITY AND PROTECTION MEASURES

After my husband's demise, I have been really afraid to face this life. I used to be afraid of everything. I really miss my husband. When I am at home, I feel very happy and safe. But I get scared when, for example, I take my daughter to the hospital or go out for some purpose or other.

– Savitri, Nagapattinam district

I. Feeling of security/insecurity

The statement of Savitri, living with one daughter and one son, and belonging to the Most Backward Community (MBC), reflects the response of 254 of the 495 widows (51.3%) who responded that they did not feel safe generally in public life, as compared to 238 (48.1%) who felt safe and secure and 3 (0.6%) who did not respond. It is significant that over 50% of the widows do not feel safe even when advanced technological development and various government-driven safety measures are said to be available for every citizen, especially women and children.

What is to be noted in this case of Savitri is her age, education and occupation. She is 34 years old, has a degree in Masters in Computer Application (MCA) and is employed by a non-government organization as animator of widows' groups and is in-charge of small-scale cottage industry. High educational qualification provides opportunities for women like Savitri to be involved more in public life. However, young age becomes a liability to realize the right to a safe and secure life, where Savitri lives alone with only her two children. Only her house, as per her statement, seems to provide a safe haven for her. What Savitri says was also confirmed by a group of widows in a focus group discussion in Viluppuram district: *"Though we seem to feel secure now, it is not like the time when our husbands were with us. All our children are small. Some of us live alone in the family to care for our small children and for everything else. Always we get bad words from our neighbours, for each and everything they quarrel with us; it is also the reason for our insecurity that we have nobody with us to question whatever happens to us or against us"*.

II. Reasons for widows feeling insecure in life

In the case of over 50% of widows who said they never felt safe and secure in public surroundings, the main reason for this was probed. Table 11.1 presents the responses of these 254 women. The reasons listed by the widows are quite spread out indicating the wide range of their experiences regarding the hostile situation in which they live.

SN	Table 11.1: Reasons for widows feeling insecure in life	No.	%	%
1	Because I'm a woman, I feel I can't speak out/argue with men	62	12.5	177 (35.8)
2	Since I am alone with no male support, people think I am defenseless.	61	12.3	
3	Since I am poor economically, people try to use this as opportunity to exploit me.	29	5.9	
4	As I am not educated well or less educated, people use my ignorance.	25	5.1	
5	Since my children are too young, I feel insecure for myself.	26	5.3	72 (14.5)
6	My dwelling being a thatch / mud house (<i>olai kудisai/mann kудisai</i>).	17	3.4	
7	Since I am a widow, I have experienced men harass me with sexual gestures.	14	2.8	
8	As I am young in age, I feel insecure.	10	2.0	
9	I have experienced being stalked by men.	5	1.0	5 (1)
10	Any other	5	1.0	
	Total	254	51.3	
	Negative Reply	241	48.7	
	Total	495	100.0	

The hostile situation referred to above is the patriarchal context in which the widows have to eke out their living and protect their safety. Dealing with the relations of power between men and women, patriarchy is a social framework of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women. It therefore excludes women from decision-making, engenders institutional discrimination and injustice against women and relegates them mainly to the private domestic sphere. In short, it is a social system that gives power and control to men over women, thereby undervaluing the “feminine” and privileging the “masculine”, overrating men as powerful and superior, and underrating women as powerless and inferior.

Viewed in this perspective, the responses of the widows are significant in the sense that they refer to the one important perspective that society in general, and men in particular, have of them and as believed by them. Cutting across all the 254 responses of widows, the widows are perceived as weak and defenceless in the eyes of society in general and men in particular, and, therefore, are viewed as vulnerable to exploitation of any kind.

For 177 widows (35.8%) (see Table 11.1), their insecurity originates from being unable to speak out or argue with men; or because of being poor and, therefore, subjected to exploitation; or because of being uneducated and hence ignorant of important matters of life; or because of being alone with no male support as pointed out by the widows of Tiruppur district in a focus group discussion: *“In general, we feel safe and secure in life. However, when we compare with the life we had when our husbands were alive, today we feel scared in the absence of our husbands. For example, when we travel somewhere and if we have to return late in the night, we feel scared. The mere presence of our husbands always ensured safety, support and*

confidence to face life no matter whether our husbands are sick or healthy, good or bad, caring or not caring.”

As for 72 widows (14.5%), life has become insecure for them due to the young age of children and, therefore, absence of support system in the family; or because of living in insecure thatched or mud houses. As the widows from Kancheepuram district said in a focus group discussion, *‘we are afraid of sleeping at night for fear that someone would enter the house and therefore we don’t have the feeling of safety which we used to have when our husbands were alive’*. Otherwise, as narrated by the widows of Nagapattinam district in a focus group discussion, it was the fear of sexual harassment due to their young age whenever they move out of their houses:

As long as we are with our family and our people at home, there is no problem. But our safety is at risk when we go out of our house. The words that some men use is really scaring, as for example, ‘Would you like to come? How much do you expect?’ Especially in the evenings, we feel more scared. We feel alone. Even at day time, everything has to be done by us only for our family well-being. But because of poor livelihood conditions, we are unable to take care of our children very well. However, we cannot but have to go out to manage our day-to-day life. When all is said and done, our voice is our only strength. If we keep mum, we are sure to be taken for granted.

Similar situations of sexual harassment also occur in work places as told by Rajakumari of Chennai district during an individual interview. To the question whether she felt protected at all, she said:

No, I don’t feel safe at all. A man can go anywhere, but women, especially widows, are not safe at all. I have faced a lot of incidents of sexual harassment. For instance, in my first job as a coolie worker, I was abused by my co-workers. When I reported it to the manager and the higher authorities, they too behaved similarly and advised me to ‘adjust’. When I resisted, they gave me tough tasks. The harassment was so bad, I couldn’t continue to work. Then one day I slapped the manager who misbehaved with me and left the job. That was the first time, I revolted in my life. I did it to protect myself.

In the case of five other widows, insecurity for them has arisen due to such factors as harassment from an alcohol addicted son, or lack of a house of their own that could provide them safety, or a house with no proper door to provide safety from sexual harassment by government officials. In this respect, what the widows said with regard to sexual harassment by different professional employees is worth noting here. In the focus group discussion in Ramanathapuram district one widow said: *“When I filed an application in the District Collectorate for employment, the concerned official appeared to talk to me with full concern and took all the required details from me but later harassed me sexually over the phone”*. Another widow said: *“A bank officer called me at 10 p.m. and said that he would book a room for both of us and in return he promised to do me a favour regarding my application for loan*

to the bank". A third widow shared her experience of sexual harassment by a government hospital doctor who "called me after 10 p.m. and said that he would be interested in having sexual relationship with me".

The conclusions from the analysis of the data in Table 11.1 are four-fold: First, patriarchy denies women their identity, dignity, freedom and independence in public life when reaching the stage of widowhood to such extent as to objectify them for easy domination and exploitation by society in general and male members in particular. This is testified by Kamatchi of Kancheepuram district in an individual interview with her:

Women are valued as a person only when they have thali (marital necklace around the neck). The moment she loses it, she doesn't receive respect in society. It is a sign that we don't have a man to protect us and, therefore, we can be treated badly as objects. Men are considered superior to women. Hence, when there is no man in the family, the widow does not get any respect. Perpetrators are there everywhere. It is mostly the men who would treat us badly. They think they are more powerful and we are powerless, because our husbands are not there with us.

Secondly, patriarchy cuts the roots of various support systems provided by society – social base (family and kinship), economic structures (livelihood sources and commercial enterprises) and cultural resources (beliefs and values) whose sustainability and maintenance the widows had hoped for when they got married;

Thirdly, patriarchy keeps widows living with fear and anxiety whenever they move around in the public domain, and even in the private sphere of their home;

Fourthly, patriarchy therefore becomes a challenge for civil society and state institutions to provide effective and lasting protection measures to widows, facilitate sustainable and integrated development projects for the empowerment and enhancement of their dignity, and enable their personal potentials and skills to protect their freedom and independence.

The question, therefore, arises now as to what extent the widows interviewed are aware of the legal protection measures available in the country and how they were able to access information about these legal resources.

III. Awareness and Knowledge of Legal Protection Measures

Multiple responses were sought from the 495 widows as to whether they were aware of, or knowledgeable about, the legislation listed in Table 11.2. From the responses, it is clear that a large number of them are unaware of such legislations. Confirming this, the widows in Viluppuram, Karur and Tiruppur districts said identically in their focus group discussions: "We are not aware of the legal facilities of the government, nor its welfare or development schemes." Similar situation has been the case of widows who were individually interviewed, as for example, Saguntala of Theni district who, living with her mother and children, working

in a women's college and feeling safe within the four walls of the institution, not interacting much with her neighbours and relatives, and working from morning till evening in the college and going home immediately thereafter, said:

I don't know much about any protection mechanisms for widows. I do not have any exposure to the outside world as I mostly remained at home. Therefore, I have no idea about what schemes exist, whom to approach, etc. Even to get the death certificate of my husband, I had to struggle a lot. Recently, I heard about the pension scheme for widows. However, I didn't make any effort to get a widow's certificate or widow's pension amount because I don't know the procedure for application and, secondly, I don't have the time to run around as I have a full-time job in the college.

S. No	Table 11.2: Knowledge of Laws	No. of Widow Respondents
1	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MNREGA)	208
2	The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986)	194
3	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005	125
4	The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013	115
5	Hindu Widows Remarriage and Property Act, 1989	98
6	Right to Information Act 2005	71
7	SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989	71
8	Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956	39

Among those who claimed awareness of government protection measures, the largest area of knowledge for 208 widows was MNREGA, thereby indicating income security as their top most concern. This is not surprising given their poverty situation which necessitates them to become aware of this legislation in looking for opportunities to sustain their livelihood. That the Dowry Prohibition Act is known to 194 women may be attributed to the prevailing awareness and understanding in society regarding the negative consequences of the practice of dowry, especially for families with poor educational and economic background.

What is surprising, however, is the low level of awareness among the widows regarding three important legislations dealing with three forms of violence – domestic violence (125 responses), sexual harassment in the workplace (115 responses) and caste-based atrocities (71 responses). In the absence of specific data to explain this low level of awareness and knowledge, the prevailing context of patriarchal oppression and exploitation that presents little opportunity for the widows to become aware of such legislations cannot be ignored. This reflection leads us to consider, therefore, what have been the sources of their awareness and knowledge of these legal protection measures.

IV. Sources of Awareness and Knowledge of Legal Protection Measures

Table 11.3 indicates multiple sources of their awareness and knowledge. Out of 495 widows-respondents, only a small number of them, ranging from 192 to 24, indicated the sources from which they learnt about legal protection measures. The majority (192 widows) have accessed their knowledge from watching mass media channels and social media messages. This shows the extent of influence of media technology on the widows and indicates, therefore, the possibility of using this medium by civil society and government agencies for awareness education purposes in future.

The next source is non-governmental organizations for 152 widows, as illustrated by Rajakumari of Chennai district in her interview:

Earlier in my life I didn't have any clue about any such protection mechanisms. All I knew was the oppressive socio-cultural codes and regulations imposed on widows by society. It was only after I attended the College Outreach Program for Widows, I became aware of such legal mechanisms. However, the existing protection mechanisms are not enough. Widows need protection within the family, society, and workplace. In fact, the widows should form a collective. The Widows' Sangam we have today, of which I am a member, has more than 1500 members and gives us certain power and authority to defend our rights.

S. No	Table 11.3: Source of Knowledge of Legal Protection Measures	No. of Widow Respondents
1	From watching mass media and social media programs (TV, Youtube, Whatsapp, etc.)	192
2	Attending NGOs' training programs	152
3	From my involvement in relatives' / friends' issues	50
4	From my involvement in issues concerning myself	42
5	Attending govt. conducted training programs	31
6	Any others (specify)	24

While it is true that civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations, serve as important agencies bringing about social change by organizing awareness programs, there are many other marginalized social groups, including widows, who may not have the opportunity to access such opportunities. For them, it is only personal life experiences which push them into a situation where they cannot but necessarily learn to cope with life. This has been the case for 92 widows whose personal experiences of involvement in their own issues or those of their relatives and friends that have been the sources of awareness and learning. In fact, this is what happened to Kalyani of Ramanathapuram district, who, during a personal interview with her, testified: *"While I know in general about certain protection mechanisms that are available for women, I never knew any specific ones dealing with widows except for the widow pension scheme. But after my house was burnt, I started to learn about certain protection mechanisms. Yes, now I realize the government should protect widows, and most importantly, the government should create awareness about such mechanisms and provide a helpline for widows."*

What Kalyani mentioned about the role of the government is very pertinent here in the light of the data shown in Table 11.3. Of the 495 widows, only 31 said that they became knowledgeable about the legal protection mechanisms through government conducted training programs. This raises the question as to whether the role of the government has been only minimal, or whether the widows were not interested in, or aware of, government conducted programs. Whatever be the case, one thing is clear, namely, that on the part of the government more pro-active measures are needed to get as many numbers of widows as possible to avail of legal education programs.

Various other sources of information were accessed by 24 widows to some or great extent about the legal protection measures. These sources are said to include: MNREGA work sites where women gather to work, membership in self-help groups and widows' sangams, friends and neighbours, association with non-governmental organisations, attending gram sabha meetings, one's own professional work sites, and contacts with political parties and unions. Reading books and studentship in colleges as well as trainers have served as opportune sources for accessing knowledge about the legal protection measures.

A point to be noted here is that whether the awareness programs are conducted by civil society organizations or government agencies, what the widows expect from such training programs is not simply theoretical knowledge about the protection measures. They are keen to know the practicalities of how to use legal provisions so as to confidently cope with any hostile situation. As Pushpa of Kancheepuram said:

Initially, I did not know anything about any of the protection mechanisms. But after I joined the widow's movement and attended some training programs organised by the non-government organization with which I am associated presently, I got to access some knowledge through which I can seek some remedy. However, I don't have the practical knowledge yet to access these remedies and am still struggling to put my knowledge to practice. If the civil society organization takes more effort along this line, then I may understand and put into practice the protection mechanisms.

What Pushpa said seems pertinent when one considers the importance of such practical knowledge whenever the widows have to access police stations to get remedial measures related to issues of safety and security.

V. Accessing Police Stations

Contrary to the prevalent assumption that the effect of the patriarchal system's weight on widows would be that they may not dare, or even be willing, to access the law enforcement machinery for legal protection and justice, the data presented in Table 11.4 show that close to one-fourth of the widows (114 widows) have approached the police stations during the past five years (2017-22). This indicates the widows' potential to manifest their freedom and independence when faced with unsafe situations.

Table 11.4: Whether accessed police stations in the last 5 years		
Response	No.	%
Yes	114	23.0
No	377	76.2
Total	491	99.2
No response	4	.8
Total	495	100.0

Of these 114 widows who approached the police, 57 (50%) went to the police station only once, 26 (22.9%) twice, 11 (9.6%) thrice and 20 (17.5%) more than three times. Notwithstanding this limited data, it conveys three important messages. The first is that even though conditioned by hostile surroundings, they do approach the police stations; secondly, their motivation for survival forces them to break the barriers of the private sphere of families and relatives and seek justice in the public sphere; and, thirdly, even where repeated offences occur, they do persist in their desire to access police assistance, as happened to Sundari from The Nilgiris district:

Because it was considered ill-omen that I walked along a pathway as a widow, I was humiliated and harassed by my neighbours. For me, it was not a mistake to walk along the public pathway but they harassed me and my children mentally in many ways. One of my neighbours even connected me with a man for alleged sexual acts and spoke ill of me, humiliated and insulted me, and even snapped off the jewellery from my neck and beat me. This made me rush to the police station along with my children. When the police interrogated me and those who attacked me, the perpetrators could not produce any evidence against me. Hence, the police threatened them with dire consequences and sent them away. But then the neighbours did not let go off the problem and continued fighting with me daily in the morning and evening near my house.

Due to such continuous harassment and fights, my daughter started suffering mentally and physically. Seeing this, the neighbours came to her and tried to change her mind against me. Again, my son and I went to the police station and in the police station those who accused me threatened my son asking, "Have you come to take a video of us?" Even the police threatened him by looking at the mobile phone in his pocket. Then, unfortunately, the police told me that I should leave my present house and shift to another house or another town if I want safety and security from these perpetrators.

This episode of Sundari brings us to the consideration of what brings the widows to the police stations. When asked for what purposes they accessed police stations (Table 11.5), the majority (59 widows) mentioned some issues pertaining to themselves or to their household, a small number (20 widows) referred to the problems of relatives and friends, and only 4 widows made references to issues connected to the widows' sangam or movement. A further 45 widows mentioned specific issues which fall under eight categories: (i) those related to husband's death under suspicious circumstances or accidents; (ii) domestic violence caused by suspicious relationships or liquor addiction; (iii) children's marital conflicts, sibling quarrels,

children's missing cases and employment issues; (iv) conflicts with in-laws' families regarding divorce and re-marriage proposals and property matters; (v) conflicts with neighbours on property trespass and sibling quarrels; (vi) theft of animals in the field and money at home; (vii) alleged murder case; and (viii) seeking permission to conduct public meetings.

Table 11.5: Purpose of approaching police stations		
S. No	Purpose	
1	For an issue pertaining to myself	59
2	For an issue pertaining to others (relatives & friends)	20
3	For an issue pertaining to Sangam/ <i>Iyakkam</i> (people's organization/people's movement)	4
4	Any other issue	45

Appreciating their courage to approach the police stations in situations of conflict, it is pertinent to find out how the widows were treated by the police. From each widow who accessed a police station, two main responses were sought as to how they were treated by police officers (Table 11.6).

Table 11.6: Behaviour of police officers at the police station		
S. No.	Types of behaviour patterns of Police	
1	Treated with dignity and respect	94
2	Helpful by listening well and filing the case	33
3	Extended physical protection from the accused	26
4	Used threatening language against me	6
5	Used caste based abusive language against me	1
6	Any other (specify)	9

To the credit of the police, encouraging responses came from the widows. As seen in Table 11.6, 94 widows said they were treated with dignity and respect, 33 appreciated the police for being helpful by listening to their complaints and filing cases, and 26 widows said the police extended physical protection for them from the accused. In certain situations, however, the widows were astute enough to make the police perform their duty with alacrity and for this to happen they approached the police with the support of their widows' movement or a non-governmental organization. To the credit of Leelavathi of Nagapattinam district who said:

In those days, I was afraid to be alone and do things by myself. Hence, I used to get the help of my elder sister and nephew. But now I have confidence to oppose all such harassment and torture. When I went to the police station to make a complaint against the man who harassed me, the police did not accept my complaint. Then again, I went to the police station with the help of the non-governmental organization supporting our struggles. This time the police warned the man who harassed me and got a written apology from him. For some time, he did not disturb me. After some time, however, he started to harass me again. Then this time I approached the local Panchayat President. He helped me out. This is how every day

I am going through a lot of problems related to my safety. But in course of time, I have gained strength and confidence. Hence, I am now ready to face any opposition or untoward incident.

On the other hand, for seven widows, their experience was the opposite: six experienced threats and one faced caste-based abuse from the police. There were also nine other widows who had the following tales of how the police mistreated them:

- *The police did not listen to my complaint properly; they even delayed in responding to me.*
- *Because I am a widow, they did not accept my complaint.*
- *My complaint about my missing son was not accepted; rather, they only said that he would return to me.*
- *They would not even give me the original First Information Report.*
- *They forced me to change my original complaint.*
- *They did not listen to my complaint properly, and instead asked me to come back again and again.*
- *They made me and my accused sit together and speak on equal terms without inquiring with me separately about my case.*

Apart from these 16 widows, there were others also who underwent such negative experiences. One such case was Meenakshi of Ramanathapuram district, who said in an interview: *“When my house was burnt, I filed a complaint. But the police didn’t take it seriously as I delayed a bit in filing my complaint. After a while, I gave up as it was too difficult to persistently follow it up. I felt sad that I couldn’t file any discrimination cases for other issues, too.”* There is also another widow’s case mentioned in a focus group discussion in Kancheepuram district: *“I went to the police station for a property issue against my brother-in-law. The Inspector asked for money as bribe and he said he would sort it out. I gave Rs.6000/-. Then the police did the inquiry. But then the Inspector advised me to enter into compromise with my brother-in-law without resolving the issue in my favour as per the norms of justice and fair play.”*

VI. Need of Security and Protection Measures

In the light of the data presented at the beginning of this chapter that over 50% of the widows felt unsafe and insecure, a discussion on the need of security and protection measures becomes pertinent. The widow-respondents were asked, based on their situation, if they thought there should be (i) legislation to safeguard widows from harm and provide them protection, and (ii) certain policies to help them develop their livelihood?

Table 11.7: Should there be a legislation to safeguard widows from harm and provide then protection, and help them develop their livelihood?		
Responses	No.	%
Yes	481	97.2
No	11	2.2
Total	492	99.4
No response	3	.6
Total	495	100.0

As shown in Table 11.7, of the total 495 respondents, barring 14 (11 said ‘no’ and 3 did not respond), all the others (481 widows) gave an affirmative response. This indicates a near overwhelming positive response, including from those who said earlier they felt secure and safe, to the need of legislation specifically to safeguard and protect them, as widows, from any kind of harm. It also shows the equal need for policies that would help them develop their livelihood, which in course of time would enhance their wellbeing and self-confidence to enable them live with dignity and rights. Now the point to reflect on is what would be the concrete and practical elements of such legislative and policy measures.

VII. Proposals for Security, Protection and Development Measures

1. Four Levels of Measures

A total of 56 widows participating in focus group discussions in eight districts (Nagapattinam, Karur, Ramanathapuram, Viluppuram, Sivaganga, Kancheepuram, Theni and Tiruppur) came up with four kinds of proposals to safeguard their rights:

a) At the Legislative level: The predominant proposal refers to the enactment of an exclusive and effective legislation, similar to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (POA Act). The proposed law should (a) be a deterrent to the perpetrators of discrimination and violence against widows; (b) ensure their safety, protection and empowerment; and (c) abolish all oppressive socio-cultural practices, including their being branded or stigmatized as widows, ‘accursed’ or ‘ill omens’. The expectation is that such legislation would serve as a protection measure for *‘the generations of widows who would come after us and who would not suffer the hardships that we had suffered’*.

b) At the Executive level: First, given the four-fold intersectionality of the rights denials faced by the widows (caste status-economic deprivation-patriarchy-widowhood) in their daily lives, a high expectation is that an independent Ministry of Widows should be set up in both the State and Union Governments and that a helpline, friendly to widows and accessible to them in all situations, should be created. Secondly, very much aware of the importance of economic development in empowering and enhancing the widows’ dignity, independence and social status in society, the widows underlined the role of the government in providing housing facilities, creating employment opportunities, promoting small-scale commercial enterprises,

clearing debt burdens, facilitating home-based income generating business and ensuring legal help for widows.

c) At the Civil Society level: While lamenting over the lack of social space in general for widows to come together as a movement or *sangam* in order to collectively secure their rights, the widows of Ramanathapuram district recalled how having an organization for themselves had helped many of them to better their livelihood. Echoing them are the widows of Sivagangai district who spoke with pride about having managed to obtain some of the entitlement certificates from the government officials through their *sangam*. Based on their positive experiences, they affirmed that widows' organizations are very necessary to fight for their rights and that *'only through these sangams we come to know where we should go to obtain our entitlements and how we should put up fights collectively.'* In a similar vein, the widows of the Irular Iyakkam (Irular people's movement) in Viluppuram district are proud of the fact that *'people in our neighbourhood are afraid to speak ill of us when we go out for training or protest because we have developed self-confidence to face life's challenges; we feel secure because we are part of this Iyakkam'.* The point underlined by these success stories here is the urgent need for assistance to widows in organizing themselves into movements/*sangams* and this could be a priority concern for civil society organizations.

d) At the personal level: While legislative measures provide protection, and executive policies promote socio-economic and livelihood needs, people's movements enhance empowerment processes. The latter is what the widows of Ramanathapuram underlined to be the goal of the widows' liberative process towards the realization of their identity and dignity, freedom and independence, namely, the widows' self-dependence and self-assertion to face life with courage and determination. This goal must be achieved by the widows themselves. They are the ones who ultimately must take their destiny in their hands. In their own words: *"Widows should be brave and we shouldn't bother what others say. Our life is in our hands."* The same train of thought was evident with the widows in Karur district:

Over a period of time, we have built self-confidence in ourselves to face our day-to-day life. However, it is true that in times of difficulties, we feel the absence of our husbands. Now we have learnt that until and unless we ourselves get out on the road, nobody will help us. If we have to manage our life, take care of our children and address all our personal and domestic needs, then we have no other choice but to swim across the river by ourselves. Our children are dependent on us, and so at least for their sake, we will have to bear all the difficulties we face in our lives.

2. Elements of a Comprehensive Legislation and Policy for Widows

Each of the widow-respondents was asked what they thought should be the key elements of a legislation and policy framework to protect and promote their rights as widows. Almost all 495 widows responded with a total of 749 suggestions, which are collated below.

VIII. Proposals Regarding Constituent Elements of the Envisaged Legislation and Policy Framework

Part I. Principles and Values

The envisaged legislation and policy for widows should be based on the following principles and values:

- a) Ensure equal treatment and non-discrimination, self-respect and dignity, freedom, self-reliance and independence for widows.
- b) Provide protection from all forms of social discrimination and exclusion from families and society.
- c) Replace mental depression with comfort and confidence through emotional accompaniment.
- d) Ensure priority assistance for development and security in all areas of life.
- e) Prioritize livelihood assistance and support to remove loneliness and insecurity.
- f) Ensure protection measures that will enable widows and their children move around outside their home with freedom and courage.
- g) Ensure implementation of laws and policies in practice rather than keep them on paper only.

Part II. Practical Elements

1. Abolition of Discriminatory Socio-Cultural Practices

- a) Give preference to widows in attending auspicious public functions.
- b) Abolish all kinds of traditional socio-cultural practices that affect the dignity and self-respect of widows.
- c) Abolish the last rites functions for widows at husband's death and funeral.
- d) Do away with superstitious practices against widows.
- e) Ensure protection measures to widows, as for all citizens, when going to work, at the workplace and anywhere in public.
- f) Ensure that widows' parental as well as in-laws' families in particular and society in general recognize their independent decision-making on all matters.
- g) Recognize widows' equal right of freedom to participate in any public functions.

2. Access to Welfare Schemes

- a) Plan and implement properly the various welfare schemes meant specifically for the development of widows.
- b) Provide financial incentives as part of the welfare schemes.
- c) Ensure widows' pension to widows if they do not enter into second marriage within six months to one year after the husband's demise.
- d) Increase widows' pension at regular intervals in keeping with the cost of living.

3. Access to Housing Facilities

- a) Provide free house-sites in widows' name.
- b) Enact free and better housing scheme for widows with increased financial resources.

- c) Ensure housing loan with minimum interest for widows interested in building houses by themselves.
- d) Provide all housing amenities including toilet, water, sewage and electricity facilities.

4. Access to Employment

- a) Give preference to widows in government jobs.
- b) Provide employment opportunities in the private sector.
- c) Ensure employment for widows with no age bar.

5. Access to Business Enterprises

- a) Work out schemes exclusively for widows' economic and business development.
- b) Provide different types of training related to self-employment enterprises.
- c) Ensure financial assistance to start self-employment enterprises.
- d) Allot interest-free bank loans for doing business enterprises.
- e) Provide business loans with government grant.
- f) Ensure toll free numbers with government assistance for any development schemes or protection measures.

6. Access to Remarriage

- a) Enable widows to be able to freely re-marry if they choose.
- b) Provide employment to men who enter into marriage with widows.
- c) Ensure protection and safety to widows who enter into inter-caste marriages.
- d) Provide educational scholarships to children born of re-marriage.

7. Protection against Violence

- a) Enact a separate law on prevention of atrocities against widows.
- b) Make verbal abuse against widows a severely punishable offence.
- c) Make caste-based verbal abuse an offence that is non-bailable for at least six months.
- d) Make teasing or joking in a derogatory manner against widows a punishable offence.
- e) Include in the law the use of the word 'widow' as an offence.
- f) Make sexual harassment against widows and their children a non-bailable and severely punishable offence.
- g) Ensure that widows are not driven away from their in-laws' home after the husbands' demise.
- h) Make any damage or destruction to widows' property a severely punishable offence.
- i) Make any violation of widows' right to safety and security a punishable offence.
- j) Provide life sentence for those who violate widows' rights.
- k) Provide protection mechanisms for widows against any accused persons or offenders.

8. Access to Psychological well-being

- a) Provide widows with counselling and guidance, and legal assistance.

9. Abolition of Alcohol Sale

- a) Ensure total abolition of sale of alcohol by the government machinery.

10. Access to Right to Property

- a) Ensure that no one expropriates the property of widows.
- b) Ensure widows' right to own their husbands' property.

11. Children's Welfare

- a) Provide government's free health benefits to widows and their children.
- b) Ensure permanent employment to the widows' children.
- c) Ensure government's educational scholarships for the children of widows.
- d) Ensure that government makes travel arrangements for widows' children to go to school in a safe and secure environment.
- e) Ensure electricity facility at home for children's education.
- f) Ensure safety and protection measures for widows' children in public space.
- g) Discount all educational loans for widows' children.

12. Access to Right to Political Participation

- a) Provide space for widows to contest in elections.

13. Abolition of Bribing Practice

- a) Stop the collection of bribes from widows by any government departments.
- b) Provide government jobs to widows without any bribes.
- c) Stop rejecting petitions of widows submitted to government agencies.

14. Functioning of Police and Court Machinery

- a) Ensure that the police and court mechanisms take appropriate and immediate action on widows' complaints.
- b) Ensure that police personnel treat young widows with care and concern, and provide sufficient protection and safety measures.
- c) Ensure that police stations provide protection and safety measures for all widows in general.

15. Separate Ministry and Department for Widows

- a) Set up an independent Ministry, Department and Administrative Centres in the Union and State Governments with adequate authority and responsibility in order to plan, publicize and implement government schemes for widows with adequate budget allocations.
- b) Ensure that all Departments and Administrative Centres receive the petitions of widows for all development and protection purposes.

IX. Important findings

An overview of the analysis of the data brings out some significant findings:

(1) Status of widows' safety and security and the reasons

That just over 50% (254 widows, or 51.3%) of the widows surveyed felt unsafe and insecure in both the private and public sphere must be a matter of concern to all civil society members and government policy makers. This is especially so in the case of young widows and widows living alone or only with their young children. It is patriarchal power relations that have robbed the widows of resources and external social support structures, which have made them defenseless to withstand attacks to their identity, dignity, freedom and independence.

(2) Status of awareness of legal protection measures

On the one hand, there is no legislation to deal exclusively with the safety and security of widows or their livelihood and development-related rights. On the other hand, it is a matter of concern that, of the 495 widows surveyed, only a small number (ranging from 39 to 194 widows) are aware of one or the other law protecting women's marital life or security. Of course, how much knowledgeable they are about these legislations is another matter to be explored. More surprising is that more widows (208 widows) are aware of MNREGA legislation that deals with income generation than laws dealing with marital or security related concerns.

(3) Reasons for low awareness of legal measures

The major reason behind the widows' low knowledge of marital or security related laws can be traced to the fact that state institutions have not given much publicity or conducted awareness programs on such laws. While the widows have some knowledge about these laws from their involvement in issues related to their own lives or that of friends and relatives, and a little more knowledge from training programs offered by civil society organizations, the data shows the major source of knowledge has been the mass media and social media. Needless to say, such media-based knowledge can never be as deep as that provided by systematic training and education. This training should be imparted effectively by civil society organizations and government institutions.

(4) Status of widows approaching police stations

One-fourth of the widows (114 widows) have approached the police stations, disproving the prevailing impression that widows are frightened to access the law enforcement machinery. At the same time, this number is disproportionate to the number of widows who would have faced discrimination and violence and therefore could have approached the police for remedial assistance. This point of view is strengthened by the large number of widows who reported experiences of discrimination and violence during the focus group discussions, interviews and informally during the survey data collection. On a positive note, a good number of widows who accessed the police stations mentioned that they had been treated with dignity and respect and that the police had been helpful in filing cases and providing protection. Again,

this has to be balanced against the many instances mentioned during personal interviews and focus group discussions about police indifference to the widows' complaints, treating them with disdain, using caste-based abusive language against them, demanding bribes, or pressuring them to enter into compromises instead of following the due process of law.

(5) Proposals regarding need of security and protection measures

That almost all the widows (481/485) affirmed the need for specific legislative protection for widows indicates the depth of insecurity they experience daily. It is also a loud and clear call to state institutions to heed to their voice. Moreover, their expectations, spelt out in detail above, point to a number of significant measures required to ensure their protection and equal rights: Abolition of Social-cultural Practices, Access to Welfare Schemes, Access to Housing Facilities, Access to Employment, Access to Business Enterprises, Access to Right to Re-marriage, Protection against Violence, Access to Psychological Rehabilitation, Abolition of Alcohol Sale, Access to Right to Property, Children's Welfare, Access to Right to Political Participation, Abolition of Bribing Practice, Effective functioning of Police and Court Machinery, and Separate Ministry and Department for Widows.

Of these practical elements, the establishment of a separate Ministry, Departments and Administrative Centres at the executive governmental level to look after the safety and development schemes for widows is their loud and clear message to state institutions of their responsibility to render full commitment to the welfare of widows. The need to organize themselves into movements/*sangams* for their empowerment and to claim their rights is also another clear message to the civil society organizations working especially for advancing gender equality and empowerment.

CHAPTER 12

MANIFESTATIONS OF COURAGE AND RESILIENCE

Be confident. Stay strong. Self-confidence is the only strength we have and, I would say, don't give it up in any situation. Make your own decisions. Don't allow anyone to decide on your behalf. Don't lament to yourself that you lost your husband. This is just part of life. Stand up and move on. Love yourself. Whether your husband was good or bad, there was a feeling that someone is there for us. Since he is not there anymore, it is we who need to care for ourselves more. – Meenakshi, Ramanathapuram district

In the previous chapter discussing security and protection measures, mention was made of the traditional patriarchal perspective of widows as 'weak and defenceless' and, therefore, vulnerable to exploitation in many ways. While this patriarchal understanding influences the experiences of widows, it is important to examine the potential of widows manifesting their courage and resilience in their day-to-day lives as human beings with freedom and independence, especially when facing challenges to their lives or those of their children.

I. Affirmation of Courage

When asked if they have had occasions to face life with courage as a widow, an overwhelming majority (454 widows, or 91.7%) affirmed they have had such opportunities. Meenakshi, referred to above, was one of them. From Ramanathapuram district, aged 40, belonging to Most Backward Community (MBC), a higher secondary school graduate, living alone with one daughter and working in a non-governmental organization as Program Coordinator, she explained that she had faced many kinds of discrimination while attending functions at relatives' houses or when she approached government officers. Such repeated experiences have emboldened her to confront people and challenge them by asking, *"If a widow adorns herself with flower on the head or bindi (ornamental dot) on the forehead, how does it affect you? Why are you bothered?"* She then added, *"When we confront people straight to the face, they would go silent."*

II. Areas of manifestation of courage

Those who gave affirmative answer were asked what three main actions they had taken on matters which affected their life as a widow. To elicit clear and specific responses from them, five areas were delineated for the widows to respond: (i) socio-cultural, (ii) economic, (iii) gender, (iv) political, and (v) human dignity and self-respect. Under each of these five areas, four important practices were listed, totaling 20 practices.

Two trends emerge from the data presented in Tables 12.1-5. First, despite widowhood resulting in their being left to fend for themselves regarding various tasks and responsibilities in the domestic sphere as well as in public spaces, widows have shown courage in engaging themselves in all the five areas and transcending the restrictions and limitations imposed by

patriarchal cultural mindset and behaviour. Secondly, while their actions to bring changes into their lives are spread out in all the five areas, three draw special attention, namely, socio-cultural, gender, and human dignity and self-respect:

- In the socio-cultural area (Table 12.1), widows in general are not welcome to any social function for allegedly bringing ill-omens to all those participating in such functions, much less to organize these events for others to participate. However, 116 widows have exhibited courage in participating in functions of their families, relatives and friends against all opposition and, more importantly, 136 widows have shown determination by themselves organizing auspicious events for their children and grandchildren.
- In the area related to gender (Table 12.2), a significant number (293 out of 495 widows) have chosen to remain single without re-marriage for various reasons, the predominant one being their commitment to care for their children.
- In matters concerning human rights and self-respect (Table 12.3), 149 widows said that they have been bold in questioning those who do injustice to women/widows, and 128 are proud of the fact that they have gradually built up their material and financial assets to ensure their security and some social status in society.

A detailed analysis of these three as well as the remaining two areas brings to light the ways in which the 454 widows have exhibited determination and resilience while engaging themselves in their day-to-day life.

III. Practices manifesting courage

1) Socio-cultural practices

In a male-dominated caste-based society wherein a woman is considered dependent on a man, be it her father, husband or son, her personal identity is defined and circumscribed by the identities of these men. Thus, with the demise of her husband, the widow is believed to lose whatever identity she has as an independent person with dignity and rights. She is also considered in ordinary parlance as having ‘swallowed’ (முழுங்கிவிட்டாள் – in Tamil) or ‘killed’ (கொன்றுவிட்டாள் – in Tamil) her husband thereby becoming an ill omen or curse to her marital family in particular and society in general.

S. No	Table 12.1: Socio-cultural practices	No. of widows
1	I organized auspicious events for my children and grandchildren	136
2	Participated in all the auspicious functions of my family, relatives & friends against all opposition	116
3	Adorned myself with ornaments, flowers, <i>bindi</i> (dot on forehead) and colour & printed sarees	81
4	Refused to perform customary rituals following my husband’s death	20

This belief, maintained by all social/caste groups, is socially sanctioned by tradition, manifested in the customary rituals performed formally on widows on the occasion of the husband's death, and approved by those gathered at the ritual function. Stigmatized, therefore, as one with no individual identity and excluded from society, a widow can neither adorn herself, nor allowed to participate in auspicious events, nor organize any auspicious public functions for which others will be invited, nor perform rituals at such functions – all because of alleged ill omen, curse or misfortune falling on those participating in the auspicious functions.

Given the rigidly organized social structure in which widows live, and the attendant censure they face if they cross traditional boundaries, performance of the customary rituals on the occasion of the husband's death is a commonly accepted, or even imposed, practice in all caste and religious groups. A rare exception is in the case of very young women or pregnant women. Seen in this perspective, it is highly significant that 20 widows said (Table 12.1) they refused to perform the customary rituals following their husbands' death. For instance, a widow from Nagapattinam district shared in a focus group discussion: *"My husband when alive was with another woman but after his death my relatives forced me to perform the customary practices but I refused to do them"*.

In terms of adorning themselves, 81 widows stated (Table 12.1) that they had taken the stand to deck themselves with ornaments, flowers, *bindi* (dot) and wear colour and print sarees, thereby presenting themselves in public as women having a right to express themselves in whatever way they choose. Pushpam of Sivaganga district said: *"I adorn myself with flowers and dot on the forehead. If I have money, I will wear golden ornaments, too. I do it on my own. Seeing me adorning myself, my neighbours (not my relatives but third persons) used to say sarcastically, 'Does she look like a widow?'"*

A large number of women, however, have testified that mainly due to various cultural restrictions rather than genuine bereavement, they have been able to return to their earlier way of adorning themselves only after a long gap of weeks or months. As mentioned by Sumathi of Nagapattinam district:

Being young myself, my maternal uncle did not want me to go through the customary practices at my husband's death. But the relatives from my husband's side forced me to perform them and so my marital necklace (thali) and bangles were removed. But personally, I did not like to go through these kinds of rituals. Therefore, much later in my life I started to keep the dot on my forehead, flowers on my hair and jewelleries on my body after attending an awareness program at Trichirappalli.

Of course, I was not surprised when people of my neighbourhood blamed me for that. But I decided to resume all these practices not for my own sake only but for my children, too. For myself, I felt the need of these practices because when I didn't keep to these practices earlier, my office colleagues started to misbehave with me and forced me to engage in indecent conversation. Hence, all these things provide

me now some safety, and these kinds of harassment from men disturb me from taking care of my children peacefully.

Breaking the socio-cultural stigma of being viewed as ill-omens or cursed, 116 widows boldly participated (Table 12.1) in all the auspicious functions of their families, relatives and friends against all opposition. Moreover, 136 widows (Table 12.1) ventured to organise auspicious events and perform certain social ceremonies for their own children and grandchildren. One such case was a widow in Ramanathapuram district who shared:

I raised my children all alone. On the day of my son's wedding, since I am a widow, my relatives discouraged me from performing the marriage rituals as normally done by parents. Instead, my relatives told my brother-in-law and his wife to do the rituals. But I didn't accept this proposal because my children got their education because of my hard work and sacrifice. And so, I am the only one who has the right to do the parental rituals and I did it. That made me happy.

2) Gender related practices

With regard to gender related practices, as presented in Table 12.2, only 12 widows said they had re-married, even despite strong opposition from relatives, as narrated by a woman from Ramanathapuram district:

There was a time when I used to be so afraid of everything. I used to live like a slave. But after struggling for so many years, now I dare to face life with courage. I invited my husband's family to my daughter's puberty function. But they insisted that, first, I shouldn't go in for a second marriage which I was planning for myself and then only they would come for my daughter's function. I didn't oblige them, but went ahead with my decision to do the second marriage for myself. I am happy now.

Of the 12 widows who had re-married, while eight said they did so willingly with husbands chosen by their parents/relatives, four others selected husbands on their own. Although the number of these widows getting re-married is small, the fact of their re-marriage must be considered significant in a patriarchal context where widowhood is viewed as a curse and that those marrying widows as well as widows who remarry are alleged to have a cursed marital life. In this context, these widows deciding to remarry is no doubt a courageous act, especially in the case of the four widows who selected husbands on their own.

S. No.	Table.12.2: Gender related practices	No. of widows
1	Willingly chose to remain single without re-marriage	293
2	Took to remarriage willingly with husband chosen by my parents/relatives	8
3	Chose husband of my choice for remarriage	4
4	Myself made written complaint to police against sexual advances/assault of men	2

In contrast to these 12 widows who decided to re-marry, a large number of widows (293) preferred to remain single without re-marriage. The main reason was to care for their children. Linked to this is their anxiety as to whether their children would be taken care of well by a second husband or whether their children would relate well with any of their children born of re-marriage. For some other widows, their first marriage was thought to be sufficient. As per a widow from Karur district: *“I am wedded to a person already. I cannot think of anybody else other than my husband. Whether he is alive or not, my husband and my daughter are my only world.”* As for another group of widows, they felt uncertain about whether their second husband would be faithful. According to Easwari from Chennai district: *“I was in a relationship with someone who promised to marry me and take care of my children. But later he cheated on me. Now I don’t trust anyone and don’t want to go for second marriage.”*

There were many other reasons for widows choosing not to re-marry, including an unhappy life with the first husband due to domestic violence or unmitigated alcoholism or serious illness. Despite the challenges involved in living the life of a single woman, some widows also found it worthwhile to experience the freedom of living alone with their children and taking care of them. They wanted to bring them up to attain certain high standards of life which the widows themselves had not been able to reach in their own lives.

3) Human dignity and Self-respect practices

Given the apparent loss of identity and dignity taken away by the socio-cultural rituals at widowhood, it may seem that widows have no way to augment their human and material resources in order to assert their rights and dignity in society. But this has not been the case with the widows surveyed, as shown in Table 12.3.

S. No.	Table 12.3: Human dignity & Self-respect practices	No. of widows
1	Have become bold and frank in questioning those who do injustice to women/widows	149
2	Gradually built up my material and financial assets to project myself as a person of importance in society	128
3	Asserted my right to do what I want and what I wish with my parental family/in-laws/relatives	67
4	Underwent training on various subjects to broaden my knowledge and skills in order to face society with courage and conviction	17

Referring to their right to freedom and independence, 149 widows stated that they have become bold and frank in questioning those who do injustice to women or widows. Stella from Nagapattinam district said, *“Once it so happened that I was travelling by bus when I observed a man trying to touch a girl with bad intention. I immediately reacted and scolded that man in public and saved that small girl.”* In the case of Sundari of the Nilgiris district, having experienced the injustice of constant harassment and insults from her neighbours as being

‘cursed’ whenever she used the nearby pathways, and having found that her appeal to the police did not resolve the problem, she said:

Thereafter, I too made a strong decision that I should talk back, and that if I keep quiet, they will come to fight with me again and again and I cannot live peacefully the rest of my life. So, I, too, started fighting with them. I, too, used the same wrong language they used against me, and now as a result they have reduced their arguments with me. I started to change myself, I started to speak boldly and I started to stand against any problem. In fact, it was women who gave me trouble and at the same time it was the women friendly with me who gave me courage. This is one of the main problems that a woman faces when she becomes a widow. So, other women should stand up and fight their problems like I fought bravely.

During these eight years of my widowed life, I have suffered in many ways and especially in words and in deeds from the people in my neighbourhood. I could not handle this situation and I completely stopped negotiating with them and started opposing them. Later, however, I learnt solid lessons through many experiences; when I know there is nothing wrong with me, then why not I start questioning them, and I am determined to handle all situations with courage. I started raising my voice, too, in support of other women like me.

Similarly, 67 widows mentioned that when opportunities arose, they asserted their rights before their parental families, in-laws and relatives to do what they wanted concerning their lives. There were also 128 widows who, to enhance their social status and affirm their identity as a person of worth and value, took enormous efforts to gradually build their material and financial assets. To be noted are also 17 widows who underwent training on various subjects in order to broaden their knowledge and skills, supporting them in facing society with courage and conviction.

4) Economic practices

What is noteworthy concerning economic practices is that in normal circumstances anything concerning the economic wellbeing of the family is relegated to male family members. The exception, of course, is the case of families falling below or just above the poverty line, where all family members often have to work for the financial upkeep of the family. Matters such as building new houses, getting title deed for house-sites or agri-land, opening business ventures and legally fighting cases for accessing husband’s or ancestral property are ordinarily taken care of by male family members.

S. No	Table 12.4: Economic practices	No. of widows
1	Built a new house for myself after my husband’s demise	52
2	Got <i>patta</i> in my name for house-site/agri-land after my husband’s demise	26
3	Opened a small/medium/big business venture	22
4	Legally fought to get a share of my husband’s property	11

However, widows have disproved this traditional way of thinking and practice. As shown in Table 12.4, a significant number of widows have engaged in the aforementioned activities after the demise of their husbands. In fact, three widows speaking in the focus group discussion in Ramanathapuram district mentioned that they had constructed houses, and one explained how she did three different jobs at the same time [making *idli* (*rice pancake*) batter, selling *idlis* to restaurants, and tailoring] and had three different money-saving plans. All the women in the group said they had provided good education to their children and that after undergoing a lot of struggles they now managed to have three meals a day for themselves and their children.

It appears that their sheer determination to come up in life or to prove themselves has been behind their success in these economic achievements.

5) Political practices

Women's participation in voting in electoral politics has become an acceptable practice now. Similarly, their involvement in such democratic exercises as participating in public rallies or protest marches is on the rise in recent years. One may also add to this the trend of their active involvement in contesting elections which is picking up momentum, especially in the local governance polls, thanks to the 33% reservation in polling seats allotted to women. However, the real exercise of authority as elected office-bearers remains much to be desired both in national and state legislative bodies and in local governance structures. Given this scenario of women's role in the democratic political process, what is the status of the widows surveyed?

S. No	Table 12.5: Political practices	No. of widows
1	Participated in issue-related public protests and rallies	64
2	Expressed my opinions in public in <i>gram sabha</i> meetings	57
3	Myself went to govt. office to present petition regarding my needs/village needs	13
4	Contested panchayat elections as ward member/president	6

Although one might assume that, given the socio-cultural restrictions and economic constraints of their daily lives, widows may not have the means, confidence or time to engage in democratic politics, facts prove otherwise as shown in Table 12.5. The number of widows involved in such political activities may be small. However, their involvement is significant. A total of 64 widows have participated in public protests and rallies, 57 have openly voiced their views in the *gram sabha* meetings, 13 have approached government officials representing their own needs and those of their villages, and six have contested the panchayat elections either as ward members or president. Kamatchi of Kancheepuram district, having had many experiences of discrimination in her life, said:

It is because of these discriminatory experiences I had faced in my life that I contested the election. I thought that would empower me and allow me to do good for other women who suffer like me. And the lesson that I have learnt in my life is

that we need to speak up and stand up for our rights. Don't give up hope. Take courage. Stay confident and express your experience openly. We need to come together and collectively fight for our rights.

What widows mentioned to be behind their active participation in political processes that concerns democratic dissent, freedom of expression, interaction with government officials and contesting panchayat elections were the motivation and awareness programs provided by civil society organizations and the support rendered by movements/*sangams* in which the widows are members. The message to be gleaned from this is that the more such support is given, the more the widows will involve themselves in democratic political processes.

IV. Factors sustaining the Widows' Resilience

While reflecting on the practices manifesting their courage in the five areas mentioned above, a question that comes to mind is what sustains the widows' resilience. Focus group discussions and personal interviews shed some light on this question.

Undoubtedly children are the mainstay of the widows' determination to live and face their daily struggles with courage and conviction. *"Our entire life is for our children; we just live till the end of our life by facing all the struggles in our life for the sake of our children"* is the statement which the widows of Viluppuram district made, and this echoes the sentiment of practically all the other widows surveyed.

Another insight about motivational factors can be gleaned from discussions with widows of Ramanathapuram and Kancheepuram districts. According to them, *"The kind of struggle and obstacles we faced had prepared us to face the situation. The inner feeling to challenge the oppressive norms and oppressors drives us to be successful in life."* What this seems to imply is that for some widows the very struggle to fight against injustice and bring changes in society has given them meaning and has sustained them against all odds in their life.

Yet another factor that sustains the widows has been the successes they had achieved in life and the social recognition they have earned thereafter. During the focus group discussion in Nagapattinam district, all the widows spoke of achievements in their lives: organizing the marriage of their children, settling their children in life, building a house of their own, and arranging and organizing the marriages of their own brothers/sisters. They then added, with some disappointment, *"Since we have proved ourselves as capable of achieving certain things in life, despite being alone, the public does look upon us with respect, and slowly integrates us into society. But there are times when the public discourages us, say, for example, when we want to put our children in a good school, or in English medium, the neighbours discourage us saying we are not capable of doing so."*

V. Important findings

1. The fact that 454 (91.7%) out of the 495 widows said that they have had occasions to face life with courage is a clear indication that, despite the oppressive conditions imposed by caste-based patriarchy, they have affirmed their agency to some or great extent in exercising their freedom and independence, thereby manifesting their identity and dignity as women capable of asserting their rights.
2. In terms of the five areas – socio-cultural, economic, gender, political, and human dignity and self-respect – in which the widows were asked to indicate their agency in action, they indicated their determination and courage to transcend the cultural barriers imposed on them by the caste-based patriarchy with determined pro-active efforts to make their presence felt in all these areas in varying degrees.
3. However, in three areas – socio-cultural, gender, and human rights and self-respect - a significant number of widows have manifested their courage. In the socio-cultural area, 116 out of 495 widows have exhibited courage in participating in the auspicious functions of their families, relatives and friends against all opposition; and more importantly, 136 widows have organized auspicious events for their children and grandchildren. In the gender-related area, 293 widows have preferred to remain single without re-marriage for various reasons, the predominant one being caring for their children, and 149 widows have questioned those who do injustice to women/widows. Finally, 128 widows have gradually built up their material and financial assets to build their social status.

In Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of the data, three messages are evident. First, despite oppressive traditions prevalent in society regarding how widows should behave, they do have the ability and power to manifest their agency in different spheres of life. Secondly, what is required for the full potential of their agency to express itself is free spaces and opportunities. Thirdly, it is incumbent on civil society and state institutions to provide such spaces and opportunities to enable widows exercise their freedom and independence to live with dignity and self-respect. In sum, as Sundari of the Nilgiris district declared:

I have become now determined to act with justice and, therefore, have started to handle any situation with courage and strength. Being a woman living alone is a challenge these days and I have learnt to overcome this challenge. My various experiences have made me a brave woman to face any situation in my own way as it comes by. In the same way, I, too, expect that the other widows also should come forward to solve their problems with courage and determination.

CHAPTER 13

FUTURE HOUSEHOLD NEEDS

Being a widow, I know how important it is to have a support system. So, I want to play a supportive role to other widows. I was instrumental in initiating a sangam for the widows in my parish. I hope this sangam will be a space to encourage widows to live with dignity and demand the government to protect our rights. Importantly, widows should have economic independence. I want to work towards this.

– Rosaline, Ramanathapuram district

Logically flowing from the previous chapter, which considered the resilience of the widows, is to turn to their future needs and hopes, dreams and expectations. This extends especially to their concerns and expectations for their children.

For Rosaline from Ramanathapuram district, her dream to provide a support system to widows stems from the traumatic experience she has had of her husband's suicide when she was only 32 years old and her son's demise barely nine days after her husband's death. This was compounded by the socio-cultural rituals that followed. Aged 40, belonging to the Most Backward Community (MBC) and educated up till 12th standard, she lives with her daughter and earns her living by working in a non-governmental organization as Program Coordinator. Intensely aware of the plight of the widows, she wanted to bring together widows into a *sangam* (association) that would provide them with a space for collective support and action to fight for their rights. At the same time, she is realistic about her needs when she said, *"I need a secure job with a decent salary. Without economic empowerment, it would be difficult to challenge other socio-cultural practices. Economic empowerment gives us self-confidence and strengthens our willpower."*

This chapter examines the thinking of the widows regarding (1) their achievements and successes so far in their life; (2) their future needs and expectations, hopes and dreams; and (3) their concerns about their children.

I. Achievements and successes in life

From what the widows in the focus group discussions and interviews in 11 districts (Nagapattinam, Karur, Ramanathapuram, Viluppuram, Sivagangai, Kancheepuram, Theni, The Nilgiris, Chennai, Dindigul and Tiruppur) shared, their achievements can be listed under the following six areas:

- (1) **Personal life:** managing their lives, despite insurmountable struggles; the very fact of living independently and taking decisions; breaking down social norms and customary practices; feeling proud of joining widows' *sangams*;
- (2) **Children's and relatives' welfare:** providing education for their children despite financial burden and safety concerns; getting their children as well as their brothers-in-

law and sisters-in-law married; purchasing ornaments for their children's marriage; looking after the children of their close relatives; maintaining the family with livelihood necessities;

- (3) **Housing facilities:** procuring house-sites; building or buying or renovating houses for themselves;
- (4) **Employment:** finding small jobs for themselves in a safe environment;
- (5) **Business enterprises:** running small businesses, either home-based or outside home;
- (6) **Loan repayment:** repayment of husband's debt.

Looking into their achievements, what is clearly discernible is that the widows have been focussing more on the household context, that is, what is of immediate value and benefit to them. The focus of their achievements is three-fold: **(i) children's educational welfare, (ii) housing facilities, and (iii) income generation.** This is not surprising given the difficult life situation in which they are placed, namely, their social status as a widow and the attendant insecurity, family status of living alone or with children or parental families, temporary and low-income employment and their low level of education.

Given this circumscribed life condition, it is worthwhile to probe their future needs, hopes and expectations. In this respect, as rights-holders, what messages do they give to civil society organizations and to state institutions as duty-bearers and service-providers?

II. Future household priority needs

Asked what could be the three key household priority needs which they would require in future, it is interesting to see that their responses are very much in consonance with the above three areas which have been their focus in the past and present. Evidence for this is the data presented in Table 13.1, wherein a majority of the widows look for: employment opportunities, either for themselves or their children (338 widows); (ii) housing facilities (288 widows); and (iii) education for their children (194 widows). Following this is the second set of priorities which consists of loan repayment (164 widows), (ii) toilet facility (127 widows) and (iii) food for the household (121 widows). The third set of priorities includes caring for their own ill-health (71 widows), (ii) marriage of their sons (55 widows), and (iii) marriage of their daughters (54 widows).

1) First set of priority needs

a) Employment:

Of the first set of three priority needs, employment opportunities, either for the widows or for their children, is their top requirement indicating thereby the paramount need for income security for family survival and maintenance. A total of 132 widows ranked it as the first priority and 146 as the second priority (see Table 13.1).

S. No.	Table 13.1: Household Concerns	Total number of widows	1 st priority	2 nd priority	3 rd priority
1	Employment opportunity for me and/or children	338	132	146	60
2	House for my household	288	203	57	28
3	Education of my children	194	46	75	73
4	Loan repayment	164	26	32	106
5	Toilet facility	127	39	32	56
6	Food for my household	121	24	75	22
7	Caring for my own ill-health	71	8	34	29
8	Marriage of my son	55	8	34	29
9	Marriage of my daughter	54	8	16	30
10	Other concerns	37	9	3	25

Referring to the need of employment, Rajathi of Theni district stated:

Although I have a job, my salary is very much less. I get only Rs.5000/- per month for my full-time job. I want to have a secure job and for that the government should give priority to widows in employment. With the support of my mother, I am also doing small business at home to make up for my income. Financial stability is the most important safety net that I need at the moment. Hence, it would be helpful if civil society or government provides support to do business on my own. Government should give priority to widows and allocate jobs based on their qualifications. It would be helpful if I get a job as a helper/ teacher in the Anganwadi.

While Rajathi raises the issue of two kinds of employment opportunities, either government jobs or self-run business enterprises, Sheela of Nagapattinam district opted for the latter option without dismissing the other alternative either:

I want to have my own business (e. g. tailoring) in order to ensure a regular income for the upbringing of my children. A very good tailoring machine would be of a great help to me with funding assistance from the government or from any private agency. Or else, I want to go into government job for which I am qualified with MCA degree (Masters in Computer Application). Government can consider the troubles and pains of widows like me and grant them permanent jobs.

b) Housing facilities:

The second major need for the widows is housing, which includes house-site, house and housing amenities. Of the 288 widows who expressed this need, 203 ranked it as their first priority. Susheela from Dindigul district stated that “one’s own house is very necessary for widows like me to be safe” and Rosaline of Ramnathapuram district said she needed “a home of our own to feel being settled down in life”.

c) Children's education:

Education of the children is the first priority for 46 widows, second priority for 75 widows and third priority for 73 widows. While income generation and housing are necessary for the overall wellbeing of the family, one cannot set aside the high stakes many widows placed on their children's education. Although one might think that their motivation may be their maternal interest in and care for the children, or to bring up the next generation to the level to which they themselves did not have the opportunities to reach, or increasing their children's socio-economic security in future, facts seem to prove otherwise. Varied considerations motivate the widows to provide good education to their children with one underlying theme, namely, that children should have a secure, independent and purposeful life. To illustrate this point with a few examples:

- **Rajathi of Theni district wants her daughters to have job security and an independent life:** *"I want both of my daughters educated well and secure a good career that helps them to live an independent life. They should have a career that provides them with a decent income. They should be able to stand on their feet without depending on others. I want to fulfil their aspirations and dreams of what they want to become in life, instead of dumping my ideas on them."*
- **Sheela of Nagapattinam district wants her daughters' high-level education and career to be a proclamation of her achievement to her deceased husband:** *"I want to bring up my children to greater heights. I used to tell my daughter 'You have to serve as a doctor in the very same hospital where your dad passed away.' My reason for this is that he could not fulfil his desire to see his daughter as a doctor when he breathed his last in the emergency ward. I will make my children realize and proclaim that in spite of the absence of their father, I have brought them up well."*
- **Rosaline of Ramanathapuram district wants her daughter's education to enable her to provide support to widows and other marginalized people:** *"I want my daughter to become an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer and support widows and other marginalized people. At the same time, I don't want to impose my ideas. Let her study well and take up the career that she dreams of. She should live an independent life without depending on others."*

Given their insecure widowhood status, their poor socio-economic status and the high level of awareness of their moral responsibility for their children, the three basic livelihood needs – employment, housing and children's education – being their top most concerns is understandable. This is a significant pointer for civil society organizations and state institutions to shape their policy commitments in these three areas thereby aiming at the betterment of the widows' future.

1) Second set of priority needs

Affected by poverty or low incomes, 164 widows are beset with the problem of repaying the loan either incurred by the deceased husbands or the widows themselves. Hence, they often had to face harassment from money lending agencies in this regard. For the next group of 127 widows, their dire need is to build toilets, the absence of which causes physical or sexual insecurity for them. As for another 121 widows, their basic need is food security for their household, without which they and their children suffer hunger and destitution.

Compared to the first set of priority needs, the number of widows indicating the second set of priorities may be less, but the three issues they face – harassment related to loans, physical and sexual insecurity, hunger and destitution – are serious violations of their right to life in general, and right to safety and protection, physical and sexual integrity and decent standard of living in particular.

2) Third set of priority needs

As regards the third set of priority concerns – caring for their own ill-health (71 widows), their sons' marriage (55 widows) and their daughters' marriage (54 widows) – these, too, have serious implications for their own health and the future of their children.

3) Other priority needs

'Other' priority needs mentioned by 37 widows fall more or less under the above mentioned three sets of priorities: (i) accessing employment opportunities and financial assistance for starting business and loan repayment; (ii) accessing housing facilities (house-site and house patta, new house, house repair, protection from house eviction, housing amenities like water, electricity and gas cylinders); (iii) concerns about children's marriage and their future life prospects, medical assistance for children, especially for those with disabilities, continuing education of widows, old age and widows' pension.

III. Hopes and Dreams

Individual interviews with the widows also provided further insights into their thinking about the broader perspectives, hopes and dreams they have for their future. The four narratives below illustrate this while sending out a message that widowhood cannot and should not hinder their development, but rather become a turning point in their life. The widows do only require opportunities, resources and support to begin a new life for themselves and their children.

- **For Malliga of Chennai district, she looks at her future as an opportunity to be a source of support to other widows' empowerment, development and protection:** *"First, I need to work hard to have financial security and that will be a base for a good future. Secondly, I wish to work for the safety of widows. Widows are being sexually abused in their workplaces. Some of them face continuous harassment. I'll fight to create a safe environment for them. Most of the widows don't have safe work environment. If the*

government gives preference to widows, they can have access to safe environment and that would help them live a dignified life. Depending on the educational background and qualification, employment can be created in different sectors.”

- **As for Snega of Nagapattinam district, independent living through business development is her dream:** *“I want to start a grocery shop with the help of my nephew. I want to start this business because I want to stand on my own feet. I don’t want to depend on others. But I don’t want to do this business in my own village as it would bring me lot of problems from my relatives and the villagers. I also dream of constructing a new house and own some land in future. Once I develop my business, I have a dream to adopt a girl child.”*
- **What drives Malar of Karur district is to see the development and welfare of her two daughters to achieve good social standing:** *“I want to have a job which will develop my family’s economic condition. I am living this life just for the sake of my two daughters. I want to make my elder daughter a police officer. I want to make my younger daughter a teacher. I want to complete building my house which is half-way through now. I never want to think of second marriage because I still love [my husband] and miss him a lot despite his illegal affairs when alive.”*
- **The dream of Senthamarai of The Nilgiris District is to come up in life with good social standing, cultivate understanding relationships with relatives and neighbours, and advance the careers of her children:** *“My dream is to work in government sector. Get a good job with a better salary. But for this my educational qualification is too low (10th), so I need to improve it. To live a safe life in the future I need to develop courage in the best way possible. I will create good rapport with my relatives and neighbours. I too will ask them to protect and safeguard me. My son should go and work abroad as he wishes. My daughter should be a brave girl and go for a government job as she desires.”*

IV. Concerns about children

While it is true that the widows, as discussed above, are keen to promote and develop the future of their children, the majority (495 widows) also have certain anxieties and concerns in this regard. Asked to indicate two concerns they considered important for their female and male children, their responses are presented in Table 13.2.

S. No.	Table 13.2: Concerns about Children	Total number of widows	Male	Female
1	Their marriage prospects	212	154	58
2	Their unemployment	123	73	50
3	Their irregular employment	122	56	66
4	Disinterest in education/discontinued education	96	42	54
5	Not respecting widowed mother	57	18	39
6	Their unhappy married life	50	37	13
7	Addiction to liquor/drugs	31	2	29
8	Irresponsible and careless behaviour	11	3	8
9	Any other (specify)	100	72	28

The marriage prospects of their children, especially that of sons, seem to be the greater concern for 212 of the 495 widows. This is interesting to examine alongside the data in Table 13.1, which showed that children's education is the third more important priority of the widows, and the personal interviews described above also indicated how much the widows expect their children to be well settled down in life. The ground reality appears to be that the widows do experience difficulties regarding the marriage prospects of their children, especially their sons.

A similar analysis can be made about the employment prospects of the widows' children. While the data in Table 13.1 indicated employment for themselves or for their children as the priority need, Table 13.2 also shows that 123 widows considered unemployment, or 122 widows mentioned irregular employment, for their children of both sexes to be a source of anxiety.

The third area of anxiety for 96 widows is their children's disinterest in, or discontinuation of, their education, with more widows mentioning this concern for their daughters. Once again it is clear that their high expectation of their children's educational welfare does not match with the reality of their children's educational experience.

The fourth area of anxiety for a small number of widows is related to their children's behaviour: that is, their daughters and sons not respecting them (57 widows); their children's unhappy married life (50 widows); their children's addiction to liquor/drugs (31 widows); and their children's irresponsible and careless behaviour (11 widows).

Apart from those widows who referred to the aforementioned anxieties, there are 100 other widows also who stated certain worries they had. These also fall more or less under the aforementioned headings, namely, uncertainties in general about the future for the children or their future marriage prospects, present marital problems, uncertain employment prospects, lack of financial resources for educating the children, emotional immaturity of children, ill-health of children, difficulties in taking care of children with disabilities, safety of daughters, lack of proper housing facilities to ensure their children's welfare, and absence of father's care for the growth of their children.

v. Important findings

1. Looking at the future advancement of their lives, a large number of widows have stated employment opportunities, housing facilities and educational welfare of their children as their first set of priority needs. This is followed by a lesser number of widows referring to loan repayments, toilet facilities and food for their households as the second set of priority needs. A smaller number of widows have also mentioned care for their ill-health, marriage of their sons and marriage of their daughters as their third set of priority needs. Taken together, these three sets of needs indicate the requirement of a forward-looking robust plan that ensures adequate financial resources and social support that would advance the widows' economic wellbeing as well as their children's welfare.

2. Besides looking towards their children's welfare, proper housing facilities and regular employment for themselves and their children, there are some widows who have broader perspectives regarding their future needs and hopes. These include leading an independent and self-sufficient life through engagement in commercial enterprises, advancing their children's good social standing in life, working towards empowering and advancing the livelihood security, independence and self-respect of other widows in society. They thus send a clear message that they do not want their widowhood to hinder their potential, but rather become a turning point in their life to continue to live and work with dignity for the betterment of other widows.
3. While the widows are highly motivated to care for and ensure better prospects for their children, they are also beset with anxieties about their future. Prominent among these concerns are their children's marriage prospects, unemployment/irregular employment, and disinterest in or discontinuation of education. Next comes their children's disrespect towards them, their unhappy married lives, addiction to liquor/drugs, and irresponsible and careless behaviour.

CHAPTER 14

IMPORTANT FINDINGS

FROM EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

The chapter-wise important findings of the research given below present the trends emerging from the analysis of the empirical data gathered through structured questionnaire, focus group discussions and personal case study interviews.

These findings form the basis for the recommendations which, in turn, support legal and administrative policy formulations by state institutions and civil society organizations for the benefit of the widows. The ultimate aim is to facilitate their empowerment process towards their freedom, independence, development and dignity.

Profile of Respondents

- 1) Social Profile:** Out of the 495 respondents, 401 (81%) are between the age group of 21 to 50. Among them, SCs form the largest group of respondents (241 or 48.7%), followed by BCs (108, or 21.8%). Of the total number of respondents, the majority (363, or 73.3%) are Hindus, and next comes Christians (102, or 20.6%) and Muslims (30, or 6.1%).
- 2) Age at widowhood:** Of the 440 respondents (88.9%), they were widowed before the age of 45. Significantly, while the minimum age of marriage for women in India is 18, 14 of the respondents were widowed before reaching the age of 20.
- 3) Cause of widowhood:** Almost three-quarters of the respondents (365, or 72.5%) said that addiction to liquor and illness were the two major causes of the death of their husbands, with many attributing the illness to alcohol addiction. In short, primarily 'addiction to liquor' is the cause of the widowhood of the respondents.
- 4) Education:** Of the total number of 495 respondents, 346 (67.9%) have never crossed 8th standard education. Still worse, among them, 126 respondents (25.5%) are illiterate. Only 64 of the 495 respondents have accessed technical or vocational training programs and are holding certificates. Out of these 64 widows, only 22 have managed to acquire jobs in line with their skills.
- 5) Family composition:** Out of the 495 respondents, 18 (4%) do not have children. The remaining 96% have an average of 2 children each. Over half of the respondents (275, or 55.6%) live with their children, while 92 (18.6%) live alone, 13.9% live with their parents and 9.5% live with their in-laws.
- 6) Children's education:** It is quite disheartening to note that 78 respondents (15.8%) had to discontinue the education of their children immediately after the death of their husbands. The main reasons were '*for the sake of sending them for work and earning some income to sustain the family*', '*unable to pay the educational fees,*' and '*their children were unable to cope with studies due to mental stress*'. When further analyzed, it is quite revealing that all are related to poverty.

Livelihood Status

1. Food intake

- Immediately after the death of the husbands, the entire financial burden and responsibilities of the family fall on the widows. They are often forced to take up any jobs available for the sake of feeding themselves and their children and running the family. In this situation, a sizable number of respondents (184 widows or 37.1%) do not enjoy three square meals a day.
- One to ten days a month a majority of widows (445 or 89.9%) consume meat, fish (379 widows or 76.4%), and eggs (354 widows or 71.4%).

2. Housing facility

- Just under one-third of the widows (157 or 31.7%) have no houses of their own. They either live in rented houses or their parents' or relatives' houses.
- In terms of the type of housing, 120 widows (24.2%) are in government-built houses while 218 are in houses built either by themselves, or their husbands, or their close relatives.
- Almost three-quarters of the women (366 or 73.9%) have house-sites of their own. Of them, 92 are registered under the widows' names, 64 under the names of their husbands, 17 under the names of widows and their husbands jointly, and the remaining 193 under other relatives' names.
- Concerning the size of the house-sites owned by them, 179 widows own above two cents, 139 widows one to two cents and 48 widows below one cent.
- In this situation, only 88 widows have applied for a new housing scheme. When others were asked why they did not apply for such schemes, 113 said that they did not need another house, whereas others said that they either had no house-sites or did not have the required financial resources to buy new house-sites.

3. Basic housing amenities:

The majority of widows have access to drinking water, health care facilities, and electricity. However, 156 widows (31.5%) do not have toilet facilities and 234 (47.3%) do not have sewage facilities.

4. Possession of formal entitlement documents:

The vast majority of the widows have documents related to entitlements such as Aadhar cards, Smart cards, Voter cards, etc. Further, it is heartening to note that a sizable number of respondents have bank and health insurance-related documents. However, only 191 widows (38.6%) have their widow pension cards, meaning that many are losing out on their basic entitlement as widows. Moreover, 398 widows (80.4%) do not have birth certificates, which is a vital document to prove one's citizenship in the country.

Identity, Independence and Dignity

- 1) **Ritual ceremonies at husbands' funeral:** Almost all the widows (91.3%) have undergone ritual ceremonies as part of their husbands' funeral rites. However, 85% were for banning these rites because they felt that these rites in no way helped them overcome their sorrow and suffering but, instead, humiliated and dehumanized them.
- 2) **Acceptance of ritual ceremonies:** 90% of widows who have undergone these rituals cited traditional compulsions and their helplessness to do otherwise as reasons for their acceptance of these rituals. It is clear that these rituals were imposed upon widows and not voluntarily accepted. Therefore, one can conclude that these cruel rituals segregated widows more from the society at large, rather than consoling, accommodating, and supporting them in the process of overcoming their sorrow and anxieties as well as asserting their right to life.
- 3) **Socio-cultural practices:** Regarding day-to-day socio-cultural practices, in general widows feel that they have to accept them as normal course of life. However, a sizable percentage of the widows seem to be setting aside some practices such as strict dress code, and removal of *bindi* (dots) and ornaments. However, most are not yet able to bypass the social norms that prohibit them from beautifying themselves: using cosmetics, keeping flowers on their heads, and especially turmeric and 'kumkum' which are associated with sexuality and fertility.
- 4) **On matters related to mobility and attendance in family-related events,** more attendance is noticeable in inauspicious (88.6%) than in auspicious (60.1%) functions; even while participating in auspicious functions, widows experience discriminatory treatment.
- 5) **Concerning meeting and conversing with people** such as relatives and men, and facing people in early mornings, more than 50% of the widows said that they were either obstructed or feel hesitant to engage in these matters.
- 6) **Decision-making:** Regarding decision-making on household matters in relation to (a) basic needs, (b) social matters that involve finance, (c) needs involving capital investment, and (d) participation in public events, over half of the widows said that they were able to make these decisions or contribute financially. In other words, many widows seemed to be self-reliant. A caution, though, in reading too positively into women being the major financial contributors is that often this might be because they received no other support. Among the ones who came forward to help the widows regarding all the above-mentioned needs, be it financial or decision-making, the elder brothers of widows topped the list followed by other persons who were not close family members. Apparently, these are, as mentioned by the widows in the focus group discussions, none other than NGOs.

Economic Assets, Savings, Loans, Income and Expenditure

- 1) **Employment:** Of the 393 widows who are labourers, 353 (71.3%) work for daily wages in the informal sector without job security and access to employment benefits. Despite the high work participation rate among widows, only 22 (4.4%) have accessed permanent jobs. The main reasons include lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector, inadequate social security policies and weak welfare schemes, administrative lapses and corruption in the public sector, lack of prior work experience, inadequate educational qualifications and vocational skills, childcare responsibilities and restricted social and physical mobility due to the stigma attached to widowhood.
- 2) **Income:** Income data reveals that most widows live in poverty. Nearly 211 widows (42.6%) earn less than Rs.50,000/- per annum, and 84 widows (17%) make between Rs.50,000/- to Rs.60,000/- per annum. Only 30 widows (6.1%) earn more than Rs. 1,00,000/- per annum. The main reasons that emerged include (a) lack of job security; (b) exploitation of labour; (c) discrimination in wages between men and women; (d) lack of support system for child care, especially for very young children; and (e) working primarily in the informal sector.
- 3) **Welfare benefits:** The widows do not seem to benefit much from government schemes. As per the data, only 225 widows (45%) have accessed a government welfare scheme. Out of this number, only 207 (41.9%) receive a widow's pension, 15 (3%) receive their husband's pension, and three receive another kind of retirement benefit payment. Corruption, prejudice/stigma about widowhood in the district administration, and gender discrimination in public institutions seem to prevent widows from accessing government benefits.
- 4) **Ownership of agricultural land:** Data shows that most of the widows do not own any agricultural land. Of the 495 widows, only 66 (13.3%) own agricultural land. Among them, only 45 have *patta* for their land; within that, only 11 have *patta* (title deed) registered in their name. On average, these women own only one acre of *nanchai* (wet land) or *punchai* (dry land) land. The rest of them have *patta* either registered in their husband's name, husband's family members, or combined *patta* with relatives.
- 5) **Indebtedness:** Debt is one of the biggest burdens for widows. Of the 495 widows, 419 (85%) have loans. Among them, 15 (3.0%) have loans above five lakhs, nearly 113 (22.8%) owe above 1 lakh, and 132 (26.7%) have loans between Rs.50,000/- to 1 lakh. In total, 260 (52.5%) widows have loans above 50,000/-. Nearly 314 widows (63.4%) spend an average of Rs.62,200/- per person per annum repaying loans, which is almost double of what they pay for subsistence needs (Rs.31,063/- per person per annum) of the entire household. The top reasons for borrowing loans include (a) health and medical care; (b) subsistence needs; (c) marriage; (d) house construction or renovation; and (e) repaying other loans. Although 194 widows benefit from taking loans from self-help groups, nearly 248 (50%) have

borrowed from moneylenders and private microfinancing firms. Consequently, 391 widows (79%) pay interest ranging from Rs.12,000/- to 6 lakhs per annum.

Participation in Public Life

- 1) Almost all the widows are involved in either a self-help group or widow's movement. Their involvement in these spaces seems to empower them, significantly boosting their emotional well-being, helping them to challenge some customary practices, gain knowledge about their entitlements, and acquire skills and financial support to start small businesses.
- 2) Almost all the widows (489 or 98.8%) had cast their votes in both Assembly and Panchayat elections held recently, with 413 (83.4%) mentioning that it was their political right.
- 3) Despite a vast majority exercising their voting rights, only nine widows contested the panchayat elections, the majority (eight women) from a rural constituency. Out of the nine widows, only two won the election, and they said they could exercise their governance power and authority without any interference.
- 4) Of the 495 widows, only 43 (8.7%) are interested in contesting elections in the future. Their disinterest, for 254 widows (51.3%), stemmed from the discriminatory experience they had faced as widows, while 124 (25.1%) said they were not interested in politics.

Experiencing Emotional Life

- 1) Of the 495 widows, almost all (487 or 98.4%) mentioned that their widowhood has detrimental mental health impacts. Among the various impacts, the highest is anxiety about their and their children's future, negatively affecting 321 women (64.8%).
- 2) The other important impacts on their mental health include the overall feeling of being depressed, overburdened by multiple responsibilities, isolation and exclusion, loneliness, and lack of trust in others.
- 3) A majority of widows (63.4% or 314) rely on their close family members for their emotional solace, primarily their children (40.60%) and their parents (22.82%). The other three significant categories of people who emotionally support the widows include friends (21.61%), neighbours (20.40%), and movement/self-help group members and NGO staff (14.94%). Only a paltry number (3.83%) said they get support from their in-laws.
- 4) Many widows feel the reduction of financial insecurity will help them emotionally as well as help them overcome other factors affecting their well-being. Widows pointed to five areas of economic support required: (a) secure employment for themselves or their children; (b) financial aid (bank loan with no/less interest) to start a business; (c) support for education of their children; (d) social security policies; and (e) widow's pension; the other changes they seek include (f) a ban on the customs and rituals that discriminate

widows; (g) a house of their own or a registered title deed (*patta*) for their house; (h) counseling service and support; and (i) skills training and career guidance.

Discrimination against Widows

- 1) Discrimination in socio-religious practices:** Widows experienced a range of discrimination in the socio-cultural sphere. Prominent were five forms of discrimination, shared by over 300 widows, linked to: (i) putting dot/*bindi* on their forehead and adorning their head with flowers; (ii) walking along certain roads at certain times of the day (e.g. morning) or visiting people in the early morning (since these activities are allegedly inauspicious and create ill omens in life); (iii) wearing jewelry; (iv) attending auspicious functions of their own family or relatives; and (v) attending others' auspicious functions. The majority of those who perpetrated these discriminations were relatives, especially the in-law's families, followed by the parental family members and then neighbours.
- 2) Discrimination in livelihood matters:** As regards livelihood matters, the three foremost forms of discrimination happened when they were trying to access (i) private shops as the first person in the day to buy basic livelihood items, as this allegedly was an ill-omen for shopkeepers; (ii) house-sites from the government; and (iii) various government development schemes. Foremost among the perpetrators were private business dealers and government officials responsible for distributing development and welfare schemes.
- 3) Discrimination in economic matters:** In economic matters, the foremost forms of discrimination are related to denial of housing and other loans from the government, banks and other sources, as well as denial of access to agricultural land ownership. While the perpetrators were widespread – including families, relatives, neighbours, elected panchayat officials, police officers, *archakars*/priests/*imams* and the general public ('any other persons'), government officials were pointed out as the main actors.
- 4) Discrimination in political matters:** Referring to political matters, the widows referred to the following prominent forms of discrimination: not being invited to attend the Gram Sabha meetings; obstructions or denial of their right to campaign in the panchayat or assembly elections, or to participate in any protest meetings or social conferences, or to contest the panchayat elections. The perpetrators were predominantly panchayat officials, government officials, family members and the general public.
- 5) Discrimination in religious matters:** Regarding religious matters, 205 widows experienced discrimination when going to temples dressed in colour sarees or decked with flowers/ornaments. Those who perpetrated this form of discrimination were their relatives, family members, neighbours, *archakars* (temple priests) and the general public. Temple priests were stated to be the main perpetrators of other forms of discrimination in relation to such temple practices as performing religious ceremonies in the public temples; observing religious vows related practices to gain divine favours (carrying milk pots, fire

pots, paddy sprouts and *kavadi*; doing holy fire walk, *pongal preparation*); participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around the temples and at festivals.

Discrimination: Overall Analysis

- First, when comparing these five spheres, a greater number of widows seem to have suffered discrimination in the socio-cultural sphere, followed by the religious sphere, thereby indicating the predominant role played by culture and religion.
- Secondly, the perpetrators of socio-cultural discrimination are predominantly family members, relatives and neighbours. For the religious sphere the perpetrators are predominantly families, relatives, neighbours and religious actors (*archakars/priests/imams*).
- Thirdly, as regards discrimination in relation to livelihood, economic and political matters, a wide range of perpetrators exist, but government officials were mentioned slightly more than others since these are the actors whom the widows have to necessarily approach for these matters.

Security and Protection Measures

- 1) Status of widows' security and the reasons:** That just over 50% (254 widows, or 51.3%) of the widows surveyed felt unsafe and insecure in both the private and public sphere must be a matter of concern to all civil society members and policy makers. This is especially so in the case of young widows and widows living alone or only with their young children. It is patriarchal power relations that have robbed the widows of resources and external social support structures, which have made them defenseless to withstand attacks to their identity, dignity, freedom and independence.
- 2) Status of awareness of legal protection measures:** While on the one hand, there is no legislation to deal exclusively with the safety and security of widows, alongside their livelihood and development-related rights, on the other hand, it is a matter of concern that, of the 495 widows surveyed, only a small number (ranging from 39 to 194 widows) are aware of the laws protecting women's marital life or security. Moreover, their knowledge about the content of these laws is another matter to be explored. More widows (208 widows), however, are aware of MNREGA legislation that deals with income generation than laws dealing with marital or security related concerns.
- 3) Reasons for low awareness of legal measures:** The major reason behind the widows' low knowledge of marital or security related laws can be traced to the fact that state institutions have not given much publicity or conducted awareness programs on such laws. While some widows have some knowledge of these laws from their life experience or from friends and relatives, and a little more knowledge from training programs offered by civil

society organizations, the major source of knowledge has been the mass media and social media. Needless to say, such media-based knowledge is less systematic and thorough. Hence, more in-depth training on laws related to women should be imparted effectively by civil society organizations and government institutions.

- 4) Status of widows approaching police stations:** Despite the common perception of widows being powerless, one-fourth of the widows (114 widows) have approached the police stations to file complaints over problems they have faced. At the same time, this number is disproportionate to the larger number of widows who have faced discrimination and violence, as evidenced in this research. On a positive note, a good number of widows who accessed the police stations mentioned that they had been treated with dignity and respect and that the police had been helpful in filing cases and providing protection. Again, this has to be balanced against the many numbers of instances mentioned during personal interviews and focus group discussions about police indifference to the widows' complaints, treating them with disdain, using caste-based abusive language against them, demanding bribes, or pressuring them to enter into compromises instead of following the due process of law.
- 5) Proposals regarding security and protection measures:** That almost all the widows (481/485) affirmed the need for specific legal protection for them indicates the depth of insecurity they experience daily. It is also a loud and clear call to state institutions to heed to their voice. The widows indicated a number of significant measures required to ensure their protection and equal rights: Abolition of degrading social-cultural practices, access to welfare schemes, access to housing facilities, access to employment, access to business enterprise opportunities, right to re-marry, protection against violence linked to their widowhood, access to psychological rehabilitation, prohibition on alcohol sale, right to property, children's welfare, right to political participation, sanctions against bribery, functioning of police and court machinery, and separate Ministry or Department for widows' welfare and rights.

Of these practical suggestions, the establishment of a separate Ministry, Departments and Administrative Centres at the executive governmental level to look after the safety and development schemes for the widows would be a clear message of expecting state commitment to the welfare of widows. The need to organize themselves into movements/*sangams* for their empowerment and to claim their rights is also another clear message to civil society organizations working especially for advancing gender equality and empowerment.

Manifestations of Courage and Resilience

- 1) The fact that 91.7% of widows said that they have faced life with courage is a clear indication that, despite the oppressive conditions imposed by caste-based patriarchy, they

are finding ways to exercise their freedom and independence, thereby manifesting their identity and dignity as women with rights.

- 2) Of the given five key areas – socio-cultural, economic, gender, political, and human dignity and self-respect - the widows indicated their agency, determination and courage to transcend the cultural barriers imposed on them by the caste-based patriarchy in three of them in a significant manner: (i) In the socio-cultural area, 116 out of 495 widows have participated in the auspicious functions of their families, relatives and friends against all opposition; and significantly, 136 widows have themselves organized auspicious events for their children and grandchildren. (ii) In the gender-related area, 293 widows have preferred to remain single without re-marriage, the predominant reason being to care for their children, and 149 widows have questioned those who do injustice to women/widows. (iii) Finally, 128 widows have gradually built their material and financial assets to increase their social status.
- 3) When analyzing the data related to the widows' manifestation of their courage and resilience, three messages are evident: (i) First, despite oppressive traditions prevalent in society regarding how widows should behave, they have the ability and power to manifest their agency in different spheres of life; (ii) Secondly, what is required for the full potential of their agency to express itself is safe spaces and opportunities; (iii) Thirdly, it is incumbent on civil society and state institutions to provide such spaces and opportunities to enable widows to exercise their freedom and independence to live with dignity and self-respect.

Future Household Needs

- 1) Looking at the future advancement of their lives, a large number of widows have stated employment opportunities, housing facilities and educational welfare of their children as their first set of priority needs. This is followed by a lesser number of widows referring to loan repayments, toilet facilities and food for their households as the second set of priority needs. A smaller number of widows have also mentioned care for their ill-health and marriage of their sons and daughters as their third set of priority needs. Taken together, these three sets of needs highlight the importance of a forward-looking plan that ensures adequate financial resources and social support to advance the economic wellbeing of widows as well as welfare of their children.
- 2) Besides looking towards their children's welfare, proper housing facilities and regular employment for themselves and their children, there are some widows who have broader perspectives regarding their future needs and hopes. These include leading an independent and self-sufficient life through commercial enterprises, advancing their children's respectable social standing in life, and advancing the livelihood security, independence and self-respect of other widows in society. They thus send a clear message that they do not want their widowhood to hinder their potential, but rather become a

turning point in their life to continue to live and work with dignity for the betterment of other widows.

- 3) While the widows are highly motivated to care for and ensure better prospects for their children, they are also beset with anxieties about their future. Prominent among these concerns are their children's marriage prospects, unemployment/irregular employment, and disinterest in or discontinuation of education. To a lesser extent their concerns also are regarding their children's disrespect towards them, their unhappy married lives, addiction to liquor/drugs, and irresponsible and careless behaviour.

CHAPTER 15

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 495 widows who have presented both the quantitative and qualitative data come out with a clear message, that is, these data are not to be considered in mere statistical terms; nor are these to be counted from a mere academic point of view. Rather, these are to be perceived as their voices, thereby manifesting the various ways through which they have been oppressed by the caste-ridden patriarchal ideology, traditions, and customs; articulating how their dignity and self-respect and humans and women have been defaced for centuries; expressing their anguish regarding the violations of their rights and entitlements; pointing out their determination to live with courage and resilience despite the multiple hurdles they face; and, asserting their right to live in future as dignified women.

This therefore becomes a message for the state institutions and civil society bodies: for the state institutions which as *political duty-bearers* have the obligation to convert these voices into concrete and realistic policy decisions and actions for the betterment of the widows' lives and status in society; for the civil society bodies which as *moral duty-bearers* hold the responsibility of acting as the widows' representatives working towards a systemic change in the ideological underpinnings of caste, gender and patriarchy.

This study can therefore be looked at as the product of the widows' voices registered and reported for action. The widows have spoken out. It is for the state actors and civil society members to respond. The recommendations given below point to a course of action that the state actors and civil society can embark upon as a way of responding to the voices of the widows.

I. Recommendations addressed to the Indian Central and Tamil Nadu State Governments

1) Safeguarding the Economic well-being of Widows:

In order to safeguard the economic well-being of widows through employment guarantees, economic development, and social security measures, it is recommended that the government:

- a. prioritizes widows in employment, and provides 10% reservation in employment in the State-run public sector and private sector for widows with opportunities for upgrading their educational qualification and technical skills;
- b. collects comprehensive data regarding the living conditions of widows and accordingly work out welfare measures and development programmes for improving their life in various fields;

- c. sets up a bank exclusively for widows to avail them with small and big loans with modest interest to start small and big commercial/business enterprises, pursue higher and professional education, and launch institutions in education, commerce, technical skills, etc.;
- d. mandates the corporate sector to set apart 0.5% of the money from the 2% amount, falling under the CSR provision (Corporate Social Responsibility) under the Companies Act 2013, to improve the livelihood needs of widows and their dependents.

2) Access to Government Benefits:

It is recommended that the government amend the 'Destitute Widows' Pension Scheme with the following provisions:

- a. The term "Destitute" be removed from the "Destitute Widows' Pension Scheme" as it denotes a pejorative meaning of 'helplessness', and be replaced with "Widows Below the Poverty Line";
- b. While the pension amount fixed by the Tamil Nadu Government must be raised periodically as per the officially estimated cost of living, it must be increased, as of now, from Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 5000/-;
- c. The payment of the pension amount should automatically begin from the date of death of the husband as indicated in the death certificate of the husband rather than from the date of signature of the Thasildar (Taluk Revenue Officer) affixed officially in the application form as has commonly been the practice of the Tamil Nadu Government administration so far; in case of delay, the amount must be calculated and disbursed retrospectively from the date of the husband's death;
- d. The following three conditions, not found in the Tamil Nadu GO but arbitrarily and autocratically imposed on the widows by the government administration, must be removed immediately, namely, that for availing of the pension, the beneficiary widow (a) must have completed 40 years of age; (b) must not have a son who has completed 18 years of age; and, (c) must surrender the ration card; instead, the only condition for pension entitlement must be the widow's status of being below the poverty line;
- e. That the Government should have a Grievance Cell for widows to report incidents of corruption and administrative lapses and any other concerns that may arise in accessing any welfare measures and development schemes.

3) Safeguarding the Emotional Well-being of Widows:

In order to address the factors affecting widows' mental health it is recommended that government:

- a. Bans all the customary practices that traumatize and humiliate widows by passing a legislation ***‘Eradication of Traditional Customary Practices Degrading Self-Respect of Widows’***;
- b. Integrates gender sanitization education as part of the school and University curriculum and constitutes a committee to censor media programs/movies promoting the degradation of widowhood;
- c. Offers a helpline and counseling services for widows and their children in all aspects related to mental health, economic well-being, education and availing of loans, etc.;
- d. Encourages civil society organizations to provide counseling services to widows in their locality.

4) Empowering Widows to take part in Public Life Actively:

By way of creating opportunities for widows to participate in public life, especially in politics, actively, it is recommended that the government:

- a. Provide 10 % reservation for widows in the Local Bodies and the Legislative Assembly;
- b. Ensure widows’ participation in Village Development, Child Protection, School Management, and Panchayat Committees;
- c. Recognize and support the emerging widow’s movements as a space for widows to collectively raise their voices against widowhood practices and situations that dehumanize their dignity and deprive them of personhood;
- d. Encourage civil society organizations to mobilize widows and form sangams or Iyyakkams as an avenue for upholding their rights collectively.

5) Legislation for Widows’ Safety and Protection

It is recommended that Government enacts a legislation ***‘Prevention of Discrimination and Atrocities against Widows’*** in the Parliament/ Tamil Nadu State Assembly as early as possible, and that shall include the following constituent provisions:

- a. ensuring the widows of their right to equality in all matters of life related to the livelihood, social, economic, political, and religious spheres;
- b. abolishing all socio-cultural practices imposed on the widows at their husbands’ demise;
- c. affirming the right of widows to continue to adopt all those socio-cultural practices which they enjoyed before their widowhood, and protect them from all unjust and superstitious cultural and religious teachings and actions;
- d. safeguarding the right of widows to self-respect, physical and sexual safety and integrity, security of life, livelihood and property;

- e. protecting the safety and security of their children;
- f. enlisting all the rights of widows and witnesses with reference to criminal offences and proceedings;
- g. enlisting the duties and responsibilities of government administrative officials and the police force when the widows approach them for their developmental and protection needs;
- h. thereby ensuring the widows a life of dignity as women and full-fledged citizenship as Indian women.

6) Governmental Administrative Machinery for Widows' Welfare, Development and Safety:

It is recommended that the Central and State Governments set up a separate and autonomous Ministry in the Government structure for the following objectives:

- a. to study the living conditions of widows and to periodically update the statistical data on the status of widows in the country and in the state of Tamil Nadu;
- b. to evolve appropriate legislations, new policies, and relevant schemes to promote welfare and development;
- c. to set up administrative structures at the lower level under the Ministry for receiving and processing widows' petitions, disseminating information on government schemes and budget allocations, conducting capacity programs, enhancing the education of the widows, providing guidance related to emotional well-being, etc.;
- d. to safeguard the safety and security of widows and their children;
- e. to allocate adequate budgetary resources for welfare, development, and protection purposes;
- f. to initiate, monitor, and review the implementation of various legal, judicial, welfare and developmental measures towards the empowerment and emancipation of widows;
- g. to prepare annual status report on the condition of widows;
- h. to submit this report to the Parliament and the State Legislature for information and debate; and,
- i. to place this report in the public domain for the benefit of the widows and the larger public.

II. Recommendations addressed to Tamil Nadu Government

1) Addressing the Problem related to Liquor Addiction

It is recommended that the Government of Tamil Nadu:

- a. Stops selling liquor as a commercial dealer;
- b. Re-visits its policy with regard to liquor in the state and moves towards banning it;
- c. Starts as many de-addiction centers as possible in the state in order to retrieve addicts back to a normal and healthy life.

2) Promoting Widows' Re-marriage, especially of Young Widows

It is recommended that the Government comes out with a policy framework with the following features:

- a. A package for BPL (Below Poverty Line) widows – who come forward to marry men of their choice, which contains solid assistance of Rs. 2 lakhs financial contribution to the account of the widow;
- b. Employment is ensured for widows in government or private sector employment in order to safeguard their dignity, protect their security of life and improve their economic well-being;
- c. Priority in employment is to be given to the male members who come forward willingly to marry the widows, thereby encouraging widows' re-marriage extensively;
- d. Children born of the re-married widows are given educational facilities (admission, scholarship, etc.) and employment opportunities;
- e. Widows' pension for ensuring the secure livelihood of the widows is disbursed within one month from the date of the husband's demise.

3) Providing Financial help for the continuation of the Studies of the Widows' Children

It is recommended that the Government bears the entire school or college fees for all the students of Government-run schools and colleges, in case of their fathers die during their studies. There should never be a drop-out case due to the death of the father of the children.

4) Ensuring the transfer of property to widows that are due to their husbands within a year

It is recommended that the Government comes out with a notification that the property of the bereaved husbands as well as the due share of the undivided property in the family be transferred to their widowed wives within a year failing which penal action will be taken against those holding the property.

III. Recommendations addressed to Civil Society Organizations

1) Evolve new and meaningful social rituals and cultural expressions

Civil society organizations can evolve and introduce certain meaningful rituals such as the one done in houses where the bereaved person is laid to rest. All the menfolk of the family would stand at the entrance of the house and keep open the palms of their hands in a gesture of welcome and willingness to receive solidarity and support. In return, the people who enter the house to pay their homage to the bereaved person would touch and hold the opened palms of the male inmates of the house, and proceed forward into the house. The meaning of the gesture is that 'I am with you in your pain'. Similar meaningful rituals can be evolved by civil society organizations for widowed women in view of smoothening their pain, assuring solidarity with them in their struggles, and instilling hope in them for future.

2) Promote Egalitarian Society through Mass Awareness

It is recommended that civil society organizations:

- a. In view of bringing systemic change in society, sustained awareness programs in educational institutions and in public fora are launched through folk and modern art performances as well as the use of media technology, social media in particular. While depicting the dehumanizing effects of traditional socio-cultural practices, efforts are required to affirm the dignity and rights of women by evolving new cultural forms and expressions that promote an egalitarian society;
- b. Launch mass awareness campaigns among the public at large to eradicate the humiliating practices that degrade widows, thereby creating avenues for widows' empowerment and emancipation, social recognition and acceptance.

3) Initiate multi-pronged service delivery and empowerment ventures

It is recommended that Civil Society Organizations:

- a. set up as many counseling centers as possible to help widows come out of their psychological blocks;
- b. support widows in child care, offer career guidance, upgrade their educational qualifications and technical skills, and create opportunities for them to venture into individual and collective entrepreneurial enterprises;
- c. provide opportunities for those widows who are capable of, and interested in, pursuing professional education (law, teaching, research, engineering, journalism, business, administration, etc.) so as to not only build up their social status in public life but also get integrated into mainstream society;

- d. support widows to gain knowledge about their entitlements and create spaces for collective bargaining with the administration when their rights are denied;
- e. mobilize widows and support them to form and strengthen their widows' movements to the extent of gaining self-confidence and skilled leadership to defend and protect the rights and entitlements of the community of widows;
- f. Further, in the light of the study findings showing a low level of interest of the widows for political leadership in the democratic governance system, it should be a major concern of the civil society organizations to impress on the widows the necessity of their participatory role in the governance system. To make a breakthrough in the patriarchal cultural setup that keeps the widows as a subservient section of society, and to access power and authority in the current political arrangement for a greater share of resources and entitlements for women in general and for widows in particular, training, empowering, encouraging and supporting widows to assume leadership positions at various levels in the democratic governance system is a challenging and enterprising task for the civil society organizations.

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PART III

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE-1: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE (English)

Research on:

**Widows of Tamil Nadu:
In search of Dignity, Safety, Rights, and Entitlements**

NOTE: Consider as one household unit if *property/land and wages* are pooled together as one household.

Questionnaire Serial No.	
House No.	
Village	
District	
Field Investigator name	
Date/s of data collection	/ / 2022
Signature	

PART I: SOCIO-ECONOMIC, CULTURAL & POLITICAL CONDITIONS

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

I. HOUSEHOLD PROFILE

1. Widow's name: _____

2. Age (completed): _____

3. Caste category: (1) FC () (2) BC () (3) OBC () (4) MBC () (5) SC () (6) ST ()

4. Religion: (1) Hindu () (2) Muslim () (3) Christian () (4) Other: _____

5-6. Age & Reason for widowhood:

	5. Age			6. <u>ONE main reason</u> for husband's death	
1.	Below 20	()	1.	Alcohol	()
2.	21- 25	()	2.	Accident	()
3.	26-30	()	3.	Murder	()
4.	31-35	()	4.	Suicide	()
5.	35-40	()	5.	Illness	()
6.	41-45	()	6.	Covid 19	()
7.	46-50	()	7.	Drug abuse	()
8.	51-55	()	8.	Any other (specify): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	
9.	56-60	()			
10.	Above 60	()			

7. Number of own children if None, write 0:

7.1 None _____ 7.2. Boys _____ 7.3. Girls _____

8. Widow's family Status [tick (✓) *ONE* relevant response]

1.	Living Alone	
2.	Living with Children	
3.	Living with in-law's family	
4.	Living with parent's family	
5.	Any other (specify): _____	

B. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITIONS**II. EDUCATION OF WIDOW & CHILDREN** (tick *ONE* relevant response)**9. Education level (completed) of widow and her children:**

	Education level (completed)	(a) Widow	(b) No. of Children-girls	I No. of Children-boys
9.1	No education & illiterate			
9.2	No education but literate			
9.3	1-5 standard			
9.4	6-8 standard			
9.5	9-10 standard			
9.6	11-12 standard			
9.7	Technical / Vocational Education			
9.8	Undergraduate degree			
9.9	Postgraduate degree			
9.10	Above Postgraduate degree			

10. Did any of your children dropped out of school /college after the death of your husband?

1. Yes () 2. No ()

11. If yes, what are the reasons for the girls and boys dropping out? (multiple answers)

Reasons	(a) Girls	(b) Boys
11.1. Unable to pay the school/college fees		
11.2. Had to work to pay off family debt		
11.3. Had to work for income to sustain family		
11.4. Had to stay at home to look after house and younger children		
11.5. Discrimination/Harassment from teachers/ professors or others		
11.6. Mental stress of children – Couldn't cope up with studies – failed in exams.		
11.7. Security of the children		
11.8. Any other (specify):		

12. Has the widow accessed any technical or vocational training programmes (completed with certificates in hand)?

1. Yes ()

2. No ()

12.1. If Yes, what types of training?

	What types of training (write)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

13. If widow has accessed any technical or vocational training programmes, with completed certificates in hand, is she employed currently as per their training?

1. Yes ()

2. No ()

13.1. If no, give **one main reason only**: _____

III. HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

14. Who makes decisions on the following matters taken in the household? (multiple responses)

	Matters	(a) Who takes the final decision on the matter? *	(b) Where applicable, who mainly/only contributes financially? *
14.1.	Purchase of food, and other basic necessities		
14.2.	Payment of major medical expenses (above Rs.1000/-)		
14.3.	Children's education – how long, what costs		
14.4.	Fixing children's marriage – when, to whom		
14.5.	Building of new house, house repairs		
14.6.	Purchase/ sale of assets – land, house site, livestock		
14.7.	Getting loans (from banks, moneylenders, SHGs...); Depositing savings (in SHGs, banks...)		
14.8.	Engaging in commercial/business/agri-enterprises (small/medium/big)		
14.9.	Woman contesting in panchayat elections or joining political parties/any election campaigns.		
14.10.	Woman joining sangham/ iyakkam/SHG and attending meetings		
14.11.	Participating in protest events, dharnas, etc.		

17. Were the traditional funeral rites performed at the occasion of the death of your husband?

1. Yes () 2. No ()

18. If yes, how did you feel when these rituals were performed? (*mention ONE main feeling*)

1. Helpless/Powerless () 2. Tradition, hence accepted ()
3. Angry/Annoyed () 4. Any other (specify): _____

19. Give *ONE* main reason for your response:

20. Do you think these funeral rites should be stopped/banned in future?

1. Yes () 2. No ()

21. If yes, why? (Give ONE main reason)

22. If no, why? (Give ONE main reason)

C. BASIC LIVELIHOOD STATUS

V. FOOD SECURITY/ CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

23. Usual number of meals per day which members of widow's household have: (ONE response only for each household member)

No.	Household members	One meal	Two meals	Three meals
23.1.	Widow			
23.2.	Widow's children (female)			
23.3.	Widow's children (male)			

24. What type of food eaten in household?

Type of Food	No. of times you consume in a week <i>(write number)</i>	Type of Food	No. of times you consume in a week <i>(write number)</i>
24.1. Milk		24.5. Fruits	
24.2. Curd		24.6. Eggs	
24.3. Pulses or beans		24.7. Meat (Mutton, beef, chicken)	
24.4. Vegetables		24.8. Fish	

VI. HEALTHCARE

25. Main healthcare facilities accessed by household: *(multiple responses, if any)*

- 25.1. Government hospital in town ()
- 25.2. Primary healthcare centre/ subcentre ()
- 25.3. Private clinic/doctor/hospital ()

25.4. *Naattu Vaithiyar (salai)* ()

25.5. Any other (specify): _____

VII. HOUSING & BASIC AMENITIES

26. Current drinking water source: *(multiple responses, if any)*

26.1. Separate/own well, borewell or water tap ()

26.2. Common well, borewell or water tap ()

26.3. Village *kulam* / *oorani* ()26.4. Village *kanmai* ()

26.5. Any other (specify): _____

27. Housing status: Do you have a house of your own?

1. Yes ()

2. No ()

28. If No, what kind of house are you living in? (one response only)

1. Rented house ()

2. Estate landlord's *pannai* house ()

3. Any other (specify): _____

29. If yes, who built it?

1. A Government built house ()

2. Your own built house ()

30. If it is a government-built house, under what scheme is it built? (one response only)

1. Indira Gandhi Kudiyiruppu Thittam (Central Govt.) ()

2. Green house Scheme (State Govt) ()

3. Prime Minister's Housing Scheme ()

4. Any other (specify):

31. If it is your own built house, what is the type of house? *(one response only)*

1. Concrete house (Pucca) ()

2. Brick Tiles House (Semi pucca) ()

3. Thatched House (*Kudisai/Olai veedu*) ()

- *Pucca* = walls made from cement, bricks/ stone + cement, while roof constructed from cement or brick tiles
- *Semi-pucca* = walls made from bricks or stone + cement, while roof made from brick tiles
- *Kudisai/Olai veedu* = walls made of mud or thatch, while roof constructed from thatch or corrugated iron/ asbestos sheets

32. If it is your own built house, who constructed or bought it?

32.1. Husband when alive ()

32.2. Self ()

32.3. Husband's ancestral house ()

32.4. Parents' ancestral house ()

33. Whether govt. built house or your own house, do you have the following:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| 33.1. Sewage facility? | 1. Yes () | 2. No () |
| 33.2. Electricity? | 1. Yes () | 2. No () |
| 33.3. Toilet facility that you use? | 1. Yes () | 2. No () |

34. Have you currently applied for any new govt. housing scheme?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Yes () | 2. No () |
|---------------|--------------|

35. If Yes, under what scheme? (one response only)

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Indira Gandhi Housing Kuyiruppu Thittam (Central Govt.) | () |
| 2. Green house Scheme (State Govt.) | () |
| 3. Prime Minister's housing scheme (Central Govt.) | () |
| 4. Any other (specify): | _____ |

36. If No, give ONE main reason only:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. I have no extra house site | () |
| 2. I have house site but no patta | () |
| 3. I have no money to buy any house-site | () |
| 4. I don't need another house | () |
| 5. Any other (specify): | _____ |

37. House site status:

37.1. Housing site ownership status: (one response only)

1. Self ()	6. Estate <i>pannai</i> house site ()
2. Husband when alive ()	7. Husband's ancestral land ()
3. Govt colony land ()	8. Parent's ancestral land ()
4. <i>Poramboke</i> land ()	9. Any other: specify:
5. Temple land ()	_____

37.2. House site size in cent:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. less than one cent () | 2. One to two cents () | 3. Above 2 cents () |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|

37.3. House site patta in whose name:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Husband | () |
| 2. Widow | () |
| 3. Jointly: husband & wife (widow) | () |
| 4. Any others (specify): | _____ |

D. ECONOMIC SITUATION

VIII. INCOME & EXPENDITURE

38. What is the main source of income for the widow? (multiple responses, if any)

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 38.1. Labourer (widow employed as labourer by someone else in any sector): | () |
| 38.2. Agriculture (own land /community farming /taken land on lease): | () |
| 38.3. Commerce/Business (own small/medium business): | () |

38.4. Combined income (labourer/agriculture/small-medium business): ()

38.5. Any other (eg. Fishing, firewood cutting, coal making) [specify]: _____

39. Annual income of the widow (from all different types of work /income sources): (one response only)

1. Below 50,000/- ()	5. Rs. 80,001-90,000/- ()
2. Rs. 50,001-60,000/- ()	6. Rs. 90,001-1,00,000/- ()
3. Rs. 60,001-70,000/- ()	7. Above Rs.1,00,000/- ()
4. Rs. 70,001-80,000/- ()	

40. Annual income of other family members in the household, if any: (one response only)

1. Below 30,000/- ()	6. Rs. 70,001-80,000/- ()
2. Rs. 30,001-40,000/- ()	7. Rs. 80001 to 90,000/ ()
3. Rs. 40,001-50,000/- ()	8. Rs. 90,001 to 100,000 ()
4. Rs. 50,001-60,000/- ()	9. Above Rs.1,00,000/- ()
5. Rs. 60,001-70,000/- ()	

41. Major household expenditure: In last year, how much was spent in household on: (multiple responses)

	(a) Expenditure items	(b) Amount Spent (Rs)
41.1	Repayment of loans	
41.2	Rent, Taxes to government, incl. electricity bills	
41.3	Household expenses on food	
41.4	Cooking fuel (firewood/gas)	
41.5	Household health – Illnesses/ medicines/ treatment	
41.6	Education: School fees, school books, uniform,	
41.7	Investment in properties: new business (including advance payment to a shop) or purchase of livestock / Purchase of a new property (land, shop, house)/ House construction/ House repairs etc.	
41.8	Average costs per year for agriculture: cultivation (seeds/ fertilisers/ pesticides/ labour wages/ hiring machines/ etc) on owned/ leased/ sharecropped land	
41.9	Cell phone/Telephone use/Personal travels / Entertainment/ Religious or cultural festivals/ pilgrimages/ vows /Alcoholic drinks/ beedi/ cigarettes/ tobacco	
41.10	Marriages, ear-boring ceremony, funeral etc.	
41.11	Elections	
41.12	Any other (specify):	
	(1)	
	(2)	
	(3)	

IX. LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT

42. If widow is employed as a labourer by someone else, what is the type of main employment: _____

1. Permanent (govt/private) ()
2. Contract (govt/private) ()
3. Daily (govt/private) ()

43. Work status of widow:

(a) Write all types of <u>paid work</u> done by widow in the year (except domestic chores)	(b) Employer* (Write number only)
43.1.	
43.2.	
43.3.	
43.4.	
43.5.	

* (1) Government (2) NGO (3) Private individuals/company

(4) Any others (specify): _____

44. Is widow engaged in bonded labour now?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

45. If yes:

- 45.1. Type of Bonded Labour: 1. Semi () 2. Full ()
- 45.2. Terms of contract (form of payment): 1. Cash () 2. Kind ()
- 45.3. ONE main reason for semi/full bondedness: _____

X. COMMERCE/BUSINESS RELATED RESOURCES

46. What commercial/business enterprises are you engaged in presently? (multiple responses, if any)

46.1. Tailoring ()	46.6. Own auto driving ()
46.2. Small food vendor ()	46.7. Hired auto driving ()
46.3. Tulsi stick rolling ()	46.8. Running canteen ()
46.4. Petty business* ()	46.9. Any others (specify three only):
46.5. Fish vendor ()	(1) _____
	(2) _____
	(3) _____

* Petty business: clothes, grocery, vegetables, fruits, fancy articles, beauty parlour, flowers, small money-lending, etc.

XI. LAND & LAND-RELATED RESOURCES

47. Do you use any type of land that generates income?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

48. If yes, what type of land: (multiple responses)

- 48.1. Leased land or sharecropping ()
- 48.2. Own Land with *patta* ()
- 48.3. Both owned land and leased/sharecropping land ()
- 48.4. Government revenue land being used for agriculture ()
- 48.5. Govt. forest land being used for agriculture ()
- 48.6. Both owned and government land (revenue/forest) ()
- 48.7. Revenue/forest land being used for agriculture ()

49. If widow has patta land, in whose name is it registered?

- 49.1. Herself () 49.2. Others ()

50. If own patta land in widow's name, how many acres of land:

- 50.1. _____ *nancai* land 50.2. _____ *punca* land

E. ASSETS, SAVINGS & CREDIT

XII. ASSETS & LIVESTOCK OWNED BY HOUSEHOLD

51. Number of income generating assets owned by household and their estimated cash value and income:

Assets	(a) No. of Assets	(b) Estimated cash value	I Average Monthly Income earned through them
51.1. Cattle and buffaloes/ cows		(a) Rs. 5000 – Rs. 10,000 () (b) Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 () I Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 50,000 () (d) Above Rs. 50,001 ()	I Rs. 500-Rs. 1000 () (f) Rs. 1001-Rs. 2000 () (g) Rs. 2001-Rs. 3000 () (h) Above Rs. 3001 ()
51.2. Sheep/ goats		(a) Rs. 5000 – Rs. 10,000 () (b) Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 () I Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 50,000 () (d) Above Rs. 50,001 ()	I Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 () (f) Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000 () (g) Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3000 () (h) Above Rs. 3001 ()
51.3. Poultry/ chickens		(a) Rs. 5000 – Rs. 10,000 () (b) Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 () I Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 50,000 () (d) Above Rs. 50,001 ()	I Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 () (f) Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000 () (g) Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3000 () (h) Above Rs. 3001 ()
51.4. Other livestock: (specify): _____		(a) Rs. 5000 – Rs. 10,000 () (b) Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000 () I Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 50,000 () (d) Above Rs. 50,001 ()	I Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 () (f) Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000 () (g) Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3000 () (h) Above Rs. 3001 ()

52. Number of General Assets

Assets	No. of Assets	Assets	No. of Assets
52.1. Irrigation facilities (borewells, etc.)		52.7. Fans (ceiling or standing fans)	
52.2. Agricultural tools (hoes, etc.)		52.8. Gold/ silver jewellery	
52.3. Bicycle		52.9. Kitchen goods (mixie, etc.)	
52.4. Television		52.10. Electric/ gas cooker	
52.5. Radio/ audio cassette recorder		52.11. Cots/ tables/ chairs	
52.6. Sewing machine		52.12. Any others (specify): _____	

XIII. SAVINGS & CREDIT**53. Average monthly savings of household (in past five years):**

1. Nil ()	5. Rs. 3,001 to Rs. 5,000 ()
2. Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,000 ()	6. Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 8,000 ()
3. Rs. 1,001 to Rs. 2,000 ()	7. Rs. 8,001 to Rs. 10,000 ()
4. Rs. 2,001 to Rs. 3,000 ()	8. Above Rs. 10,001 ()

54. Level of loans today:**54.1. Total loan amount:**

1. No loan ()	5. 10,001 to 25,000 ()
2 Below Rs. 2000 ()	6 25001 to Rs. 50,000 ()
3. Rs. 2000 to Rs. 5000 ()	7. 50,001 to 1,00,000 ()
4 Rs. 5001 to Rs. 10000 ()	8. Above 1,00,001 ()

54.2. Rate of Interest: (multiple responses)

54.2.1. 2% ()	54.2.2. 5% ()
54.2.3. 10% ()	54.2.4. More than 10% ()

54.3. Purpose of loan (multiple responses):

No.	Purpose	Tick	No.	Purpose	Tick
54.3.1	Subsistence		54.3.8	Dowry	
54.3.2	Festivals		54.3.9	Marriage	
54.3.3	Funeral		54.3.10	Child birth	
54.3.4	Pushpavati function		54.3.11	Purchase of commercial assets	
54.3.5	Upgrading living standards (housing, household wares, personal belongings, etc.)		54.3.12	Due to calamities, drought, accident, etc.	

54.3.6	Housing construction/repairs & renovation		54.3.13	Health & medical care	
54.3.7	To pay back another loan		54.3.14	Any other (specify): _____	

55. Source of Loan Today (*multiple responses*)

Source of loan	Tick relevant items	Source of loan	Tick relevant items
55.1. Moneylender		55.7. Neighbours	
55.2. Commercial bank		55.8. Employer	
55.3. Cooperative		55.9. NGO	
55.4. SHG		55.10. Private Microfinance company	
55.5. Relatives		55.11. Private shareholder's group (சீட்டு பிடிப்பது)	
55.6. Friends		55.12. Others – <i>Specify</i> : _____	

F. ENTITLEMENT DEEDS

XIV. ACCESSING ENTITLEMENT DOCUMENTS

56. Do you have the following livelihood, citizenship and election related documents?

No	Types of documents for widow	Tick relevant items	No	Types of documents for widow	Tick relevant items
56.1	Aadhar Card		56.15	MNREGA Card	
56.2	ATM card		56.16	Old Age Pension Card	
56.3	Agri. Land patta		56.17	PLF (Panchayat level federation membership)	
	(1) For agri. Land		56.18	PLF membership passbook	
	(2) For revenue land		56.19	Pension Card for Differently Abled Persons	
	(3) For forest land		56.20	Pension Card for Widows	
56.4	Birth Certificate		56.21	PAN Card	
56.5	Caste Certificate		56.22	Ration Card	
56.6	Differently Abled Person Identity Card		56.23	Registered bank account	
56.7	Fishery card		56.24	Smart card	
56.8	Family Card (Smart Ration Card)		56.25	Social Forestry Rights Card	
56.9	Husband's death certificate		56.26	Voter Card	

56.10	Health Insurance Card (Modi Card)		56.27	Welfare Card	
56.11	Health Insurance card (Kalaingar Card)		56.28	Widows destitute certificate	
56.12	House site patta		56.29	Any other, if any (specify: (1) (2) (3)	
56.13	Kisan card				
56.14	Legal heir certificate				

G. CIVIL-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

XV. MEMBERSHIP IN INSTITUTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

57. Are you involved in any of the following associations or committees? (*multiple responses*)

- 57.1. Panchayat (as President) ()
- 57.2. Panchayat (as Member) ()
- 57.3. Women's Sangham /Iyakkam/Movement ()
- 57.4. Self-Help Group ()
- 57.5. Village development committee ()
- 57.6. Education committee / School Development Committee ()
- 57.7. Temple committee ()
- 57.8. Traditional panchayat ()
- 57.9. Political party ()
- 57.10. Others (specify):
- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

XVI. ACCESSING POLITICAL RIGHTS

58. Did you vote in the last Assembly elections?

- 1. Yes ()
- 2. No ()

59. Did you vote in the last local body elections?

- 1. Yes ()
- 2. No ()

60. If Yes, in either or both assembly and local body elections, in the one main reason is:

- 1. It is my political right ()
- 2. My liking for the Party I voted for ()
- 3. My liking for the candidate I voted for ()
- 4. I was given money ()
- 5. I was told to vote by my Sangam/Iyakkam ()
- 6. Any other (specify): _____

61. If no, in either or both assembly and local body elections, in the one main reason is:

1. I was not interested ()
2. I disliked all political parties ()
3. I did not get money from any political party ()
4. Nothing good will come out of the elections ()
5. Any other (specify): _____

62. As a widow, did you contest in the recent Panchayat elections?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

63. If yes, is it for rural or urban?

1. Rural ()
2. Urban ()

64. If yes, for what post?

1. Ward Member ()
2. Councillor ()
3. Panchayat President ()
4. Union President ()
5. Chair Person ()

65. The status of the result: (1) Won () (2) Lost ()

66. If you have won, mention 1 main factor for your victory:

1. People have confidence in me. ()
2. Widows Sangam supported me. ()
3. I spent a lot of money. ()
4. My caste people voted for me. ()
5. My family & relatives supported me. ()
6. Any other (specify): _____

67. If you did not win, mention 1 main factor for the loss:

1. I did not have money power ()
2. My caste factor was against me. ()
3. Being a widow, people didn't have confidence in me ()
4. Any other (specify): _____

68. If you had won as member or president, were you able to exercise your governance authority effectively?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

69. If yes, what is one key factor that helped you to exercise your governance authority effectively? (tick ONE main reason only)

1. I command respect from the Councillors & people ()
2. Widows' Sangam is behind me as big support ()
3. My caste groups supports me ()

4. I have influence with govt. officials/party leaders ()
5. Good financial background of my family/relatives ()
6. I have credibility as social worker ()
7. Any other (specify): _____

70. If not, why? (*1 main reason only*)

1. Prevalence of male chauvinism in and outside the Council ()
2. Caste domination in and outside the Council ()
3. Govt officials do not co-operate with me ()
4. Sangam members don't support me ()
5. I myself don't feel confident of exercising authority ()
6. Any other (specify): _____

71. Would you like to contest in the Panchayat elections in future to any of these posts: ward member/panchayat president/union president/chairperson ?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

72. If yes, what would be the reasons? (*one main reason only*)

1. To assert the rights of widows ()
2. To prove that widows can contribute to people's welfare ()
3. As encouragement for other widows to involve in public life ()
4. Any other (specify): _____

73. If no, what would be the reasons? (*one main reason only*)

1. Widows will not be accepted to serve in public/political life ()
2. As widow, I'm already overburdened with looking after family life ()
3. Political/political life is not a safe place for widows ()
4. I simply do not like politica any more ()
5. Any other (specify): _____

H. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF WIDOWHOOD

XVII. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS & SUPPORT SYSTEM

74. Have you been negatively affected mentally due to being treated as a widow?

1. Yes ()
2. No ()

75. If yes, state what kind of emotional disturbances you have been going through (*state 2 main ones only and indicate the frequency*).

S. N.	Emotional states (choose only 2 main ones only)	Frequency (tick only)		
		Sometimes	Often	Always
75.1.	Angry about & hating parental family/in-laws/relatives/society in general for being rejected or excluded			

75.2.	Anxiety/worry about life & children's future			
75.3.	Feeling empty, depressed and disgusted with life in general			
75.4.	Feeling distrustful of others			
75.5.	Fear of what would befall, being a widow with no support from parental family/in-laws/relatives			
75.6.	Feeling lonely			
75.7.	Feeling overburdened with household work, care of children, earning for life, etc.			
75.8.	Mental stress/tension due to facing various difficulties/obstacles			
75.9.	Feeling helpless and loss of self-confidence in oneself			
75.10.	Any other? (Specify):			
	(a)			
	(b)			
	I			

76. With whom do you share your emotional status and seek guidance and support?
(mention only 2 main ones)

S.N.	Support agency (choose only 2 main ones)	Tick only	S.N.	Support agency (choose only 2 main ones)	Tick only
76.1.	Widows' parents		76.9.	SHG members	
76.2.	Widow's in-laws		76.10.	Priests/Sisters	
76.3.	Children		76.11.	No one	
76.4.	Neighbours		76.12.	Any others (specify):	
76.5.	Friends			(1)	
76.6.	NGO Staff			(2)	
76.7.	Iyakkam Leaders/Members			(3)	
76.8.	Employers				

77. In the area of emotional well-being, what helpful steps would you require in future?
(mention 1 or 2 important suggestions)

77.1. _____

77.2. _____

I. RESISTANCE CAPACITY OF WIDOWS

XVIII. MANIFESTATION OF RESISTANCE AND COURAGE

78. Did you have occasions to face life courageously as a widow?

1. Yes

()

2. No ()

78. If YES, what are the main actions you have done for a courageous stand on matters which affect your life as a widow: (tick up to THREE main actions only)

S.N.	Actions (choose up to 3 main actions only)	Tick relevant items
	A. Socio-cultural practices	
78.1.	Refused customary rituals on the occasion of husband's death	
78.2.	Adorned myself with ornaments, flowers, bindi (dot) and colour & printed sarees	
78.3.	Participated in auspicious functions of families & relatives against all opposition	
78.4.	Myself organized auspicious events for my children and grandchildren	
78.5.	Travelled for work and other social functions alone and single on foot or by bus or by train	
78.6.	Communicated, talked and had conversation with all men and women freely	
78.7.	Walked along the streets any time of the day	
	B. Economic practices	
78.8.	Got <i>patta</i> in my name for house-site/agri-land after my husband's demise	
78.9.	Built a new house for myself after my husband's demise	
78.10.	Opened a small/medium/big business venture	
78.11.	Got business loans from public/private banks	
78.12.	Opened bank account in my name in private/public bank	
78.13.	Accessed widow's pension certificate from govt. dept.	
78.14.	Legally fought to get a share of my husband's property	
	C. Gender related practices	
78.15.	Chose husband of my choice for remarriage	
78.16.	Took to remarriage willingly with husband chosen by my parents/relatives	
78.17.	Willingly chose to remain single without re-marriage	
78.18.	Myself made written complaint to police against sexual advances/assault of men	
78.19.	Educated girl-children beyond higher secondary schooling	
	D. Political practices	
78.20.	Willingly chose to attend gram sabha meetings	
78.21.	Expressed my opinions in public in gram sabha meetings	
78.22.	Contested panchayat elections as ward member/president	
78.23.	Registered myself as member of movement/iyakkam	
78.24.	Myself went to govt. office to present petition regarding my needs/village needs	
78.25.	Participated in issue-related public protest marches	
78.26.	Made speeches in public meetings	
78.27.	Myself took decision about children's education, marriage, ear-boring ceremony, puberty, etc.	
	E. Human dignity & Self-respect	
78.28.	Asserted my right to do what I want and what I wish with my parental family/in-laws/relatives	

78.29.	Equipped myself with school/college/technical/vocational education to earn and stand on my own feet	
78.30.	Underwent training on various subjects to broaden my knowledge and skills in order to face society with courage and conviction	
78.31.	Have become now more than before a socially communicable person without feeling shy or inferior	
78.32.	Have become bold and frank in questioning those who do injustice to women/widows	
78.33.	Gradually built up my material and financial assets to project myself as a person of importance in society	

J. SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS

XIX. SOCIAL AND LEGAL SECURITY

79. What is your level of knowledge of the following laws? (multiple responses, if any)

No	Law	Level of knowledge*
79.1	SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989	
79.2	Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955	
79.3	Protection of Violence from Domestic Violence Act 2005	
79.4	Right to Information Act 2005	
79.5	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005	
79.6	Indian Constitution 1949 – Fundamental Rights Provisions	
79.7	The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986)	
79.8	The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION and REDRESSAL) Act, 2013	
79.9	The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	
79.10	The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988)	
79.11	The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013	
79.12	Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986	
79.13	The Maternity Benefit Act 1961,	
79.14	Muslim Women (Protection of rights on divorce) Act 1986,	
79.15	Hindu Adoption And Maintenance Act, 1956.	
79.16	Any other (specify): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

* (1). Never heard of law (2) Only know the name of law (3). Know a few provisions of law, that is, broadly what law is for (4) Know the law and its provisions well, and how to use the law, (5). Utilized those laws for myself / my close associates.

80. What is the source of your knowledge? (tick appropriate multiple responses)

(NOTE: Answers expected only from three categories of respondents: (3) those who know a few provisions of law, that is, broadly what law is for, and (4) those who know the law

and its provisions well, and how to use the law, (5) those who have utilized the law for oneself & for others)

80.1.	Attending NGO's training programs	
80.2.	Attending govt. conducted training programs	
80.3.	From my involvement in issues concerning myself	
80.4.	From relatives'/friends'/neighbours' involvement in issues	
80.5.	From Mass media and Social media (TV, Youtube, Whatsapp etc)	
80.6.	Any others (specify): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

81. Have you ever been to the police station in the last 5 years?

1. Yes () 2. No ()

82. If yes, how many times? (one response only)

1. Once () 2. Twice ()
3. Thrice () 4. More than three times ()

83. If yes, for what purpose? (multiple responses, if any)

83.1. For an issue pertaining to myself ()

83.2. For an issue pertaining to other (relatives & friends) ()

83.3. For an issue pertaining to Sangam/Iyakkam ()

83.4. Any other (specify):

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

84. If yes, how were you treated at the police station by the police officers? (up to TWO main reasons responses only)

84.1.	Treated with dignity and respect	
84.2.	Helpful by listening well and filing the case	
84.3.	Extended physical protection from the accused	
84.4.	Used foul words with sexual connotation	
84.5.	Used caste based abusive language	
84.6.	Used threatening language	
84.7.	Physically assaulted	
84.8.	Assaulted with lathis	
84.9.	Any other (specify) (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

85. As a widow, do you feel secure in public life generally? (give one main response only)

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Yes, always anytime, anywhere | () |
| 2. Yes, sometimes only whether day or night | () |
| 3. Never felt secure at night only | () |
| 4. Never felt secure whether day or night & anywhere | () |

86. What is a key factor which makes you feel insecure? – to be responded by only those who ticked (1,2, 3 or 4 above) (one main response only)

1.	Since I am alone with no male support, people think I am defenceless.	
2.	Since I am a widow, I have experienced men harass me with sexual gestures	
3.	I have experienced being stalked by men	
4.	Since I am poor economically, people try to exploit me.	
5.	As I am not educated well or less educated, people use my ignorance.	
6.	My dwelling being a thatch or mud house (Olai kudisai/Mann kudisai)	
7.	Since my children are too young, I feel insecure for myself and them.	
8.	As I am young in age, I feel insecure.	
9.	Because I'm a woman, I feel I can't speak out/argue with men forcefully.	
10.	Any other (specify): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

87. Given the insecure situation of widows, do you think there should be a legislation to safeguard widows from harm, provide them protection and help them develop their livelihood?

- | | | | |
|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| 1. Yes | () | 2. No | () |
|--------|--------|-------|--------|

88. If yes, what should be the special features of this legislation? (mention 2 features only).

- 88.1. _____
- 88.2. _____

K. FUTURE CONCERNS

XX. PRIORITIES OF HOUSEHOLD

89. What are the three key priorities for your household which you do not have now and hence in need of in future? (number your choices in order of importance, 1 being the most important):

89.1.	House for my household	
89.2.	Food for my household	
89.3.	Toilet facility	

89.4.	Employment opportunity for me and/or children	
89.5.	Education of my children	
89.6.	Marriage of my daughter	
89.7.	Marriage of my son	
89.8.	Caring for my own ill-health	
89.9.	Loan repayment	
89.10.	Any other (specify): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

90. What are your main areas of concern for your female and male children? (*tick two each only for female and male children*)

No.	Concerns	Female children	Male children
90.1	Irresponsible and disoriented behaviour		
90.2	Disinterest in education/discontinued education		
90.3	Addiction to liquor/drugs		
90.4	Not respecting widowed mother		
90.5	Their marriage prospects		
90.6	Their unhappy married life		
90.7	Their unemployment		
90.8	Their irregular employment		
90.9	Any other(specify): (1) _____ (2) _____		

PART II - PROTECTION RIGHTS & ENTITLEMENTS
AGAINST DISCRIMINATION/DENIAL AND VIOLENCE

91. What have been the forms of rights denial/discrimination and forms of violence you have faced in your life as a widow?

Themes		Discrimination/Denial		VIOLENCE		
No.	Forms of Discrimination	<u>Denial/ discrimination by whom:</u> (1) Family members (2) Relatives (3) Neighbors (4) Elected panchayat officials (5) Govt. officials (6) Police officers (7) <i>Archakars/</i> priests/mullahs in temple, church, mosque (8) Any others (specify)	Whether formal complaint has been filed with police	Forms of violence: (1) Verbal (2) Physical (3) Sexual (4) Psychological	<u>Violence by whom:</u> (1) Family members (2) Relatives (3) Neighbors (4) Elected panchayat officials (5) Govt. officials (6) Police officers (7) <i>Archakars/</i> priests/mullahs in temple, church, mosque (8) Any others (specify)	Whether formal complaint has been filed with police

		Write numbers (1/2/3/4/5/6/7/or specify if 8 only	Tick only (✓)	Write numbers (1/2/3/4) only	Write numbers (1/2/3/4/5/6/7/ or specify if 8 only	Tick only (✓)
	A. Socio-Cultural Practices					
1	For wearing colour/flower sari					
2	For putting dot/bindi on forehead & adorning head with flowers					
3	For beautifying face with cosmetics					
4	For wearing jewelry like bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, toe ring, nose stud, etc.					
5	For attending own family's/relatives' auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony at pregnancy (<i>valai kaappu</i>), etc.					
6	For attending others' (not family/relatives) auspicious functions (marriage, ear boring ceremony, bangles wearing ceremony at pregnancy (<i>valai kaappu</i>), etc.					
7	For attending own family's/relatives' funeral/memorial functions, etc.					
8	For attending others' (not family/relatives) funeral/memorial functions					

9	For walking along certain roads at certain time of day (v.g. morning) or visiting people in early mornings in routine manner as alleged to be inauspicious in sight					
10	For walking freely along village roads during weddings or festivals					
11	For having conversations with men in day-to-day life					
12	For desiring second marriage with partner of one's own choice					
13	For desiring second marriage with partner fixed by others (family, relatives, etc.)					
14	For participating in such socio-cultural functions as village dance, sports, competitions, etc.					
15	For sitting in main places (instead of sitting separately) at functions/festivals					
16	Any others (specify):					
	(1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					
	B. Livelihood matters					
17	When accessing or trying to access govt. development schemes					
18	When accessing or trying to access govt. disaster relief schemes					

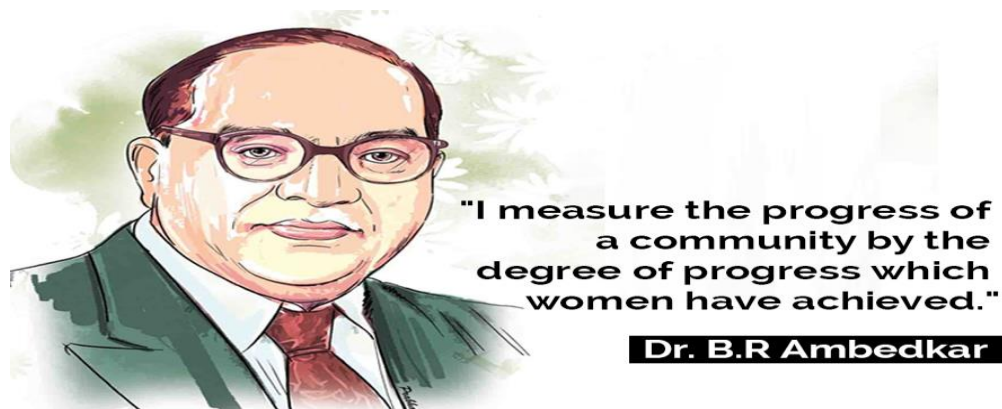
19	When accessing or trying to access house sites					
20	When accessing or trying to access house <i>patta</i>					
21	When accessing or trying to access house construction					
22	When accessing or trying to access basic amenities for one's domestic use– water, toilets, electricity, etc.					
23	When accessing or trying to access water from public source, being made to wait until other married/unmarried women have accessed					
24	When accessing or trying to access PDS, being denied of provisions while others received					
25	When accessing or trying to access private shops as first person (போனியாங்குதல்) to buy basic livelihood items					
26	When accessing or trying to access public grazing grounds					
27	When participating in SHG or any organization/committee					
28	Any other (specify: (1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					

	C. Economic matters					
29	For accessing or trying to access agri. land ownership					
30	For cultivating already owned agri. land					
31	For accessing or trying to access agri. land as tenant					
32	For accessing or trying to access one's new commercial/business enterprise for oneself or for running commercial/business enterprise already owned & run by self					
33	For putting up or trying to put up commercial infrastructure building or shed					
34	For accessing or trying to access agri. loans or commercial/business loans from govt./bank/other sources					
35	For accessing or trying to access housing loans from govt./bank/other sources					
36	For accessing or trying to access loans from govt./banks/other sources for any other purposes (specify):					
	(1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					

37	When being paid wages for similar agri. work/other works done by other women					
38	Any other (specify):					
	(1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					
	D. Political matters					
39	Being invited to attend Gram Sabha meetings					
40	For entering into panchayat office					
41	For contesting in panchayat elections as ward member/president					
42	For campaigning in panchayat or assembly elections					
43	For participating in any protest meetings/social conferences					
44	For accessing panchayat office after winning panchayat election as ward member/president					
45	For exercising authority in office as panchayat president/ward member					
46	For approaching or trying to approach govt. administration officials after being elected as ward member/president for any welfare needs of the electorate or for any problems					

	faced by her while functioning in the panchayat administration					
47	For approaching or trying to approach police stations for filing complaints regarding problems faced by the elected woman in her constituency					
48	Any other (specify):					
	(1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					
	E. Religious matters					
49	For entering public temples					
50	For giving offerings inside the temples					
51	For receiving <i>prasadam</i> from temple priests					
52	For going to temples dressed in colour sari/ decked with flowers/ornaments					
53	For participating in religious processions or in religious gatherings around temples /churches on temple/church festivals					
54	For performing religious ceremonies in public temple					
55	For observing religious vows related practices to gain divine					

	favours (carrying milk pots, fire pots, paddy sprouts and <i>kavadi</i> ; doing holy fire walk; <i>ghjt</i> preparation)					
56	For allegedly being possessed by evil spirits (witch)					
57	Any other (specify):					
	(1)					
	(2)					
	(3)					



ANNEXURE 2: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE (Tamil)

தமிழகத்தின் விதவைப் பெண்கள்:
மாண்பு, பாதுகாப்பு, மனித உரிமை மற்றும் சட்ட உரிமைகளைத் தேடி
கள ஆய்வு - 2022

கேள்வித்தாள் எண்:

விதவைப் பெண்:	தகவல் சேகரிப்பவர்:
பெயர்:	பெயர்
வீட்டு எண்:	தகவல் சேகரித்த தேதி: / / 2022
உணர்/கிராமம்:	கையொப்பம்:
மாவட்டம்	கைபேசி எண்:
கைபேசி எண்:	

பகுதி I: சமூக, பொருளாதார, கலாச்சார மற்றும் அரசியல் நிலைகள்

அ. தனிநபர் தொடர்பான தகவல்கள்

I. குடும்ப விபரம் :

1. உங்களின் (விதவைப் பெண்ணின்) பெயர்: _____

2. உங்கள் வயது (நிறைவடைந்து) : _____

3. சாதிப் பிரிவு :

- | | |
|---|-----|
| (1) உயர்ந்த சாதி FC | () |
| (2) பிற்படுத்தப்பட்ட வகுப்பினர் BC | () |
| (3) பிற பிற்படுத்தப்பட்ட வகுப்பினர் OBC | () |
| (4) மிகவும் பிற்படுத்தப்பட்ட வகுப்பினர் MBC | () |
| (5) ஆதிதிராவிடர்/பட்டியல் இனத்தவர் SC | () |
| (6) பழங்குடியினர் ST | () |

4. மதம்: (1) இந்து () (2) இஸ்லாமியர் () (3) கிறிஸ்தவர் ()

(4) பிற மதத்தினர் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

5-6. கணவர் இறந்த போது உங்கள் வயது மற்றும் உங்கள் கணவர் இறப்பிற்கான காரணம்.

	5. வயது			6. கணவர் இறப்பிற்கான ஓர முக்கிய காரணம் மட்டும்	
1	20 க்கு குறைந்த வயது	()	1	குடி	()
2	21- 25	()	2	விபத்து	()
3	26-30	()	3	கொலை	()
4	31-35	()	4	தற்கொலை	()
5	36-40	()	5	உடல் நலக் குறைவு	()
6	41-45	()	6	கொரோனா தொற்று	()
7	46-50	()	7	போதை மருந்து பயன்பாடு	()
8	51-55	()	8	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	
9	56-60	()		(1) -----	
10	61 வயதிற்கு மேல்	()		(2) -----	
				(3) -----	

7. உங்கள் குழந்தைகளின் எண்ணிக்கை விபரம். (குழந்தைகள் இல்லை என்றால் 0 என்று குறிப்பிடவும்.)

7.1 குழந்தைகள் இல்லை ----- 7.2 ஆண் குழந்தைகள் -----
7.3 பெண் குழந்தைகள் ----- 7.4 மூன்றாம் பாலினத்தவர் -----

8. உங்களது குடும்ப நிலை: ஒரு பதிலை மட்டும் (✓) குறிப்பிடுக

1	தனியாக வசிக்கின்றேன்	
2	என் குழந்தைகளுடன் வசிக்கின்றேன்	
3	மாமனார் மாமியாருடன் வசிக்கின்றேன்	
4	என் பெற்றோருடன் வசிக்கின்றேன்	
5	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	

ஆ. சமூக – பொருளாதார சூழ்நிலை

II. கல்வித் தகுதி குறித்த விபரம்

9. உங்கள் மற்றும் உங்களது குழந்தைகளின் கல்வித்தகுதி (ஒரு பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

	கல்வித்தகுதி (முடித்துத் மட்டும்)	(a) விதவைப் பெண் (✓ செய்யவும்)	(b) பெண் குழந்தைகளின் எண்ணிக்கை	ஐ ஆண் குழந்தைகளின் எண்ணிக்கை
9.1	பள்ளிக்குச் செல்லவே இல்லை – எழுத படிக்கத் தெரியாது.			
9.2	பள்ளிக்குச் செல்லவில்லை - இருப்பினும் ஓரளவு எழுத படிக்கத் தெரியும்.			
9.3	1-5 வகுப்பு			
9.4	6-8 வகுப்பு			
9.5	9-10 வகுப்பு			
9.6	11-12வகுப்பு			

9.7	தொழிற்கல்வி			
9.8	இளநிலைப் பட்டதாரி			
9.9	முதுநிலைப் பட்டதாரி			
9.10	முதுநிலைப் பட்டத்திற்கு மேலான உயர்கல்வி			

10. உங்களது கணவரது இறப்பிற்குப் பிறகு, உங்களது குழந்தைகளில் யாரேனும் பள்ளிப் படிப்பிலிருந்தோ அல்லது கல்லூரிப் படிப்பிலிருந்தோ இடைநிற்க நேர்ந்ததா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

11. ஆம் என்றால் அதற்கான முக்கிய காரணம் என்ன? (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம். பொருத்தமானவைகளுக்கு ✓ செய்யவும்)

காரணங்கள்	(a) பெண் குழந்தைகள்	(b) ஆண் குழந்தைகள்
11.1. பள்ளி/கல்லூரி கட்டணத்தைச் செலுத்த இயலவில்லை		
11.2. குடும்பக் கடனை அடைக்க வேலைக்கு செல்ல வேண்டிய நிர்ப்பந்தம்		
11.3. குடும்ப வாழ்வாரத்திற்கான வருமானத்தை ஈட்ட வேலைக்கு செல்ல வேண்டிய நிர்ப்பந்தம்.		
11.4. வீட்டையும் மற்றும் வீட்டில் இருந்த இளைய சகோதர சகோதரிகளையும் கவனித்துக் கொள்ள வேண்டிய நிர்ப்பந்தம்.		
11.5. ஆசிரியர்கள் / பேராசிரியர்கள் பாரபட்சமாக நடத்திக் கொடுமைப்படுத்தியதால்		
11.6. தந்தை இழப்பினால் ஏற்பட்ட மன அழுத்தம் காரணமாக படிப்பில் கவனம் செலுத்த இயலவில்லை/தேர்வில் தோல்வியினால்		
11.7. குழந்தைகளுக்கு பாதுகாப்பற்ற சூழல்		
11.8. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)		

12. நீங்கள் ஏதேனும் சான்றிதழுடன் கூடிய தொழிற்கல்விப் பயிற்சி படித்ததுண்டா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

(12.1) ஆம் என்றால், என்ன வகையான பயிற்சிகள்?

	புயிற்சியின் பெயர்களைக் குறிப்பிடுக
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

13. சான்றிதழுடன் கூடிய தொழிற்கல்விப் பயிற்சி படித்துள்ளீர்கள் என்றால், அப்பயிற்சி சார்ந்த வேலையில் அமர்த்தப்பட்டு இருக்கின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

13.1 இல்லை என்றால், அதற்கான ஓர காரணத்தை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக: _____

III. குடும்பம் சார்ந்த காரியங்களில் முடிவெடுத்தல்

14. கீழ்க்கண்ட குடும்பம் தொடர்பான செயல்பாடுகளுக்கான முக்கிய முடிவுகளை உங்களது வீட்டில் எடுப்புத யார்?

	செயல்பாடுகள்	(a) முடிவுகளை எடுப்பது யார் *	(b) அதற்கான செலவுகளைச் செய்வது (யார் முக்கியமாக செலவு செய்கிறார்களோ, அதனை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.)*
14.1.	உணவு மற்றும் அத்தியாவசியமான பொருட்களை வாங்குவது தொடர்பாக		
14.2.	ஆயிரம் ரூபாய்க்கு மேலான மருத்துவச் செலவுகள் குறித்த முடிவுகள் தொடர்பாக		
14.3.	குழந்தைகளின் கல்வி மற்றும் அதற்கான செலவுகள் குறித்த முடிவுகள் தொடர்பாக		
14.4.	குழந்தைகளின் திருமணம் குறித்த முடிவுகள்		
14.5.	புது வீடு கட்டுவது மற்றும் வீட்டைப் புதுப்பிப்புத தொடர்பாக		
14.6.	நிலம், வீட்டு மனை, மற்றும் கால்நடை விலங்குகள் வாங்குவது மற்றும் விற்பது குறித்த முடிவுகள் தொடர்பாக		
14.7.	கடன் வாங்குவது தொடர்பாக (வங்கி, சுயநிதி உதவிக்குழு அல்லது வட்டிக்கு பணம் கொடுப்பவர்கள் ஆகியோரிடமிருந்து) மற்றும் சேமிப்புத தொடர்பாக (சுயநிதி உதவிக்குழு, வங்கிகளிடமிருந்து)		
14.8.	வியாபாரம் அல்லது சிறு தொழில் ஆரம்பிப்புத தொடர்பாக		
14.9.	தேர்தலில் போட்டியிடுவது அல்லது அரசியல் கட்சியில் இணைவது மற்றும் தேர்தல் பிரச்சாரத்தில் ஈடுபடுவது தொடர்பாக		
14.10.	பெண்களது உரிமைகள் சார்ந்த இயக்கங்கள், சங்கங்கள் அல்லது சுயநிதி குழுக்களில் சேர்வது மற்றும் அவைசார்ந்த கூட்டங்களில் கலந்து கொள்வது தொடர்பாக		
14.11.	போராட்டங்கள், தர்ணா மற்றும் பொது நிகழ்வுகளில் கலந்து கொள்வது தொடர்பாக		
14.12.	வெளியூர்களில் நடக்கும் அரசியல்/சங்க/இயக்க கூட்டங்கள், பயிற்சிகள் மற்றும் மாநாடுகளில் கலந்து கொள்வது தொடர்பாக		
14.13.	உறவினர்கள், நண்பர்கள் மற்றும் அருகாமை பகுதியில் உள்ளவர்களின் சுப மற்றும் துக்க நிகழ்வுகளில் கலந்து கொள்வது தொடர்பாக (எ.கா. காதுகுத்து, நிச்சயதார்த்தம், திருமணம், சாவு)		
14.14.	கோயில்களுக்கு திருபாத்திரை செல்வது, சுற்றுலா செல்வது முதலியன தொடர்பாக		
14.15.	தனிப்பட்ட தேவைக்கான ஆடைகள், நகைகள், அழகு சாதன பொருட்கள் வாங்குவது தொடர்பாக		

* (1) நான் (கேள்விகளுக்குப் பதிலளிக்கும் விதவைப் பெண்.) (2) மாமியார் (3) மாமனார் (4) தாய்

IV. சமூகப் பண்பாட்டுப் பழக்கவழக்கங்கள்

15. உங்களது அன்றாட வாழ்வில் கீழ்க்கண்ட நடைமுறை பழக்கங்களை கடைப்பிடிக்கின்றீர்களா? (பொருத்தமானவைகளுக்கு பதில் கூறலாம்) (✓ செய்யவும்)

	சமூக கலாச்சார பழக்கங்கள்	ஆம்	இல்லை
15.1	பூ போட்ட வண்ணச் (கலர்) சேலை அணிவது		
15.2	நெற்றியில் பொட்டு வைப்பது		
15.3	நகைகள் அணிந்து கொள்வது - வளையல், கொலுசு, மூக்குத்தி மற்றும் இதர நகைகள்		
15.4	அழகுசாதனப் பொருட்களால் முகத்தை அழகுபடுத்துவது (எ.கா. கண்மை, பவுடர் பூசுவது முதலியன)		
15.5	முங்சள் மற்றும் குங்குமம் பயன்படுத்துவது		
15.6	தலையில் பூ வைத்து கொள்வது		
15.7	உங்கள் குடும்பம் சார்ந்த வைபவங்களில் - கல்யாணம், காதுகுத்து, வளைகாப்பு போன்றவற்றில் பங்கேற்பது.		
15.8	உங்கள் உறவினர்கள் மற்றும் நண்பர்களது குடும்பங்கள் சார்ந்த வைபவங்களில் - கல்யாணம், காதுகுத்து, வளைகாப்பு போன்றவற்றில் பங்கேற்பது.		
15.9	உங்கள் குடும்ப மற்றும் உறவினர்களின் சாவு மற்றும் நினைவு நாள் நிகழ்வுகளில் கலந்து கொள்வது.		
15.10	நண்பர்கள் மற்றும் தெரிந்தவர்களின் சாவு மற்றும் நினைவு நாள் கூட்டங்களில் கலந்து கொள்வது.		
15.11	அக்கம் பக்கம் இருப்பவர்கள் மற்றும் அறிமுகமான ஆண்களிடம் சாதாரணமாக பேசுவது		
15.12	உறவினர்களின் வீட்டுக்கு வழக்கமாகச் செல்வது		
15.13	காலை வேளையில் பொது மக்களை எதிர்கொள்வது/சந்திப்பது		
15.14	மற்ற பெண்களைப் போன்று பொதுக் குளங்கள், ஏரிகள் மற்றும் கிணறுகள் ஆகியவற்றில் குளிப்பது		
15.15	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): (1) _____ (2) _____		

16. மனைவிமார்களுக்கு நடத்தப்படும் பாரம்பரியச் சடங்குகள் உங்களது கணவர் இறந்தவுடன் உங்களுக்கு நடத்தப்பட்டதா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

17. ஆம் என்றால், அச்சடங்குகளை நடத்திய போது உங்கள் மனநிலை (உணர்வு) என்னவாக இருந்தது? (ஏதாவது முக்கியமான ஒன்றை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.)

1. பலவீனம்/இயலாமை ()
2. புரம்பரிய வழக்கம்; அதனால் ஏற்று கொண்டேன் ()
3. கோபம்/எரிச்சல் ()
4. வேறு ஏதும்(குறிப்பிடுக.):

18. உங்கள் பதிலுக்கான ஓர் காரணத்தைக் கூறுக

19. கணவரை இழந்த பெண்களுக்கு நடத்தப்படும் இது போன்ற பாரம்பரியச் சடங்குகள் நிறுத்தப்பட வேண்டும் அல்லது தடை செய்யப்பட வேண்டும் என்று நினைக்கின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

20. ஆம் என்றால், ஏன்? ஆதற்கான ஓர் முக்கிய காரணத்தை கூறுக

21. இல்லை என்றால், ஏன்? ஆதற்கான ஓர் முக்கிய காரணத்தை கூறுக

இ. அடிப்படை வாழ்வாதார நிலை

V. உணவு பாதுகாப்பு/உட்கொள்ளும் வழக்கங்கள்

22. உங்கள் வீட்டின் குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள் சராசரியாக ஒரு நாளைக்கு எத்தனை வேளை உணவு சாப்பிடுவீர்கள்? (ஓர் பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

எண்.	குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள்	ஓர் வேளை உணவு	இரு வேளை உணவு	மூன்று வேளை உணவு
22.1.	நீங்கள் (விதவைப் பெண்)			
22.2.	பெண் குழந்தைகள்			
22.3.	ஆண் குழந்தைகள்			

23. உங்கள் வீட்டில் சாப்பிடும் உணவு வகைகளின் விபரம் கூறுக?

உணவு வகை	ஓர் மாதத்தில் எத்தனை நாட்கள் உட்கொள்வீர்கள் (நாள் எண்ணிக்கையை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)
23.1. பால்	
23.2. தயிர்	
23.3. பருப்பு வகைகள்	
23.4. காய்கறிகள்	
23.5. பழங்கள்	
23.6. முட்டை	
23.7. மாமிசம் (ஆட்டுக்கறி மாட்டுக்கறி, கோழிக்கறி)	
23.8. மீன்	

VI. சுகாதாரம்

24. உங்களுக்கு உடல் நலக்குறைவு ஏற்படும் போது எந்த மருத்துவமனைக்குச் செல்வீர்கள்? (தேவை எனில் பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

24.1. நகரத்தில் உள்ள அரசு மருத்துவமனை ()

24.2. ஆரம்ப சுகாதார மையம் ()

24.3. தனியார் மருந்தகம்/மருத்துவர்/மருத்துவமனை ()

24.4. நாட்டு வைத்தியர்/சித்த மருத்துவர் ()

24.5. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

VII. குடியிருப்பு மற்றும் இதர அடிப்படை வசதிகள்

25. நீங்கள் தற்பொழுது குடிநீர் எங்கிருந்து எடுக்கின்றீர்கள்? (தேவை எனில் பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

25.1. உங்களுக்கு சொந்தமான கிணறு/ஆழ்குழாய்க்கிணறு(போர்வெல்)/நீர்க் குழாய் ()

25.2. பொது கிணறு, ஆழ்குழாய்க்கிணறு (போர்வெல்), நீர் குழாய் ()

25.3. ஊர் குளம்/ஊரணி ()

25.4. ஊர் கண்மாய் ()

25.5. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

26. குடியிருப்பு நிலை: உங்களுக்கு சொந்த வீடு இருக்கின்றதா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

27. உங்களுக்கு சொந்த வீடு இல்லை என்றால் வேறு எங்கு வசிக்கின்றீர்கள்? (ஒரு பதிலை மட்டும் தேர்வு செய்க)

27.1. வாடகை வீடு () 27.2. பண்ணை வீடு ()

27.3. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) : _____

28. நீங்கள் சொந்த வீட்டில் குடியிருக்கின்றீர்கள் எனில், அது யார் கட்டியது ?

28.1. அரசாங்க வீடு () 28.2. நீங்கள் கட்டிய/வாங்கிய சொந்த வீடு ()

29. உங்கள் வீடு அரசாங்கத்தால் கட்டிக் கொடுக்கப்பட்ட வீடு எனில், அது எந்தத் திட்டத்தின் கீழ் கட்டப்பட்டது?

29.1. இந்திராகாந்தி நினைவு குடியிருப்புத் திட்டம் (மத்திய அரசு) ()

29.2. தமிழக அரசின் பசுமை வீடு திட்டம். ()

29.3. பிரதம மந்திரி குடியிருப்புத் திட்டம் ()

29.4. பழைய காலனி வீடு திட்டம் ()

29.5. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

30. நீங்கள் குடியிருக்கும் வீடு நீங்கள் கட்டியது எனில், அது எந்த வகையைச் சார்ந்தது? (ஒரு பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.)

30.1. கான்கிரீட் வீடு (சுவர்கள் செங்கற்கள் அல்லது கற்களால் கட்டப்பட்டு சிமென்டால் பூசப்பட்டு, மேல்தளம் கான்கிரீட் போடப்பட்டு) ()

30.2. ஓட்டு வீடு – (சுவர்கள் செங்கற்கள் அல்லது கற்களால் கட்டப்பட்டு சிமென்டால் பூசப்பட்டது, மேல்தளம் செங்கற்களால் கட்டப்பட்டது) ()

30.3. குடிசை அல்லது ஓலை வீடு – (சுவர்கள் மண்ணாலோ அல்லது ஓலைகளாலோ கட்டப்பட்டது, கூரை ஓலைகளாலோ அல்லது ஆஸ்பெஸ்டாஸ் சீட்டாலோ போடப்பட்டது) ()

31. நீங்கள் குடியிருக்கும் வீடு , உங்களது சொந்த வீடு எனில், அது யாரால் கட்டப்பட்டது அல்லது வாங்கப்பட்டது?

31.1. எனது கணவர் உயிருடன் இருக்கும் போது கட்டப்பட்ட வீடு ()

31.2. நான் எனது சொந்த முயற்சியால் கட்டியது ()

- 31.3. எனது கணவரது வம்சாவழி வீடு ()
 31.4. எனது பெற்றோரின் வம்சாவழி வீடு ()

32. நீங்கள் குடியிருக்கும் வீடு , (நீங்கள் சொந்தமாக கட்டியதாக இருந்தாலும் அல்லது அரசாங்கம் கட்டிக் கொடுத்த வீடாக இருந்தாலும்) கீழ் கண்ட வசதிகளைக் கொண்டதாக இருக்கின்றதா?

- 32.1. கழிவு நீர் கால்வாய் 1. ஆம் () 2. இல்லை ()
 32.2. மின்சார இணைப்பு 1. ஆம் () 2. இல்லை ()
 32.3. பயன்படுத்தும் கழிப்பிடம் 1. ஆம் () 2. இல்லை ()

33. நீங்கள் அரசாங்க குடியிருப்பு திட்டத்தின் கீழ் ஏதேனும் புதிய வீட்டுக்காக தற்போது விண்ணப்பித்து இருக்கின்றீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

34. ஆம் என்றால், எந்த திட்டத்தின் கீழ் விண்ணப்பித்து இருக்கின்றீர்கள்

1. இந்திராகாந்தி நினைவு குடியிருப்பு திட்டம் (மத்திய அரசு) ()
 2. தமிழக அரசின் பசுமை விட திட்டம் ()
 3. பிரதம மந்திரி குடியிருப்பு திட்டம் (மத்திய அரசு) ()
 4. பழைய காலனி விட திட்டம் ()
 4. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): -----

35. இல்லை என்றால், அதற்கான ஓர காரணத்தை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.

1. எனக்கு வீடு கட்ட வீட்டு மனை (நிலம்) இல்லை. ()
 2. என்னிடம் வீட்டு மனை உள்ளதா, ஆனால் பட்டா இல்லை ()
 3. வீட்டு மனை வாங்க பணம் இல்லை. ()
 4. எனக்கு வேறு வீடு தேவையில்லை. ()
 5. வேறு ஏதும் (குறிப்பிடுக): -----

36. வீட்டு மனை பற்றிய விவரம்

36.1. உங்கள் வீட்டு மனையை வாங்கியது யார்? (ஒரு பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

1. நான்	()	6. எஸ்டேட் பண்ணை நிலம்	()
2. கணவர் உயிருடன் இருக்கும் போது வாங்கியது	()	7. கணவரது குடும்ப (வம்சாவழி) நிலம்	()
3. அரசாங்க காலனி இடம்	()	8. எனது பெற்றோரது (வம்சாவழி) நிலம்	()
4. புறம்போக்கு நிலம்	()	9. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	
5. கோயில் நிலம்	()		

36.2. உங்கள் வீட்டு மனையின் (நிலம்) அளவினை (சென்ட் கணக்கில்) குறிப்பிடுக

1. ஓர் சென்ட்டுக்கு குறைவானது () 2. ஒன்றிலிருந்து இரண்டு சென்ட் ()
 3. இரண்டு சென்ட்டுக்கு மேல் ()

36.3. உங்கள் வீட்டு மனைப் பட்டா யார் பெயரில் உள்ளது?

1. கணவர் ()
 2. எனது பெயரில் (விதவைப் பெண்) ()
 3. இருவர் பெயரிலும் - (எனது கணவர் & எனது பெயரில்) கூட்டாக உள்ளது ()
 4. வேறு எவரேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): -----

ஈ. பொருளாதாரச் சூழ்நிலை

VIII. வருவாய் மற்றும் செலவு

37. உங்கள் குடும்ப வருமானத்திற்காக செய்யும் தொழில்/வேலை என்ன? (தேவை எனில் பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

- 37.1. தொழிலாளி (ஏதேனும் ஓர துறையில், சம்பளத்திற்குப் பிறரிடம் வேலை செய்தல்): ()
- 37.2. விவசாயம் (சொந்த நிலத்திலோ, சமூக பொது நிலத்திலோ அல்லது குத்தகை நிலத்திலோ) ()
- 37.3. சொந்த தொழில்/வியாபாரம் (சிறு அல்லது பெரு வியாபாரம்) ()
- 37.4. பலதரப்பட்ட வேலைகள்: (கூலித்தொழில், விவசாயம் அல்லது சிறு, பெரு வியாபாரம்): ()
- 37.5. பிற வேலைகள் குறிப்பிடுக (எ.கா. மீன் பிடித்தல், கரிமூட்டம் போடுதல், விறகு வெட்டுதல்): _____

38. அரசிடமிருந்து உதவித் தொகை பெறுகிறீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

39. ஆம் என்றால், எவ்வகையான உதவித் தொகை?

- 39.1. விதவை ஓய்வூதியத் தொகை ()
- 39.2. கணவனின் பென்சன் தொகை ()
- 39.3. பெற்றோர் பென்சன் தொகை ()
- 39.4. வேறு ஏதாவது (குறிப்பிடுக):

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

40. பல்வேறு வகையான தொழில்களின் மூலமாக உங்களுக்குக் கிடைக்கும் மொத்த ஆண்டு வருமானம் (ஒர பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

1. ரூ.50,000/- குறைவாக ()	5. ரூ. 80,001 – 90,000/- ()
2. ரூ.50,001 – 60,000/- ()	6. ரூ. 90,001 – 1,00,000/- ()
3. ரூ.60,001 – 70,000/- ()	7. ரூ. 1,00,000/-க்கு மேல் ()
4. ரூ. 70,001 – 80,000/- ()	

41. தங்கள் குடும்பத்திலுள்ள மற்றவர்களுக்குக் கிடைக்கும் மொத்த ஆண்டு வருமானம் (யாரேனும் இருந்தால் குறிப்பிடுக) (ஒர பதிலை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.)

1. ரூ.30,000/- குறைவாக ()	6. ரூ. 70,001 – 80,000/- ()
2. ரூ.30,001 – 40,000/- ()	7. ரூ. 80,001 – 90,000/- ()
3. ரூ.40,001 – 50,000/- ()	8. ரூ. 90,001 – 1,00,000/- ()
4. ரூ.50,001 – 60,000/- ()	9. ரூ. 1,00,000/-க்கு மேல் ()
5. ரூ. 60,001 – 70,000/- ()	

42. கடந்த ஓர் ஆண்டில் நீங்கள் உங்களது வீட்டிற்காகச் செய்த முக்கிய செலவுகள்

	செலவு விபரம்	(a) செலவான தொகை
42.1	கடனைக் கட்டியது	
42.2	வாடகை, வரி மற்றும் நீர் & மின்சாரக் கட்டணம்.	
42.3	வீட்டிற்கான உணவுச் செலவு	
42.4	சமையல் எரிவாயு வாங்கியது	
42.5	குடும்பத்தில் உள்ள அனைவருக்குமான மருத்துவச் செலவு – மருந்து மற்றும் ஆஸ்பத்திரிச் செலவு	
42.6	கல்விக்கான செலவு: பள்ளி/கல்லூரி கட்டணம், புத்தகம், சீருடை போன்றவை	
42.7	முதலீடு செய்து: புது வியாபாரம் (கடைக்கு கொடுத்த முன்பணம்) அல்லது கால்நடை விலங்குகள் வாங்கியது அல்லது புது இடம் வாங்கியது (நிலம், வீட்டு மனை, கடை) அல்லது விட கட்டியது/விட சரி செய்து.	
42.8	விவசாயத்திற்காகும் ஆண்டு செலவு: விதை, உரம், பூச்சிக்கொல்லி மருந்து, கூலியாள் சம்பளம், வாடகை இன்னும் பிற செலவுகள்	
42.9	செல்போன் மற்றும் அதன் பயன்பாட்டிற்கான செலவுகள், பயணம், கோயில் திருவிழாக்கள், பண்டிகைகள், திருயாத்திரைகள், பீடி சிகரெட், மதுபானங்கள் மற்றும் கேளிக்கை நிகழ்ச்சிகளுக்கான செலவு	
42.10	திருமணம், காதுகுத்து. சாவு மற்றும் பிற நிகழ்வுகள்	
42.11	அரசியல் தேர்தல் தொடர்பான செலவு	
42.12	வேறும் ஏனோம் (குறிப்பிடுக):	
	(1)	
	(2)	
	(3)	

IX தொழிலாளர் மற்றும் வேலை

43. நீங்கள் ஓர் நிறுவனத்திலோ அல்லது வேறு யரிடமோ வேலை செய்கின்றீர்கள் என்றால் உங்கள் வேலையின் தரம் எத்தகையது

1. நிரந்தரமானது (அரசு/தனியார்) ()
2. ஒப்பந்த அடிப்படையிலானது (அரசு/தனியார்) ()
3. தினக்கூலி (அரசு/தனியார்) ()

44. உங்களது வேலை விபரத்தை குறிப்பிடுக

(a) நீங்கள் ஊதியம் பெறும் அனைத்து வகையான வேலைகளையும் குறிப்பிடுக. (உங்கள் வீட்டு வேலையைத் தவிர)	(b) வேலையில் அமர்த்துபவர் * (சரியான எண்ணைக் குறிப்பிடுக.)
43.1.	
43.2.	
43.3.	
43.4.	

43.5.

* (1) அரசு நிறுவனம் (2) தொண்டு நிறுவனம் (3) தனியார் நிறுவனம்/தனிநபர்
(4) வேறு யாரும் (குறிப்பிடுக) _____

45. நீங்கள் ஏதேனும் கொத்தடிமை வேலையில் இருக்கின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

46. ஆம் என்றால்,

46.1. எந்த வகையான கொத்தடிமைத்தனம் 1. பாதி () 2. முற்றிலும் ()

46.2. ஒப்பந்த வடிவம் பணம் வழங்குப முறை: 1. பணம் () 2. பொருள் ()

46.3. கொத்தடிமைத்தனத்திற்கான ஒரு முக்கிய காரணத்தை கூறுக: _____

X வியாபாரம் மற்றும் தொழில் சார்ந்த வளங்கள்

47. நீங்கள் என்ன விதமான தொழில் செய்து வருகின்றீர்கள் (தேவை எனில் பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

47.1. தையல் ()	47.6. சொந்த ஆட்டோ ரிக்ஷா ஓட்டுதல் ()
47.2. சிறு தள்ளு வண்டி உணவகம் ()	47.7. வாடகை ஆட்டோ ரிக்ஷா ஓட்டுதல் ()
47.3. ஊதுபத்தி செய்தல் ()	47.8. சிறு உணவகம் நடத்துதல் ()
47.4. குறு வியாபாரம்* ()	47.9. வேறு ஏதேனும் (மூன்றை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)
47.5. மீன் வியாபாரம் ()	(1) _____
	(2) _____
	(3) _____

* குறு வியாபாரம்: துணிமணி, பலசரக்கு சாமான், காய்கறி, பழங்கள், ஆடம்பரப் பொருட்கள், அழகு நிலையம், பூ கட்டி விற்றல், சிறு வட்டிக் கடை

XI. நிலம் மற்றும் நிலம் சார்ந்த வளங்கள்

48. உங்களுக்கு விவசாய நிலம் உள்ளதா? (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

49. ஆம் என்றால், நீங்கள் உங்களது நிலத்தினை வருமானத்திற்கெனப் பயன்படுத்துகின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

50. ஆம் எனில் எவ்வகையான நிலம். (தேவை எனில் பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

- 50.1. ஒத்திக்கு எடுத்த நிலம் ()
- 50.2. சொந்தப் பட்டா நிலம் ()
- 50.3. சொந்த பட்டாநிலம் மற்றும் ஒத்திக்கு எடுத்த நிலம் ()
- 50.4. விவசாயத்திற்குப் பயன்படுத்தக் கூடிய அரசு நிலம் ()
- 50.5. அரசின் வனத்துறை நிலம் ()
- 50.6. சொந்த பட்டா நிலம் மற்றும் அரசு வனத்துறை நிலம் ()
- 50.7. விவசாயத்திற்குப் பயன்படுத்தும் வருவாய்த்துறை/வனத்துறை நிலம் ()
- 50.8. கூட்டுப் பட்டா நிலம் (உறவினர்) ()

51. விதவையாகிய உங்களது நிலம் பட்டா நிலம் எனில், பட்டா யாருடைய பெயரில் உள்ளது?

51.1. எனது பெயரில் () 51.2. மற்றவர்கள் பெயரில் ()

52. விதவையாகிய உங்களது பெயரில் பட்டா நிலம் உள்ளதா என்றால், எத்தனை ஏக்கு?

52.1. ----- நுங்சை நிலம்

52.2. ----- புஞ்சை நிலம்

ஆ. சொத்துகள், சேமிப்புகள் மற்றும் கடன்

XII. குடும்பத்தினரின் சொத்துகள் மற்றும் கால்நடைகள்

53. குடும்பத்தினரின் கைவசமுள்ள வருமானம் ஈட்டக்கூடிய சொத்துக்களின் எண்ணிக்கை மற்றும் அவற்றின் பண மதிப்பு

சொத்து	(a) சொத்தின் எண்ணிக்கை	(b) பண மதிப்பு	ஐ அச் சொத்துகளிலிருந்து ஈட்டக்கூடிய சராசரி மாத வருமானம்
53.1. மாடுகள், எருமைகள்		(1) ரூ.5,000 - 10,000 () (2) ரூ.10,001 - 20,000() (3) ரூ.20,001 - 50,000() (4) ரூ.5,0001-க்கு மேல்()	(1) ரூ.500 - 1,000 () (2) ரூ.1,001 - 2,000 () (3) ரூ.2,001 - 3,000 () (4) ரூ.3,001-க்கும் மேல்()
53.2. ஆடுகள்		(1) ரூ.5,000 - 10,000 () (2) ரூ.10,001 - 20,000() (3) ரூ.20,001 - 50,000() (4) ரூ.5,0001-க்கு மேல்()	(1) ரூ.500 - 1,000 () (2) ரூ.1,001 - 2,000 () (3) ரூ.2,001 - 3,000 () (4) ரூ.3,001-க்கும் மேல்()
53.3. கோழிகள்		(1) ரூ.5,000 - 10,000 () (2) ரூ.10,001 - 20,000 () (3) ரூ.20,001 - 50,000 () (4) ரூ.5,0001-க்கு மேல் ()	(1) ரூ.500 - 1,000 () (2) ரூ.1,001 - 2,000 () (3) ரூ.2,001 - 3,000 () (4) ரூ.3,001-க்கும் மேல்()
53.4. வேறு கால்நடைகள் ----- -----		(1) ரூ.5,000 - 10,000 () (2) ரூ.10,001 - 20,000 () (3) ரூ.20,001 - 50,000 () (4) ரூ.5,0001-க்கு மேல் ()	(1) ரூ.500 - 1,000 () (2) ரூ.1,001 - 2,000 () (3) ரூ.2,001 - 3,000 () (4) ரூ.3,001-க்கும் மேல்()

XIII. சேமிப்பும் கடனும்

54. குடும்பத்தின் இப்போதைய மொத்த சேமிப்பு எவ்வளவு? (கடைசி 5 ஆண்டுகளில் மட்டும்) (ஒர் பதில் மட்டும்)

1. ஒன்றுமில்லை ()	7. ரூ.8,001 - ரூ.10,000 ()
2. ரூ.500 - ரூ.1,000 ()	8. ரூ.10,000 - ரூ.20,000 ()
3. ரூ.1,001 - ரூ.2,000 ()	9. ரூ.20,000 - ரூ.40,000 ()
4. ரூ.2,001 - ரூ.3,000 ()	10. ரூ.40,000 - ரூ.50,000 ()
5. ரூ.3,001 - ரூ.5,000 ()	11. ரூ.50,000-க்கும் மேல் ()
6. ரூ.5,001 - ரூ.8,000 ()	

55. இன்றைய கடன்களின் அளவு

55.1. மொத்த கடன் தொகை (ஒர் பதில் மட்டும்)

1. கடன் இல்லை ()	5. ரூ.50,001 - ரூ.1,00,000 ()
2. ரூ.10,000-க்கும் குறைவு ()	6. ரூ.1,00,001 - ரூ.5,00,000 ()
3. ரூ.10,001 - ரூ.30,000 ()	7. ரூ.5,00,000-க்கு மேல் ()

4. ரூ.30,001 - ரூ.50,000 ()	
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55.2. ஓர் மாதத்தில் கட்டும் மொத்த வட்டித் தொகை எவ்வளவு? (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

55.2.1. ரூ. 1000-க்குக் குறைவு ()	55.2.5. ரூ. 10,001 - ரூ. 20,000 ()
55.2.2. ரூ. 1001 - ரூ. 3,000 ()	55.2.6. ரூ. 20,001 - ரூ. 50,000 ()
55.2.3. ரூ. 3001 - ரூ. 5,000 ()	55.2.7. ரூ. 50,001-க்கு மேல் ()
55.2.4. ரூ. 5001 - ரூ. 10,000 ()	

56. கடன் வாங்கியதன் நோக்கம் (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

எண்.	நோக்கம்	✓ செய்க
56.1	அடிப்படைவாழ்வாதாரத் தேவை	
56.2	திருவிழா கொண்டாட்டம்	
56.3	இறுதி ஆங்கிலி நிகழ்வு	
56.4	பூப்பெய்தல் சடங்கு	
56.5	வாழ்வுநிலை மேம்பாட்டிற்காக வாங்கியவை (வீட்டிற்குத் தேவையான பொருட்கள், சொந்தத் தேவைகளுக்கான பொருட்கள் முதலியன)	
56.6	வீடு கட்டுவதற்காக / வீட்டினைப் புழத பார்ப்பதற்காக	
56.7	இன்னொரு கடனை அடைப்பதற்காக	
56.8	வரதட்சணை	
56.9	திருமணம்	
56.10	குழந்தை பிறப்பு	
56.11	வியாபாரத்திற்கான பொருட்கள் வாங்கியது	
56.12	பேரிடர்களைச் சந்திப்பதற்காக (வறட்சி, விபத்து முதலியன)	
56.13	உடல்நலம் மற்றும் மருத்துவத்திற்காக	
56.14	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	

57. யாரிடமிருந்து கடன் பெறப்பட்டது (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

யாரிடமிருந்து கடன்	✓ செய்க
57.1. வட்டிக்குக் கடன்கொடுக்கும் தொழில் செய்பவரிடமிருந்து	
57.2. தொழில் வங்கியிலிருந்து	
57.3. கூட்டுறவு வங்கியிலிருந்து	
57.4. சுய உதவிக் குழுவிலிருந்து	
57.5. உறவினர்களிடமிருந்து	
57.6. நண்பர்களிடமிருந்து	
57.7. பக்கத்து வீட்டுக்காரர்களிடமிருந்து	
57.8. நான் வேலை பார்க்கும் முதலாளியிடமிருந்து	
57.9. தன்னார்வத் தொண்டு நிறுவனத்திடமிருந்து	
57.10. தனியார் கடனுதவி செய்யும் நிறுவனத்திடமிருந்து	
57.11. சீட்டுப் பிடிப்புத	
57.12. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	

உ. மனித உரிமை மற்றும் சட்ட உரிமை சார்ந்த ஆவணங்கள்

XIV. உரிமை மற்றும் சட்டம் சார்ந்த ஆவணங்களை பெறுதல்

58. வாழ்வாதாரம், குடியுரிமை மற்றும் தேர்தல் பிரதிநிதித்துவம் சார்ந்த கீழ்க்கண்ட ஆவணங்கள் தங்களிடம் உள்ளதா?

ஏண்	ஆவணங்கள்	✓ செய்க
58.1	பிறப்பு சான்றிதழ்	
58.2	குடும்ப அட்டை (ஸ்மார்ட் ரேசன் கார்டு)	
58.3	கணவரது இறப்பு சான்றிதழ்	
58.4	விதவைக்கான சான்றிதழ்	
58.5	விதவை ஓய்வூதிய அடையாள அட்டை	
58.6	சாதி சான்றிதழ்	
58.7	ஆதார் அட்டை	
58.8	வாக்காளர் அடையாள அட்டை	
58.9	வீட்டுப் மனை பட்டா	
58.10	மத்திய அரசின் சுகாதார காப்பிட அட்டை (மோடி கார்டு)	
58.11	முதலமைச்சரின் விரிவான மருத்துவ காப்பீட்டு திட்ட அடையாள அட்டை (கலைஞர் காப்பீட்டு திட்டம்)	
58.12	100 நாள் வேலை அடையாள அட்டை (மகாத்மா காந்தி தேசிய ஊரக வேலை வாய்ப்புத் திட்டம்)	
58.13	முதியோர் ஓய்வூதிய அடையாள அட்டை	
58.14	வாரிசு சான்றிதழ்	
58.15	பதிவு செய்யப்பட்ட வங்கி கணக்கு	
58.16	ஏ.டி.எம் கார்டு	
58.17	பான் கார்டு (Pan Card)	
58.18	மாற்று திறனாளி ஓய்வூதிய அடையாள அட்டை	
58.19	மாற்று திறனாளிகள் அடையாள அட்டை	
58.20	விவசாயத்திற்கான பட்டா	
58.21	அமைப்பு சாரா தொழிலாளர் நலவாரிய அட்டை	
58.22	கிசான் கிரெடிட் கார்டு	
58.23	மீனவர் மின்னணு அடையாள அட்டை	
58.24	ஊராட்சி அளவிலான கூட்டமைப்பு உறுப்பினர் அட்டை (PLF Membership Card)	
58.25	ஊராட்சி அளவிலான கூட்டமைப்பு உறுப்பினர் இருப்பு கையேடு (PLF membership பாஸ் புக்)	
58.26	சமூக வனவள உரிமை அட்டை	
58.27	வேறு ஏதும் இருப்பின் (குறிப்பிடுக) (1) (2) (3)	

எ. குடியுரிமை மற்றும் அரசியல் ஈடுபாடு

XV. நிறுவனங்கள் மற்றும் சங்கங்களில் உறுப்பினராயிருத்தல்

59. நீங்கள் கீழ்க்காணும் ஏதேனும் சங்கங்களில் உறுப்பினராக இருக்கின்றீர்களா? (✓ செய்யவும்)

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 59.1. பஞ்சாயத்து (தலைவர்) | () |
| 59.2. பஞ்சாயத்து (உறுப்பினர்) | () |
| 59.3. பெண்கள் சங்கம்/பெண்கள் இயக்கம்/விதவைகள் இயக்கம் | () |
| 59.4. சுய உதவிக் குழு | () |
| 59.5. கிராம முன்னேற்றக் குழு | () |
| 59.6. கல்விக் குழு / பள்ளி முன்னேற்றக் குழு | () |
| 59.7. கோவில் குழு | () |
| 59.8. பாரம்பரிய கிராமப் புஞ்சாயத்து | () |
| 59.9. அரசியல் கட்சி | () |
| 59.10. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) | () |

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

XVI. அரசியல் உரிமைகளைத் தேடிப் பெறல்

60. அண்மையில் நடந்த சட்டசபைத் தேர்தலில் வாக்களித்தீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

61. அண்மையில் நடந்த உள்ளாட்சித் தேர்தலில் வாக்களித்தீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

62. இரண்டு தேர்தல்களில் ஏதோ ஒன்றில் வாக்கு அளித்திருந்தாலும், அதற்கான ஓர முக்கியக் காரணம் என்ன? (ஒன்று மட்டும் குறிப்பிடவும்)

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. வாக்களிப்புத எனது அரசியல் உரிமை | () |
| 2. நான் ஓட்டளித்த கட்சியின் மீதான எனது பற்று | () |
| 3. நான் ஓட்டளித்த வேட்பாளர் மீதான எனது பற்று | () |
| 4. நான் வாக்களிப்பதற்காக பெற்ற பணம் | () |
| 5. நான் சார்ந்திருக்கின்ற சங்கம் / இயக்கம் கூறியதால் | () |
| 6. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): | _____ |

63. இரண்டு தேர்தல்களில் ஏதாவது ஒன்றில் வாக்கு அளிக்கவில்லை என்றாலும், அதற்கான ஓர முக்கியக் காரணம் என்ன? (ஒன்று மட்டும் கூறுக)

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. எனக்கு ஆவாயில்லை | () |
| 2. அனைத்து அரசியல் கட்சிகள் மீதும் எனக்குள்ள வெறுப்பு | () |
| 3. எந்த அரசியல் கட்சியும் எனக்குப் பணம் கொடுக்கவில்லை | () |
| 4. தேர்தல்கள் மூலமாக நல்லுத எதுவும் நடக்காது | () |
| 5. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): | _____ |

64. ஒரு விதவையாக இருந்தாலும் நீங்கள் அண்மையில் நடந்து முடிந்த பஞ்சாயத்துத் தேர்தலில் போட்டியிட்டீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

65. ஆம் என்றால், அது கிராமப்புறமா அல்லது நகர்ப்புறமா?

- (1) கிராமப்புறம் () (2) நகர்ப்புறம் ()

66. ஆம் என்றால் என்ன பதவிக்கு?

1. வார்டு உறுப்பினர் () 4. ஊராட்சி ஒன்றியத் தலைவர் ()
2. கவுன்சிலர் () 5. நுகராட்சித் தலைவர் (சேர்மன்) ()
3. பஞ்சாயத்துத் தலைவர் ()

67. தேர்தலில் வெற்றி பெற்றீர்களா அல்லது தோல்வியடைந்தீர்களா?

- (1) வெற்றி () (2) தோல்வி ()

68. நீங்கள் வெற்றி பெற்றிருந்தால், அதற்கான ஒரு முக்கிய காரணம் மட்டும் கூறுக.

1. மக்களுக்கு என்மீது நம்பிக்கை உள்ளது. ()
2. விதவைகள் சங்கம் எனக்கு ஆதரவளித்தது. ()
3. நான் ஏராளமாகப் பணம் செலவளித்தேன். ()
4. எனது சாதி மக்கள் எனக்கு ஓட்டளித்தனர். ()
5. எனது குடும்பத்தினர் மற்றும் உறவினர்கள் எனக்கு ஆதரவளித்தனர். ()
6. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) _____

69. நீங்கள் வெற்றி பெறவில்லையெனில், அதற்கான ஓர் முக்கிய காரணத்தைக் குறிப்பிடுக

1. என்னிடம் பணபலம் இல்லை. ()
2. நான் சார்ந்திருக்கின்ற சாதி எனக்கு எதிராக உள்ளது. ()
3. நான் விதவையாக இருப்பதால், மக்களுக்கு என்பது நம்பிக்கை இல்லை. ()
4. வேறு ஏதேனும் காரணம் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

70. நீங்கள் வார்டு உறுப்பினராகவோ, பஞ்சாயத்துத் (ஊராட்சி/நகராட்சி) தலைவராகவோ வெற்றி பெற்று பதவியில் அமர்ந்தவராக இருந்தால், உங்களால் உங்களது ஆட்சி அதிகாரத்தைத் திறம்படச் செய்ய முடிந்ததா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

71. ஆம் என்றால், உங்களது ஆட்சி அதிகாரத்தை நீங்கள் திறம்படச் செய்ய உறுதுணையாக இருந்த ஓர் முக்கியமான காரணியை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக

1. வார்டு கவுன்சிலர்கள் மற்றும் மக்கள் ஆகியோருக்கு என் மீதான நன்மதிப்பு ()
2. விதவைகள் சங்கம் எனக்குப் பின்னால் ஆதரவாக இருப்பது ()
3. எனது சாதி எனது பின்னால் ஆதரவாக இருப்பது ()
4. அரசு அதிகாரிகள் மற்றும் கட்சித் தலைவர்களிடம் எனக்குள்ள செல்வாக்கு ()
5. எனது குடும்பத்தினர் மற்றும் உறவினர்களிடம் உள்ள பணபலம் ()
6. நான் ஓர் சமூகப் பணியாளர் என்பதால் மக்களுக்கு என் மீதான நம்பகத்தன்மை ()
7. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

72. இல்லை என்றால், அதற்கான ஓர் முக்கிய காரணத்தை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக:

1. கவுன்சில் கூட்டத்தின் உள்ளும் புறமும் நிலவி வரும் ஆணாதிக்கம் ()
2. கவுன்சில் கூட்டத்தின் உள்ளும் புறமும் நிலவி வரும் சாதி வெறி ()

3. அரசு அதிகாரிகளின் ஒத்துழைப்பின்மை ()
4. சங்க உறுப்பினர்களின் ஒத்துழைப்பின்மை ()
5. எனக்குள் காணப்படும் தன்னம்பிக்கையின்மை ()
6. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

73. எதிர்காலத்தில் நீங்கள் வார்டு உறுப்பினர் / ஊராட்சித் தலைவர் / ஒன்றியத் தலைவர் / சேர்மன் ஆகிய பதவிகளுக்குப் போட்டியிட விரும்புகிறீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

74. ஆம் என்றால், அதற்கான காரணம் என்ன (முக்கியமான ஒன்றினை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

1. ஓர விதவையாக என்னுடைய உரிமையை நிலைநாட்ட ()
2. விதவைகள் பொது மக்களின் முன்னேற்றத்திற்காக பாதுகாக்க பங்களிக்க முடியும் என்பதனை நிரூபிக்க ()
3. மற்ற விதவைகள் பொதுவாழ்வில் நுழைவதை உற்சாகப்படுத்த ()
4. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

75. இல்லை என்றால், அதற்கான காரணம் என்ன (முக்கியமான ஒன்றினை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

1. மக்களுக்குப் பணி செய்யும் பொதுவாழ்விற்கு விதவைகள் அனுமதிக்கப்படமாட்டார்கள். ()
- ஆ. ஓர விதவையாக, நான் ஏற்கெனவே பல்வேறு குடும்பப் பணிச் சமைகளால் தவித்துக் கொண்டிருக்கிறேன். ()
3. அரசியல் வாழ்க்கை விதவைகளுக்குப் பாதுகாப்பான ஒன்றல்ல ()
4. எனக்கு அரசியல் என்பது அறவே பிடிக்காத ஒன்று ()
5. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): _____

ஏ. விதவை நிலை ஏற்படுத்தும் மனோவியல் தாக்கங்கள்

XVII. மனோவியல் தாக்கங்கள் மற்றும் ஆதரவு அமைப்புகள்

76. நீங்கள் ஓர விதவை என்ற காரணத்தினால் மன ரீதியாக பாதிக்கப்பட்டிருக்கிறீர்களா?

- (1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

77. ஆம் எனில், என்ன வகையான பாதிப்புகள்? (முக்கியமான இரண்டினை மட்டும் குறிப்பிட்டு ஆத எவ்வளவு கால இடைவெளியில் ஏற்படுகிறது என்பதையும் குறிப்பிடுக)

வ. எண்	மன ரீதியான பாதிப்புகள் (முக்கியமான இரண்டினை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)	எவ்வளவு கால இடைவெளியில் (✓ செய்யவும்)		
		சில சமயங்களில்	பல சமயங்களில்	எப்போதும்
77.1.	என்னை வெறுத்துப் புறம்தள்ளியதன் காரணமாக எனது பெற்றோர், கணவனின் பெற்றோர், உறவினர்கள், பொதுச் சமூகம் ஆகிய அனைவர் மீதும் வெறுப்பு மற்றும் கோபம்.			

77.2.	எனது வாழ்க்கை மற்றும் குழந்தைகளின் எதிர்காலம் குறித்து பயம் மற்றும் கவலை			
77.3.	வெறுமை உணர்வு, மனச்சோர்வு, வாழ்க்கைமீதான விரக்தி			
77.4.	யாரையும் நம்ப இயலா நிலை			
77.5.	பெற்றோர் மற்றும் உற்றார் ஆகியோரிடமிருந்து எவ்வித உதவியும் கிட்டா நிலையில், என்ன என்னநேருமோ என்ற அச்ச உணர்வு			
77.6.	தனிமை உணர்வு			
77.7.	அன்றாட வீட்டு வேலைகள், குழந்தைகளை கண்காணித்தல் மற்றும் வாழ்வாதாரத்திற்காக உழைத்தல் போன்ற அனைத்து வகையான சுமைகளால் ஏற்படும் தத்தளிப்பு.			
77.8.	பல்வேறு கஷ்டங்கள்/சவால்கள் ஆகியவற்றைத் தொடர்ந்து சந்திப்பதால் ஏற்படும் மனோவியல் அழுத்தம்/பதட்டம்.			
77.9.	தன்னம்பிக்கை இழந்த நிலையில் செய்வதறியாமல் தவிக்கும் நிலை			
77.10.	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) :			
	(1)			
	(2)			
	(3)			

78. உங்களது மனநீதியான பாதிப்புகளை யாருடன் முக்கியமாக பகிர்ந்து கொண்டு ஆதரவினையும் வழிகாட்டுதலையும் பெறுகின்றீர்கள் (முக்கியமான இரண்டினை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

வ.எண்	ஆதரவளிக்கும் நபர்கள் அல்லது அமைப்பு	✓ செய்க
78.1.	என் பெற்றோர்	
78.2.	கணவனது பெற்றோர்	
78.3.	குழந்தைகள்	
78.4.	பக்கத்து வீடுகளில் வசிப்போர்	
78.5.	நண்பர்கள்	
78.6.	தன்னார்வத் தொண்டு நிறுவனப் பணியாளர்கள்	
78.7.	இயக்கத் தலைவர்கள் / உறுப்பினர்கள்	
78.8.	சக வேலையாட்கள்/ தொழிலாளர்கள்	
78.9.	சுயஉதவிக்குழு உறுப்பினர்கள்	
78.10.	குரக்கள் / சகோதரிகள்	
78.11.	யாருமில்லை	
78.12.	வேறு யாரேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) :	
	(1)	
	(2)	
	(3)	

79. எதிர்காலத்தில் மனரீதியான பாதிப்புக்களை போக்குவதற்கு என்ன செய்தால் உதவியாக இருக்கும்? (ஒன்று அல்லது இரண்டு பரிந்துரைகளை முன் வைக்கவும்)

79.1. _____
79.2. _____

ஐ.விதவை பெண்களது போராட்டத் திறன்

XVIII. போராட்டம் மற்றும் தைரியத்தின் வெளிப்பாடு

80. நீங்கள் ஒரு விதவை என்ற முறையில் வாழ்வின் சவால்களைத் துணிவுடன் சந்தித்த அனுபவங்கள் உள்ளனவா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

81. ஆம் எனில் உங்களது கணவரது இறப்பிற்குப்பின் உங்களது வாழ்வில் புறச் சவால்களை எதிர்த்து, துணிவுடன் நீங்கள் எடுத்த முன்று முக்கிய செயல்பாடுகளை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக.

வ. எண்	முன்று முக்கிய செயல்பாடுகள் மட்டும் தேர்வு செய்க	✓ செய்யவும்
	A. சமூகக் கலாச்சார நடைமுறைப் பழக்கங்கள்	
81.1.	கணவரது இறப்புக்குப் பின் நடத்தப்படுகின்ற பாரம்பரிய சடங்குகளை நான் செய்ய மறுத்தேன்	
81.2.	வழக்கம்போல் நான் நகை அணிதல், பூ வைத்தல், பொட்டு வைத்தல், வண்ணச்சேலை அணிதல் ஆகியவற்றைச் செய்து வருகிறேன்.	
81.3.	வழக்கம்போல எல்லா குடும்ப மற்றும் நண்பர்களது வீடுகளில் நடக்கும் நல்ல காரியங்கள் அனைத்திலும், எதிர்ப்புக்களையெல்லாம் மீறிப் பங்கேற்று வருகிறேன்.	
81.4.	எனது குழந்தைகள் மற்றும் பேரக் குழந்தைகளின் நல்ல காரியங்களை நானே முன்னின்று நடத்தி வருகிறேன்.	
	B. பொருளாதார நடைமுறைப் பழக்கங்கள்	
81.5.	எனது கணவரது இறப்புக்குப் பின்னூ வீட்டு மனை, விவசாய நிலம் ஆகியவற்றிற்கான பட்டாவினை எனது பெயரில் மாற்றியுள்ளேன்.	
81.6.	எனது கணவரது இறப்புக்குப் பின்னர், எனக்காகவும் எனது குழந்தைகளுக்காகவும் ஓர புதிய வீட்டினைக் கட்டியுள்ளேன்.	
81.7.	ஓர சிறிய / நடுத்தர / பெரிய வியாபார தளத்தினை உருவாக்கியுள்ளேன்.	
81.8.	எனது கணவரது சொத்துப் பங்கினை சட்டப்படிப் போராடிப் பெற்றுள்ளேன்.	
	C. பாலின நடைமுறைப் பழக்கங்கள்	
81.9.	நானே நான் விரும்பும் துணையைத் தேடி மறுமணம் செய்துள்ளேன்.	
81.10.	எனது பெற்றோர் / உறவினர்கள் தேடித் தந்த துணையை விருப்பத்துடன் மறுமணம் செய்துள்ளேன்.	
81.11.	நான் எனது சுய விருப்பத்துடன் மறுமணத்தைத் தவிர்த்து தனியே வாழ்ந்து வருகிறேன்.	
81.12.	என்னிடம் பாலியல் சீண்டல் மற்றும் தொந்தரவு செய்த நபர்களுக்கு எதிராக நானே எனது கைப்பட புகார் முன எழுதி காவல் நிலையத்தில் சமர்ப்பித்துள்ளேன்.	

	D. அரசியல் நடைமுறைப் பழக்கங்கள்	
81.13.	கிராம சபைக் கூட்டங்களில் எனது கருத்தினை துணிவுடன் பதிவிட்டு வருகிறேன்.	
81.14.	புங்சாயத்து தேர்தல்களில் வாட்டு உறுப்பினர் பதவிக்கோ புங்சாயத்து தலைவர் பதவிக்கோ போட்டியிட்டுள்ளேன்	
81.15.	என்னுடைய தேவைகளை முன்னிறுத்தியும் எனது கிராமத்தின் தேவைகளை முன்னிறுத்தியும், நானே அரசு அலுவலகம் சென்று கோரிக்கை மனுக்களைக் கொடுத்திருக்கிறேன்.	
81.16.	மக்கள் பிரச்சினை தொடர்பான போராட்டங்களிலும் ஊாவலங்களிலும் பங்கேற்றுள்ளேன்.	
	E. மனித மாண்பு மற்றும் தன்மானம் தொடர்பான நடைமுறைப் பழக்கங்கள்	
81.17.	எனது பெற்றோர் / என் கணவனது பெற்றோர் / என் உறவினர்கள் ஆகியோர் முன்னிலையில் எனது விருப்பப்படி என் உரிமைகளை செயல்படுத்துவது பற்றி தெளிவுபடப் பதிவு செய்துள்ளேன்.	
81.18.	சமூகத்தைத் துணிச்சலுடனும் உறுதிப்பாட்டுடனும் எதிர்கொள்ளும் நோக்கில், எனது அறிவுத் திறனை மேம்படுத்திக் கொள்ள. பல்வேறு பயிற்சிகளைப் பெற்று திறமைகளை வளர்த்துள்ளேன்.	
81.19.	பெண்களுக்கும் விதவைகளுக்கும் அநீதி இழைக்கின்றவர்களைக் கேள்வி கேட்பதற்குரிய துணிச்சலுள்ள நபராக மாறியுள்ளேன்.	
81.20.	கொஞ்சம் கொஞ்சமாக எனது பொருளாதார பலத்தினை மேம்படுத்தி, சமூகத்தில் நானும் ஓர முக்கியமான நபர் என்பதனை நிரூபித்துள்ளேன்.	

ஓ. பாதுகாப்பு குறித்த அம்சங்கள்

XIX. சமூக மற்றும் சட்டப் பாதுகாப்பு

82. கீழ்க்காணும் சட்டங்கள் பற்றி உங்களுக்குத் தெரியுமா?

ஏண்.	சட்டங்கள்	ஆம் எனில் ✓ செய்யவும்
82.1	பட்டியல் சாதியினர் மற்றும் பட்டியல் பழங்குடியினர் வன்கொடுமைகள் தடுப்பு) சட்டம், 1989	
82.2	குடும்ப வன்முறையிலிருந்து பெண்களை பாதுகாத்தல் சட்டம் 2005	
82.3	தகவல்பெறும் உரிமைச் சட்டம் 2005	
82.4	மகாத்மா காந்தி தேசிய ஊரக வேலை உறுதியளிப்புச் சட்டம் - 2005	
82.5	வரதட்சணை தடைச் சட்டம் – 1961 (திருத்தச் சட்டம் 1986)	
82.6	பணியிடத்தில் பெண்களுக்கெதிரான பாலியல் துன்புறுத்தல் (தடுப்பு, பாதுகாப்பு மற்றும் நிவாரணம்) சட்டம், 2013	
82.7	இந்து சமய விதவைகள் மறுமணம் மற்றும் சொத்துரிமைச் சட்டம், 1989	
82.8	இந்து சமய வாரிசு திருத்தச் சட்டம், 2005	

83. ஆம் என்றால், மேற்கூறிய சட்டங்கள் பற்றி யாரிடமிருந்து அறிந்து கொண்டீர்கள்? (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

83.1.	தன்னார்வத் தொண்டு நிறுவனம் நடத்திய பயிற்சியில் கலந்து கொண்டதன் மூலம்	
83.2.	அரசு நடத்திய பயிற்சியில் கலந்து கொண்டதன் மூலம்	
83.3.	எனக்கான பிரச்சினையில் நான் ஈடுபட்டதன் மூலம்	
83.4.	எனது உறவினர்கள் மற்றும் நண்பர்களது பிரச்சினையில் நான் ஈடுபட்டதன் மூலம்	
83.5.	பொது மற்றும் சமூக ஊடகங்களின் மூலம் (தொலைக்காட்சி, யூ டியூப். வாட்ஸ்அப் முதலியன)	
83.6.	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	
	(1) _____	
	(2) _____	
	(3) _____	

84. கடந்த 5 ஆண்டுகளில் நீங்கள் எப்பொழுதாவது காவல் நிலையத்திற்குச் சென்றதுண்டா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

85. ஆம் என்றால், எத்தனை முறை?

1. ஓர முறை () 3. மூன்று முறை ()
2. இரண்டு முறை () 4. மூன்று முறைக்கு மேல் ()

86. ஆம் எனில், என்ன காரணத்திற்காக? (பல பதில்கள் இருக்கலாம்)

- 86.1. என் தொடர்பான பிரச்சினை காரணமாக ()
86.2. மற்றவர்கள் (எனது உறவினர், நண்பர்கள்) தொடர்பான பிரச்சினை காரணமாக ()
86.3. சங்கம் / இயக்கம் தொடர்பான பொதுப் பிரச்சினை காரணமாக ()
86.4. வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக):
(1) _____
(2) _____
(3) _____

87. ஆம் எனில், நீங்கள் காவல் நிலையத்தில் அங்குள்ள அதிகாரிகளால் எவ்வாறு நடத்தப்பட்டீர்கள்? (இரண்டு முக்கியமான பதில்களை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக) (✓ செய்யவும்)

87.1.	மரியாதையுடனும், மாண்புடனும் நடத்தப்பட்டேன்.	
87.2.	செவிமடுத்து, வழக்கு பதிய உதவியாக இருந்தனர்.	
87.3.	நான் குற்றம் சுமத்திய நபரிடமிருந்து என்னைப் பாதுகாக்க முன்வந்தனர்.	
87.4.	பாலியல் நோக்குடன் தகாத வார்த்தைகளால் என்னிடம் பேசினர்.	
87.5.	என்னிடம் சாதி ரீதியிலான தகாத வார்த்தைகளைப் பேசினர்.	
87.6.	என்னை பயமுறுத்தும் விதத்திலான வார்த்தைகளைப் பேசினர்.	
87.7.	உடல் ரீதியாக என்னை அடித்தனர். (உ.ம். கையால் அடித்தல், அறைதல் மற்றும் காலால் உதைத்தல்)	
87.8.	கம்பால், என்னை அடித்தனர்	
87.9.	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக)	
	(1) _____	
	(2) _____	
	(3) _____	

88. உங்களது பொது வாழ்க்கையில் ஒரு விதவை என்ற வகையில் நீங்கள் பாதுகாப்பாக இருக்கின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

89. இல்லை என்றால், அதற்கான ஒரு முக்கிய காரணத்தை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக (✓ செய்யவும்)

1.	நான் எவ்வித ஆண்துணையும் இல்லாமல் தனியாக இருப்பதால், மற்றவர்கள் என்னை பலவீனமானவராகக் கருதுகின்றனர்.	
2.	நான் ஓர விதவையாக இருப்பதால். ஆண்கள் பலவகையான பாலியல் தொடர்பான சைகைகள்மூலம் என்னைத் தொந்தரவு செய்ததை அனுபவத்திருக்கிறேன்.	
3.	என் வாழ்க்கையில் ஆண்கள் என்னைப் பின்தொடர்வதை எதிர்கொண்டிருக்கின்றேன்.	
4.	நான் ஏழ்மை நிலையில் இருப்பதால், ஓர சிலர் அதனைத் தங்களுக்கு சாதகமாக்க முனைகின்றனர்.	
5.	நான் கல்வியறிவில் குறைவுள்ளவராக இருப்பதால், எனது அறியாமையைத் தங்களுக்குச் சாதகமாகப் பயன்படுத்த ஒருசிலர் முனைகின்றனர்..	
6.	எனது விட பாதுகாப்பற்ற ஓலையால் வேயப்பட்ட மண் குடிசையாக இருப்பதால்	
7.	எனது குழந்தைகள் மிகவும் சிறியவர்களாக இருப்பதால், எனக்கும் எனது குழந்தைகளுக்கும் பாதுகாப்பின்மையை உணர்கிறேன்.	
8.	நான் இளமையாக இருப்பதால், பாதுகாப்பின்மையை உணர்கிறேன்.	
9.	நான் ஒரு பெண்ணாக இருப்பதால், என்னால் வலிமையாக எதிர்த்துப் பேசுவோ, விவாதிக்கவோ, சண்டையிடவோ முடியாது என்று உணர்கிறேன்.	
10.	வேறு ஏதாவது (குறிப்பிடுக) (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

90. விதவைகளது பாதுகாப்பற்ற சூழலின் பின்னணியில், அவர்களைப் பாதுகாக்கின்ற விதத்திலும், வாழ்வாதாரத்தை முன்னேற்றுகின்ற விதத்திலும், ஒரு சட்டம் இயற்றப்பட வேண்டும் என நினைக்கின்றீர்களா?

(1) ஆம் () (2) இல்லை ()

91. ஆம் என்றால், அது என்னவிதமான அம்சங்களை உள்ளடக்கியதாக இருக்க வேண்டும்? (இரண்டு சிறப்பு அம்சங்களை மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக)

91.1. _____

91.2. _____

ஒ. எதிர்காலம் குறித்த எதிர்பார்ப்புகள்

XX. குடும்பத்தின் முன்னுரிமை

92. உங்களது குடும்பத்தில் தற்போது இல்லாத ஆனால் அத்தியாவசியமாகத் தேவைப்படுகின்ற மூன்று தேவைகளைக் குறிப்பிடுக. (முக்கியத்துவத்தின் அடிப்படையில் அவற்றை 1, 2, 3 என வரிசைப்படுத்துக)

92.1.	வீடு	
92.2.	உணவு	
92.3.	கழிப்பிட வசதி	
92.4.	வேலை வாய்ப்பு – எனக்கு / எனது பிள்ளைகளுக்கு	
92.5.	எனது பிள்ளைகளுக்கான கல்வி	
92.6.	எனது மகளின் திருமணம்	
92.7.	எனது மகனின் திருமணம்	
92.8.	எனது வியாதியை கவனிப்புத	
92.9.	கடனைத் திருப்பி அடைத்தல்	
92.10.	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக): (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____	

93. உங்களது ஆண் / பெண் குழந்தைகள் குறித்த உங்களது முக்கியமான இரண்டு கவலைகளை முன்மொழிக. (பெண் குழந்தைகளுக்கான இரண்டு கவலைகள் ஆண் குழந்தைகளுக்கான இரண்டு கவலைகள் மட்டும் குறிப்பிடுக) (✓ செய்யவும்)

	கவலைகள்	பெண் குழந்தைகள்	ஆண் குழந்தைகள்
93.1	பொறுப்பற்ற நெறிதவறிய நடத்தை குறித்த		
93.2	கல்வியின்முத அக்கறையின்மை / கல்வி இடைநின்றமை குறித்த		
93.3	போதைக்கு (குடிக்கு / போதை மருந்துகளுக்கு) அடிமையான நிலை குறித்த		
93.4	விதவைத் தாயாகிய தன்னை மதிக்காத நிலை குறித்த		
93.5	அவர்களது எதிர்கால திருமண வாழ்வு குறித்த		
93.6	திருப்தியற்ற அவர்களது திருமண வாழ்வு குறித்த		
93.7	அவர்கள் வேலையின்றி இருப்புத குறித்த		
93.8	அவர்கள் நிலையான வேலையின்றியிருப்பதைக் குறித்த		
93.9	வேறு ஏதேனும் (குறிப்பிடுக) (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____		

**பகுதி II - பாகுபாடு/உரிமை மறுப்பு மற்றும் வன்முறைக்கு
எதிரான பாதுகாப்பு உரிமைகள்**

94. ஒரு விதவையாக உங்கள் வாழ்க்கையில் நீங்கள் எதிர்கொண்ட உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு மற்றும் வன்முறையின் வடிவங்கள் என்ன?

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபா டு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்து றையில் முறையா ன புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளதா? டிக் (✓) செய்யவும்
	A. சமூக-கலாச்சாரம் தொடர்பான			
1	வண்ண/பூ புடவை அணிவதற்கு			
2	நெற்றியில் பொட்டு/பிண்டி வைப்பதற்கும் தலையில் பூ வைப்பதற்கும்			
3	அழகுசாதனப் பொருட்களால் முகத்தை அழகுபடுத்துவதற்கு			
4	வளையல்கள், வெள்ளிக் கொலுசுகள், கால் மோதிரம் (மிஞ்சி), மூக்குத்தி போன்ற நகைகளை அணிவதற்கு			
5	குடும்பத்தினர்/உறவினர்களின் திருமணம், காது குத்தும் விழா, கர்ப்ப காலத்தில் வளையல் அணியும் விழா (வளை காப்பு) போன்ற சுப நிகழ்ச்சிகளில் கலந்துகொள்வதற்கு			
6	மற்றவர்களின் திருமணம், காது குத்தும், கர்ப்ப காலத்தில் வளையல் அணியும் விழா (வளை காப்பு) போன்ற சுப நிகழ்ச்சிகளில் கலந்துகொள்வதற்கு			
7	குடும்பத்தினர்/உறவினர்களின் இறுதிச் சடங்குகள்/நினைவுச் சடங்குகள் போன்றவற்றில் கலந்துகொள்வதற்கு			

** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட புங்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபா டு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்து றையில் முறையா ன புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளத ா? டீக் (✓) செய்யவும்
8	பிறரின் இறுதிச் சடங்கு/நினைவுச் சடங்குகளில் கலந்து கொள்வதற்கு			
9	சகுனம் பார்ப்பதினால் குறிப்பிட்ட நேரத்தில் (உ.ம். காலை நேரத்தில்) சில பொது நடைபாதைகளில் செல்வதற்கு அல்லது காலை நேரத்தில் பொதுவாக மக்களை சந்திப்பதற்கு			
10	திருமணங்கள் அல்லது திருவிழாக்களின் போது கிராம சாலைகளில் சுதந்திரமாக நடப்பதற்கு			
11	அன்றாட வாழ்வில் ஆண்களுடன் உரையாடுவதற்கு			
12	தன்னுடைய சொந்த விருப்பத்தின் பேரில் திருமணம் செய்ய துணைவரை தேர்வு செய்வதற்கு			
13	மற்றவர்களால் (குடும்பம், உறவினர்கள்) தேர்வு செய்யப்பட்ட துணைவருடன் மறுமணம் செய்வதற்கு			
14	கிராமிய நடனம், விளையாட்டு, வேறுபல போட்டிகள் போன்ற சமூக-கலாச்சார விழாக்களில் பங்கேற்பதற்கு			
15	பொது நிகழ்வுகளில் ஒதுங்கி அமர்வதற்கு பதிலாக எல்லோரையும் போல் மைய இடங்களில் அமர்வதற்கு			
16	வேறு எதாவது (குறிப்பிட்டுக் கூறவும்): (1) (2) (3)			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட புங்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்துறையில் முறையான புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளதா? இல்லை (✓) செய்யவும்
	B. வாழ்வாதாரம் தொடர்பான			
17	வளர்ச்சித் திட்டங்கள் பெறுவதற்காக அரசாங்கத்தை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது.			
18	பேரிடர் நிவாரண திட்டங்கள் பெறுவதற்காக அரசாங்கத்தை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது.			
19	வீட்டு மனை பெறுவது தொடர்பாக அரசாங்கத்தையோ அல்லது வேறு நபர்களுையோ அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
20	வீட்டு பட்டா பெறுவது தொடர்பாக அரசாங்கத்தை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
21	விட கட்டும் போது அல்லது கட்டுவதற்காக மற்றவர்களை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும் போது			
22	தன்னுடைய வீட்டு உபயோகத்திற்கான அடிப்படை வசதிகளை (தண்ணீர், கழிவறைகள், மின்சாரம் போன்றவை) பெற மற்றவர்களை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
23	பொது இடங்களில் தண்ணீரை எடுக்கும் போது அல்லது எடுக்க முயற்சிக்கும்போது, மற்ற திருமணமான அல்லது திருமணமாகாத பெண்கள் தண்ணீர் பிடிக்கும் வரை காத்திருக்க வைக்கப்படுதல்			
24	ரேசன் கடையில் பொருள் கொடுக்க மறுப்பு அல்லது மற்றவர்களுக்கு முன்னுரிமை கொடுத்தல்			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட பஞ்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்துறையில் முறையான புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளதா? டிக் (✓) செய்யவும்
25	அடிப்படை வாழ்வாதாரப் பொருட்களை வாங்க முதல் நபராக (போனி வாங்குதல்) தனியார் கடை அல்லது அரசு ரேசன் கடையை அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது மறுப்புத			
26	பொது மேய்ச்சல் நிலங்களை பயன்படுத்த அணுகும்போது அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
27	மகளிர் சுய உதவிக்குழு அல்லது ஏதேனும் அமைப்பு/குழுவில் உறுப்பினராகப் பங்கேற்பதற்கு			
28	வேறு ஏதாவது (குறிப்பிட்டுக் கூறவும்): (1) (2) (3)			
	C. பொருளாதாரம் தொடர்பான			
29	விவசாய நிலங்களுக்கு நில உரிமை பெறுவதற்கு அல்லது பெற முயற்சிக்கும் போது			
30	ஏற்கனவே தனக்கு சொந்தமான நிலத்தில் விவசாயத்தை பயிரிடுவதற்கு அல்லது பயிரிட முயற்சிக்கும் போது			
31	விவசாய நில குத்தகைதாரராக பாதுகும் போது அல்லது குத்தகைதாரராவதற்கு முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
32	தன்னுடைய வணிகப் பணியை/ நிறுவனத்தை தொடங்கும்போது/ தொடங்க முயற்சிக்கும்போது அல்லது ஏற்கனவே தனக்கு சொந்தமான வணிகத் தொழிலை/ நிறுவனத்தை சுயமாக நடத்துவதற்கு			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட புங்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்துறையில் முறையான புகார் அளிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளதா? டீக் (✓) செய்யவும்
33	வணிக கட்டிடம் அல்லது கொட்டகை போடுவதற்கு			
34	விவசாய நிலம் வாங்குவதற்கு அரசு நிறுவனம்/வங்கிகள்/பிற நிதி நிறுவனங்களிலிருந்து விவசாயக் கடன்கள் அல்லது வணிகக் கடன்கள் பெறுவதற்கு அல்லது பெற முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
35	அரசு நிறுவனம்/வங்கிகள்/பிற நிதி நிறுவனங்களிலிருந்து இருந்து வீட்டுக் கடன் வாங்கும் போது/வாங்க முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
36	பிற தேவைகளுக்காக அரசு நிறுவனம்/வங்கிகள்/மற்ற நிதி நிறுவனங்களிலிருந்து கடன்களை பெற அல்லது பெற முயற்சிக்கும் போது (என்ன தேவையென்று குறிப்பிட்டுச் சொல்லவும்): (1) (2) (3)			
37	ஒரே மாதிரி விவசாய வேலைக்கு மற்ற பெண் தொழிலாளர்களுக்குரிய அதே கூலியை வழங்கும்போது			
38	வேறு எதாவது (குறிப்பிட்டுக் கூறவும்): (1) (2) (3)			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட புங்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபா டு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்து றையில் முறையா ன புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளத ா? டீக் (✓) செய்யவும்
	D. அரசியல் தொடர்பான			
39	கிராம சபைக் கூட்டங்களில் கலந்துகொள்ள அழைப்பு வழங்கும்போது			
40	பங்சாயத்து அலுவலகத்திற்குள் நுழைவதற்கு			
41	பங்சாயத்து தேர்தலில் வார்கு உறுப்பினராக/தலைவராகப் போட்டியிடுவதற்கு			
42	பங்சாயத்து அல்லது சட்டசபை தேர்தல்களில் பிரச்சாரம் செய்வதற்கு			
43	எந்தவொரு சனநாயக எதிர்ப்புக் கூட்டங்களிலும்/சமூக மாநாடுகளிலும் பங்கேற்பதற்கு			
44	பங்சாயத்து தேர்தலில் வார்கு உறுப்பினர்/தலைவராக வெற்றி பெற்ற பிறகு பங்சாயத்து அலுவலகத்தை அணுகுவதற்கு அல்லது அலுவலகத்தில் நுழைவதற்கு			
45	பங்சாயத்து தலைவர்/வார்கு உறுப்பினர் பதவியில் முறையான அதிகாரம் செலுத்துவதற்கு			
46	வார்கு உறுப்பினர்/தலைவராக தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட பிறகு பங்சாயத்து நிர்வாகத்தில் பணிபுரியும் பாதுவாக்காளர்களின் நலன் தேவைகள் அல்லது தான் எதிர்கொள்ளும் ஏதேனும் பிரச்சனைகளுக்கு அரசாங்க அதிகாரிகளை அணுகுவதற்கு அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
47	தான் வெற்றி பெற்ற தொகுதியில் எதிர்கொள்ளும் பிரச்சனைகள் குறித்து புகார் அளிக்க காவல் நிலையங்களை அணுகுவதற்கு அல்லது அணுக முயற்சிக்கும்போது			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட பங்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				
48	வேறு எதாவது (குறிப்பிட்டுக் கூறவும்):			

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்து றையில் முறையா ன புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளதா? டீக் (✓) செய்யவும்
	(1)			
	(2)			
	(3)			
	E. மதம் சார்ந்த			
49	பொது கோவில்களுக்குள் நுழைவதற்கு			
50	கோவில்களுக்குள் காணிக்கைகள் கொடுப்பதற்கு			
51	கோவில் பூசாரிகளிடம் இருந்து பிரசாதம் பெறுவதற்கு			
52	வண்ணப் புடவை உடுத்தி / பூக்கள் / ஆபரணங்களால் அலங்கரித்து கோவில்களுக்குச் செல்வதற்கு			
53	கோவில்/தேவாலய/மசூதி திருவிழாக்களில் கோவில்கள் /மசூதி/தேவாலயங்களைச் சுற்றியுள்ள மத ஊர்வலங்கள் அல்லது மதக் கூட்டங்களில் பங்கேற்பதற்கு			
54	பொதுக் கோவிலில் சமயச் சடங்குகளைச் செய்வதற்கு			
55	தெய்வீக அனுக்கிரகங்களைப் பெறுவதற்கான வேண்டுகோள்கள் தொடர்பான நடைமுறைகளைக் கடைப்பிடிப்பதற்கு (பால்குடம், தீச்சட்டி, முளைப்பாரி, காவடி எடுத்தல் மற்றும் துதி மிதித்தல், பொங்கல் தயாரித்தல்)			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட பஞ்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				
56	தீய ஆவிகள் (குனியக்காரி) ஆட்கொண்டதாகக் கூறப்படுதல்			

	பாகுபாட்டின் வடிவங்கள்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபா டு இருப்பின் ✓ செய்யவும்	உரிமை மறுப்பு/பாகுபாடு யாரால்? ** எண்களை மட்டும் (1/2/3/4/5/6/7) எழுதவும் அல்லது 8 என்றால் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதவும்	காவல்து றையில் முறையா ன புகார் அளிக்கப் பட்டுள்ளத ா? டிக் (✓) செய்யவும்
57	வேறு எதாவது (குறிப்பிட்டுக் கூறவும்): (1) (2) (3)			
** (1) குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்கள், (2) உறவினர்கள், (3) பக்கத்து வீட்டவர்கள், (4) தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட பஞ்சாயத்து அதிகாரிகள், (5) அரசு அதிகாரிகள், (6) போலீஸ் அதிகாரிகள், (7) கோவில், தேவாலயம், மசூதியின் அர்ச்சகர்கள்/ பாதிரியார்கள்/முல்லாக்கள், (8) வேறு				

ANNEXURE 3: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

**Research on:
Widows of Tamil Nadu:
In search of Dignity, Safety, Rights, and Entitlements**

**தமிழகத்தின் விதவைப் பெண்கள்:
மாண்பு, பாதுகாப்பு, சட்ட உரிமைகள் மற்றும் வாழ்வாதார
உரிமைகளைத் தேடி**

**குழு கலந்துரையாடல் - கேள்வித்தாள்
Focus Group Discussion – Questionnaire**

Total Number of Participants பங்கேற்பாளர்களின் மொத்த எண்ணிக்கை:	
Name of the participants பங்கேற்பாளர்களின் பெயர்கள்:	
Location இடம்:	
Date தேதி:	
Duration நேரம்	
Name of facilitator வழிநடத்துனரின் பெயர்	
Name of Note taker குறிப்பு எடுத்தவரின் பெயர்	
Audio recording file name ஆடியோ கோப்பு விவரம்	

Questions for Discussion

கலந்துரையாடலுக்கான கேள்விகள்

I. Socio-Cultural and Religious Practices:

(சமூகக் கலாச்சார மற்றும் மத வழக்கங்கள்)

1) What kind of funeral ceremony was followed at the funeral of your husband?

- How did you feel when this ceremony was performed?
- Who ensures such ceremonies are performed at the funeral and who conducted it?
- Have these ceremonies always been there for widows in your community or locality?
- What are the different funeral rites followed by different communities in this village when a husband dies?
- Why do you think such ceremonies have been practiced? (Social norms and stigma)
- Do you see any changes in the ceremony in the modern world?
- What are your opinions on such ceremonies and do you think that they should be continued?
- Have you ever thought of second marriage and why? If you remain single, how do you look at your future when you attain senior hood?

உங்களது கணவர் இறந்தவுடன்' எந்த விதமான பாரம்பரியச் சடங்குகள் உங்களுக்கு நடத்தப்பட்டது?

- அச்சடங்குகளை நடத்திய போது உங்கள் மனநிலை (உணர்வு) என்னவாக இருந்தது?
- அச்சடங்குகள் நடத்தப்படுவது குறித்த முடிவுகளை எடுத்தது யார்? அவற்றைச் செய்து முடித்தவர்கள் யார்?
- இது போன்ற சடங்குகள் உங்கள் பகுதியில், மற்றும் உங்களது சமூகத்தில் எப்போதும் நடத்தப்படுகின்றதா?
- உங்கள் பகுதியில் இருக்கும் பல்வேறு சமூக குழுக்கள் அனைத்தும் ஒரே விதமான சடங்கு முறைகளை பின்பற்றுகின்றார்களா? அவற்றில் ஏதேனும் வேறுபாடுகள் உள்ளனவா?
- இது போன்ற சடங்குகள் ஏன் நடத்தப்படுகின்றது என்று நீங்கள் நினைக்கின்றீர்கள்?
- மாறிவரும் சமூகச் சூழலில் செய்யப்பட்டுவரும் சடங்குமுறைகளில் மாற்றங்கள் ஏதேனும் நடைபெற்றுள்ளனவா?
- இது போன்ற சடங்குகள் குறித்த உங்கள் கருத்து என்ன? இது போன்ற சடங்குகள் தொடர்ந்து நடத்தப்பட வேண்டும் என்று நினைக்கின்றீர்களா?
- உங்கள் மறுமணம் குறித்து எப்போதாவது நினைத்துப் பார்த்திருக்கின்றீர்களா? நீங்கள் உங்கள் வாழ்க்கையைத் தனித்தே தொடரும் பட்சத்தில் உங்களின் முதுமைப் பருவம் எப்படி இருக்கும் என்று நீங்கள் எண்ணுவதுண்டா?

2) What kind of socio, cultural and religious practices you were not allowed (or afraid /hesitant) to follow after becoming a widow?

- What and who prevents you from following such practices?
- How does it impact your day-to-day life? How do you feel about it?
- What do you think are the reasons for imposing such restrictions on widows?
- What happens to widows who don't oblige to such restrictions related to widowhood? How difficult it is to challenge such notions in practical life?
- What are the socio-cultural practices that widows from different communities must follow or stop doing?

நீங்கள் விதவையான பிறகு என்னென்ன சமூகக், கலாச்சார நடைமுறைப் பழக்க வழக்கங்களையெல்லாம் கைவிட வேண்டியிருந்தது? அல்லது தயக்கத்தின் கடைபிடித்திட வேண்டிதாக இருக்கின்றது? (எ.கா. பொட்டு வைப்பது மஞ்சள் பூசுவது)

- இப்பழக்கங்களைக் கடைபிடித்திட விடாமல் உங்களை தடுப்பது எது? அல்லது யார்?
- இது உங்கள் அன்றாட வாழ்வில் என்ன விதமான தாக்கத்தினை மற்றும் உணர்வினை ஏற்படுத்துகின்றது?
- உங்கள் பார்வையில், விதவை பெண்கள் மீது இது போன்ற தடைகள் விதிக்கப்படுவதற்கான காரணம் என்ன?
- இது போன்ற தடைகளை மீறும் விதவை பெண்களை இச்சமூகம் எவ்வாறு நடத்துகின்றது? நடைமுறை வாழ்க்கையில், இதுபோன்ற சவால்களைச் சந்திப்பதில் உள்ள சிரமங்கள் எவை?
- பிறந்ததில் இருந்து பெண்கள் கடைப்பிடிக்கும் சமூக கலாச்சார வழக்கங்களை கணவரது இறப்பிற்கு பிறகு விட்டு விட வேண்டுமா? அல்லது எப்போதும் போல் கடைபிடிக்கலாமா? இது குறித்த உங்கள் கருத்து என்ன?

II. Discrimination and Violence (பாகுபாடு மற்றும் வன்முறை):

3) What changes have happened in how you are treated by your family and relatives after you became a widow?

- Narrate one or two incidents of how you have been discriminated against by your family members.
- Did you face any violence (physical, verbal, sexual, psychological) from any of your family members?
- Are you able to take decisions on your own about yourself and your children?
- What do you think are the reasons for being treated differently?
- How do you feel about it?
- Have you shared/discussed your feelings with your family members? If yes / or No, why?

நீங்கள் விதவையான பிறகு, உங்கள் குடும்பத்தினரும் உறவினர்களும் உங்களை நடத்துகின்ற விதத்தில் என்ன விதமான மாற்றங்கள் ஏற்பட்டுள்ளன?

- உங்கள் குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்களால் நீங்கள் புறக்கணிக்கப்பட்ட அல்லது பாகுப்பாட்டிற்கு உள்ளாக்கப்பட்ட அனுபவங்கள் ஏதும் இருப்பின், அவற்றில் ஒன்று அல்லது இரண்டினை மட்டும் பகிர்ந்து கொள்ளுங்கள்.
- உங்கள் குடும்ப உறுப்பினர்களால் நீங்கள் ஏதும் வன்முறைக்கு (உடல், வாய்மொழி, மற்றும் பாலியல் ரீதியிலான) உள்ளாக்கப்பட்டு இருக்கின்றீர்களா?
- உங்களது வாழ்வு மற்றும் உங்கள் குழந்தைகளது வாழ்வு குறித்த முடிவுகளை உங்களால் தனித்து எடுக்க முடிகின்றதா?
- விதவை பெண்கள் பாகுபடுத்தப்படுவதற்கான காரணங்கள் குறித்து நீங்கள் என்ன நினைக்கின்றீர்கள்? அவ்வாறு நடத்தப்படும் போது உங்கள் மனநிலை (உணர்வு) என்னவாக இருக்கின்றது?
- அவ்வாறு வெளிப்படும் உணர்வுகளை நீங்கள் உங்கள் குடும்பத்தினரிடம் பகிர்ந்து கொண்டது / விவாதித்தது உண்டா? ஆம் அல்லது இல்லை ... காரணம் என்ன?

4) What changes have happened in how you are treated by the wider community/workplace after you became a widow? (i.e. discrimination and violence)

- Narrate one or two incidents of how the community/workplace has discriminated against you.
- What are common challenges you face in the community/workplace as a widow in your day-to-day life?
- Did you face any violence (physical, verbal, sexual, psychological) in the community/workplace?
- What are the differences between how other non-widowed women treat you as compared to men?
- How do you feel about it?
- Why do you think the community treats you differently?

நீங்கள் விதவையான பிறகு, இச்சமூகம் (பொது வெளி மற்றும் வேலைத்தளம்) உங்களை நடத்துகின்ற விதத்தில் என்ன விதமான மாற்றங்கள் ஏற்பட்டுள்ளன?

- நீங்கள் சமூகத்தால் பாடுபடுத்தப்பட்ட அனுபவங்கள் ஏதும் இருப்பின், அவற்றில் ஒன்று அல்லது இரண்டினை மட்டும் பகிர்ந்து கொள்ளுங்கள்.
- உங்களது அன்றாட வாழ்வில் நீங்கள் சந்திக்கும் சவால்கள் எவை?
- பொது வெளியில் அல்லது வேலை பார்க்கும் இடங்களில் ஏதும் வன்முறையை சந்தித்த இருக்கின்றீர்களா? (வாய்மொழி, பாலியல், உளவியல் மற்றும் உடல்ரீதியான வன்முறை)
- விதவையல்லாத ஏனைய பெண்கள் உங்களை நடத்துகின்ற விதத்திற்கும், பிற ஆண்கள் உங்களை நடத்துகின்ற விதத்திற்கும் ஏதேனும் வித்தியாசங்கள் இருப்பதாக உணர்கின்றீர்கள்? இருப்பின் அவை யாவை?
- விதவைப் பெண்கள் ஏன் சமூகத்தால் பாடுபடுத்தப்படுகின்றார்கள்? அவ்வாறு நடத்தப்படும் போது உங்கள் மனநிலை (உணர்வு) என்னவாக இருக்கின்றது?

5) Have you approached government officials, elected representatives, or police for any help since becoming a widow? If yes, how were you treated by these officials?

- What are the major challenges you faced when dealing with any government officials, elected representatives, or police?
- If you experience any forms of discrimination/violence, have you ever reported it?
- Narrate one or two incidents of discrimination that you faced when approaching them

நீங்கள் விதவை ஆன பிறகு அரசு அதிகாரிகள், தேர்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட மக்கள் பிரதிநிதிகள் அல்லது காவல் துறை அதிகாரிகளை சந்தித்து ஏதேனும் உதவி கோரிய அனுபவம் உண்டா? அவ் வேளைகளில், நீங்கள் எவ்வாறு நடத்தப்பட்டீர்கள்?

- அரசு அதிகாரிகள் தேர்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட மக்கள் பிரதிநிதிகள் அல்லது காவல் துறை அதிகாரிகளை நீங்கள் சந்திக்க சென்ற போது நீங்கள் சந்தித்த முக்கிய சவால்கள் என்ன?
- அவர்களை சந்தித்த போது, நீங்கள் ஏதேனும் பாடுபட்டினை / வன்முறையினைச் சந்திக்க நேர்ந்ததா? ஆம் என்றால், அது குறித்து நீங்கள் ஏதேனும் புகார் அளித்தீர்களா?

- நீங்கள் அவர்களைச் சந்தித்த போது, பாகுபடுத்தப்பட்ட அனுபவங்கள் ஏதும் இருப்பின், அவற்றில் ஒன்று அல்லது இரண்டினைப் பகிர்ந்து கொள்ளுங்கள்.

6) Do you feel safe? Can you narrate incidents or circumstances where you felt unsafe?

- What kind of safety concerns do widows face in day-to-day life?
- Why do you think, you feel safe or unsafe?

நீங்கள் பாதுகாப்பாக உணர்கின்றீர்களா? எப்பொழுதேனும் நீங்கள் பாதுகாப்பின்மையை உணர்ந்திருக்கின்றீர்கள்? அப்படி உணர்ந்திருந்தால், அத்தகைய அனுபவங்கள் குறித்துப் பகிர்வும்?

- அன்றாட வாழ்வில் விதவை பெண்கள் சந்திக்கும் பாதுகாப்புப் பிரச்சினைகள் எவை?
- எதனடிப்படையில் நீங்கள் பாதுகாப்பாகவோ அல்லது பாதுகாப்பின்றியோ இருப்பதாக உணருகின்றீர்கள்?

7) What needs to be done to protect widows from ill-treatment, discrimination, and all forms of violence?

- Do you think laws can protect widows? If yes or no, why and how

விதவை பெண்களை, அனைத்து வகையான வன்முறை, பாகுபாடு மற்றும் சமூக புறக்கணிப்பு ஆகியவற்றிலிருந்து இருந்து பாதுகாக்க அரசு செய்ய என்ன வேண்டும்?

- சட்டங்கள் விதவை பெண்களை பாதுகாக்குமா? ஆம் என்றால் எவ்வாறு? இல்லை என்றால் ஏன்?

III. Livelihood Impact (வாழ்வாதார சூழல் ஏற்படுத்தும் தாக்கம்):

What key challenges have you faced to your livelihood after becoming a widow? – i.e. work life and ability to provide education, food for children, access and control over livelihood resources, food security, skills training, etc.

- Were you an earning member before your husband's death?
- If not, how did you manage to meet the livelihood needs of your family?
- Are you debt-ridden? If yes, any hassles you faced from lenders and how do you intend to repay?
- How has covid-19 affected your lives and livelihood?
- Did you face any issues with the family members in getting access to resources/ancestral property?
- What are the major setbacks (eg. Sale of property/ assets, health issues, etc) that happened after your husband's death
- How do you feel about managing the family alone?

உங்கள் குடும்பத்திற்கான வாழ்வாதாரத்தை ஈட்டுவதற்காக நீங்கள் சந்தித்த / சந்திக்கும் முக்கிய சவால்கள் எவை? – (வேலை சூழல், குழந்தைகளுக்கான கல்வி கொடுக்கும் திறன், வாழ்வாதார மூலங்களை பெறும் மற்றும் கட்டுப்படுத்தும் திறன், உணவு பாதுகாப்பு தொழிற்கல்வி முதலியன)

- உங்கள் கணவர் உயிருடன் இருந்த போதே நீங்கள் ஏதும் வருமானம் தரும் வேலை / தொழிலில் ஈடுபட்டு இருந்தீர்களா?
- இல்லை என்றால் குடும்பத்திற்கான வாழ்வாதார தேவைகளை தற்பொழுது எவ்வாறு சமாளிக்கின்றீர்கள்?
- உங்களுக்கு ஏதும் கடன் பிரச்சனை இருக்கின்றதா? ஆம் என்றால் கடன் கொடுத்தவர்களிடமிருந்து ஏதேனும் தொந்தரவுகளைச் சந்திக்கின்றீர்கள்? கடனை எவ்வாறு திருப்பி அடைத்து வருகின்றீர்கள்?
- கொரோனா தொற்று காலம் உங்களுடைய வாழ்வையும் வாழ்வாதாரத்தையும் எவ்வாறெல்லாம் பாதித்தது?
- உங்களது கணவர் அல்லது உங்களது குடும்பத்தின் சொத்துக்களில் நீங்கள் உரிமை கொண்டாடுவதில் ஏதேனும் சிக்கல்கள் எழுந்துள்ளனவா?
- உங்கள் கணவர் இறப்பிற்கு பிறகு உங்கள் வாழ்வில் ஏற்பட்ட முக்கிய பின்னடைவுகள் என்ன? (உடல் நலன், சொத்து விற்பனை)
- குடும்பத்தை தனியாக சமாளிப்பது குறித்த உங்களது மனநிலை (உணர்வு) என்ன?

8) What are the difficulties you faced in raising children and fulfilling their needs (including personal growth, emotional well-being, education, health care, marriage, etc)

- a. How has your husband's death impacted your children?
- b. How did you overcome the challenges? Have the children been supportive?

குழந்தைகளை வளர்பதற்கும்' அவர்களது தேவைகளை பூர்த்தி செய்வதற்கும் நீங்கள் சந்திக்கும் சவால்கள் என்ன? (குழந்தைகளின் தனிப்பட்ட வளர்ச்சி, பக்குபட்ட மனநிலை, கல்வி, உடல் நலன், திருமணம் முதலியன)

- உங்கள் கணவரது இறப்பு உங்கள் குழந்தைகளிடம் ஏற்படுத்தியுள்ள தாக்கம் என்ன?
- வாழ்வின் சவால்களை எவ்வாறு மேற்கொண்டு வருகின்றீர்கள்? உங்களது குழந்தைகள் உங்களுக்கு ஆதரவாக இருக்கின்றீர்களா?

9) Looking back on your family life for the past five years, what are 5 concrete material developments your family has made? How have you contributed to this and what motivated you?

கடந்த 5 ஆண்டுகளில் உங்களது குடும்பத்தில் நடந்தேறியுள்ள 5 முக்கிய வளர்ச்சிகளைக் குறிப்பிடுக? அவற்றில் உங்களது பங்களிப்பு என்னவாக இருந்துள்ளது?

IV. Asserting Rights, Resilience, and Support systems:

(உரிமை நிலைநாட்டல், சாமாளிக்கும் திறன், மற்றும் ஆதரவு சக்திகள்)

What do you think are the key achievements you made after becoming a widow? Name at least a few.

- a) Personal Life
- b) Professional life
- c) Public sphere

நீங்கள் விதவையான பிறகு உங்கள் வாழ்வில் நீங்கள் சாதித்த முக்கிய சாதனைகள் / வெற்றிகள் எவை?. சிலவற்றையேனும் குறிப்பிடுக

- அ) தனி வாழ்வில்
- ஆ) தொழிலில்
- இ) பொது வாழ்வில்

10) Looking back at your life since you became a widow, what support has been, or would be, most useful to overcome the key challenges you face? What support have you already received to overcome these challenges?

நீங்கள் விதவையான பிறகு நீங்கள் சந்தித்து வரும் சவால்களை எதிர்கொள்வதற்கு உங்களுக்குப் பேராதரவாக இருக்கின்ற மற்றும் இருக்கக்கூடிய உதவி எது? என்ன விதமான ஆதரவினை நீங்கள் உங்களது வாழ்வில்பெற்றீர்கள்?

11) How aware are you of your rights and entitlements? How did you gain this knowledge? And what has been your experience in accessing your rights and entitlements, especially from government officials and police?

உங்களது சட்ட மற்றும் வாழ்வாதார உரிமைகள் (அரசு திட்டங்கள்) குறித்து எந்த அளவு தெரிந்து வைத்துள்ளீர்கள்? அவற்றை நிலைநாட்டுவதற்காகவும் அடைவதற்காகவும் நீங்கள் அரசு அதிகாரிகள் மற்றும் காவல் துறையினரை சந்தித்த பொழுது உங்களுக்கு ஏற்பட்ட அனுபவங்கள் என்ன?

12) If you are part of the Widows Sangham/Iyakkam in the village, what have been the impacts or changes because of this Sangham/Iyakkam on yourself, your family life, your position in the community, and your relationship with other caste people?

நீங்கள், விதவை பெண்களுக்கான அமைப்புகள் அல்லது இயக்கங்களில் ஈடுபட்டு இருக்கின்றீர்களா? அப்படியானால், அந்த ஈடுபாடு என்ன விதமான மாற்றத்தை / தாக்கத்தை உங்கள் வாழ்வில், உங்களது குடும்பத்தில், நீங்கள் வகிக்கின்ற பொறுப்பில், நீங்கள் பிற சாதியினரோடு கொண்டிருக்கின்ற உறவில் ஏற்படுத்தி இருக்கின்றது?

13) What do you think needs to be done to ensure equal rights, dignity, and respect for all women irrespective of their marital status? What do you expect the government to do in this regard?

பெண்களது திருமண வாழ்வு எப்படிப்பட்டதாக இருந்தாலும் அவர்களது சம உரிமை மற்றும் மாண்பு ஆகியவை போற்றப்பட / உத்தரவாதப்படுத்தப்படுத்தபட என்ன செய்ய வேண்டும் என்று நீங்கள் நினைக்கின்றீர்கள்? இது குறித்த அரசு என்ன செய்ய வேண்டும் என்று எதிர்பார்க்கின்றீர்கள்?

14) What do you think will be the most important thing that will keep you sustaining your life in the future?

நீங்கள் உங்களது எதிர்கால வாழ்வை நோக்கித் தொடர்ந்து முன்னேறிட, உங்களை வழிநடத்திடும் முக்கிய உந்து சக்தி எது?

ANNEXURE 4: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Widows in Tamil Nadu: **In Search of Dignity, Safety, Human Rights and Entitlements**

Case Study Format

Note:

- (1) The case study format given below has detailed questions – only for getting a good idea of the interview-task at hand. Besides, these questions are to be taken only as guidelines. Hence, each question is not to be responded to. Moreover, all the questions may not be applicable to all the widows, and therefore are not expected to be asked for during the interview.
- (2) Objectivity, clarity, conciseness, sharpness and exactness of facts must determine the information sought and recorded.
- (3) Apart from writing descriptive information on the personal profile of the widow, certain incidents and experiences of the widow are also expected to be narrated briefly.
- (4) Wherever needed for emphasis, record the widow's own words/conversation in direct speech – sentences, phrases, etc.
- (5) For each case study, prepare around 10 pages, excluding Part One: Case Profile, of A-4 size typed sheets.

Part I: CASE PROFILE

1. Full name of widow being interviewed:		
2. Locally known caste name:		
3. Caste name in community certificate, if available:		
4. Age (completed):		
5. Widow's children: give separately no. of girls & boys	Girls	Boys
6. Other household members, if any (in-laws, grandparents, etc): give separately no. of women & men	Women	Men
7. Widow's education (only completed):		

8. Widow's religion:	
9. Widow's MAIN occupation:	
10. Widow's Secondary Occupations, if any:	1. 2. 3.
11. Village of Residence of widow:	
12. Panchayat:	
13. Panchayat Union:	
14. Taluk:	
15. District:	
16. MLA Constituency:	
17. MP Constituency:	
18. Detailed postal address, tel./mobile no. of widow:	
19. Contact details of someone having a clear knowledge of the woman - in case of need for clarifications/more information (<i>Preferably someone from the village/town of the widow</i>):	
20. Date/s of interview session:	
21. Interviewer's name:	
22. Interviewer's signature:	
23. Signature of Core Team Coordinator & date after final checking:	

Part II: CASE DETAILS

1) Circumstances of widowhood & thereafter

1) What was your age and that of your husband when he died? How and why did he die – immediate and remote reasons: illness, accident, alcohol, drugs, suicide, etc.?

2) Post-husband's death, living alone, with children [how many children], with in-laws, with parents....and why?

3) Were the customary cultural practices followed at your husband's death? Did you undergo them and why? Did you like them and why? What were your feelings when you underwent them? Did you react against such practices – physically in public or mentally within yourself?

If you had reacted openly in public, what have been the consequences? Do you think such practices should be continued in future and why?

4) As a widow, how did you feel then when your husband died, and now after these years?

2) Safety & Security and Protection Mechanisms

1) Do you feel safe and secure after becoming a widow?

- If yes, how & why, that is, in what ways have you made your life safe and secure?
- If no, in what ways and from whom have you experienced insecurity? In which places and for what duration? With what consequences?

2) Are you aware of any protection mechanisms for widows established by the government? If you know them, what are they?

- Should any more such protection mechanisms be established by the government?
- Should the government abolish any socio-cultural practices that affect the identity, image and personality of widows?
- What role should widows play in creating such mechanisms and in restoring the identity and image of widows?

3) Identity perceptions as woman and as widowed woman

1) How do your family members perceive you ***as a woman and as a widowed woman*** – positively/negatively?

- How are you addressed? What are the words/phrases /images used to express their perceptions about you ***being a woman and a widowed woman***?
- What do they think about what your future should be, how your future should be?

2) How do your relatives perceive you ***as a woman and as a widowed woman*** – positively/negatively?

- How are you addressed? What are the words/phrases /images used to express their perceptions about you ***being a woman and a widowed woman***?
- What do they think about what your future should be, how your future should be?

3) How do the people in general perceive you ***as a woman and as a widowed woman*** – positively/negatively?

- How are you addressed? What are the words/phrases /images used to express their perceptions about you ***being a woman and a widowed woman***?
- What do they think about what your future should be, how your future should be?

4) How do YOU perceive yourself ***as a woman and as a widowed woman***?

- What do you think about who you are, what you are? In other words, how do you look at yourself ***being a woman and a widowed woman***?
- What do you think about what your future should be, how your future should be?

- 5) Did you, ***being a woman and a widowed woman***, feel harassed by others regarding their identity perceptions about you? What are these types of harassment and from whom? Any difference in the type of harassment you have faced ***as a woman and as a widowed woman***? Any violence perpetrated against you regarding identity perceptions and from whom? Any difference in the type of violence you had undergone ***as a woman and as a widowed woman***?

4) Socio-cultural practices

- 1) Being a widow, are you **personally interested** in the following socio-cultural practices? If yes, why? If no, why?

- doing certain socio-cultural practices – adorning yourself with colour/flower sari, dot on your forehead, jewellery, flowers, cosmetics, bracelets, bangles, silver anklets, etc.?
- attending your family's/relatives'/others' auspicious functions – engagement, marriage, ear boring ceremony, *valai kaappu* when pregnant, etc.?
- attending your family's/relatives'/others' funerals, memorial functions, etc.?
- involving in public services, participating in public celebrations, visiting public places, etc.
- conversations with men in day-to-day life?
- meeting people early morning, visiting relatives' houses?
- taking bath in public ponds/lakes/wells, etc. like other women?
- Falling in love with a man or entering into second marriage?

- 2) Do you **practice them or are you restricted from** doing so? If yes, why? If no, why?

5) Discrimination/Harassment/Atrocities experienced & Courage manifested

- 1) **As a woman and widow**, in what **specific and different ways** have you suffered discrimination/harassment/atrocities in the village/locality?

- 2) **As a widow**, in **what specific ways** have you suffered discrimination/harassment/atrocities in the village/locality while being engaged in the following activities and **in what forms (verbal, physical, psychological, sexual, etc.)?**

- adopting traditional socio-cultural practices;
- stopping traditional socio-cultural occupations;
- accessing government disaster relief schemes;
- accessing government welfare measures;
- accessing house-site/land patta, housing scheme, etc.
- accessing loans (personal, housing, business/commercial, etc.)
- accessing basic amenities such as water, toilets, electricity;

- accessing PDS or other shops for buying basic items;
- accessing healthcare facilities;
- being in school or classroom (in teaching profession, in social relationships, in providing midday meals, etc);
- employed as farm labourer, daily wage labourer, etc.;
- engaged in small/big commercial enterprises as owner/manager;
- participating in SHG or any organisation/ committee;
- performing religious practices (a) in temples/churches/mosques, (b) at home, shrines, etc.
- trying to contest or contesting panchayat authority (incl. membership);
- doing campaign work for political candidates;
- executing or trying to execute panchayat authority after election;
- personally engaged in inter-caste marriage;
- doing second marriage?
- ... and so on

3) What do you think are **the reasons** for such discrimination/harassment/atrocities? How often? Who are the perpetrators?

4) What were the **immediate and long-term consequences/effects/results/impact** of these discrimination/harassment/atrocity experiences **on you and on the perpetrators**?

5) If and when discrimination/harassment/violence was perpetrated against you or you underwent violence of any kind in deed or words, **did you respond/react** to such discrimination/harassment/violence? If yes, how – physically, in words, gestures, action, etc? **What made you respond/react** in such manner or what gave you the courage to respond in such manner? Was there **any reaction from the perpetrators**? Did you take **any steps to overcome this reaction**? How or in what manner?

6) **Did you seek any remedy** from your parents/relatives/friends/village elders/ political parties? Did you approach the police station? What was your experience in the police station? Any case filed by the police? Any investigation done by the police? Any charge sheet filed? Any court case and in what stage?

7) **Any counter-action/response** from others (including perpetrators) against you?

8) **What concrete lessons** have you learnt from your experience? What concrete advice would you like to give to other widows to face such problems courageously, to protect themselves, to respond to such situations, and to get appropriate remedial actions with justice and fairness?

6) Future

A. Regarding the widow herself

- 1) What would you like to be in future in terms of who you want to be so that you would feel happy contented in life? What steps would you like to take to achieve this? What assistance would you like to get from others – family/ relatives/ friends/ government/ civil society organizations?
- 2) What security measures would you require to live a safe and secure life in future? What steps would you like to take to achieve this? What assistance would you like to get from others – family/relatives/friends/government/civil society organizations?

B. Regarding her family

- 1) In what specific ways have you/your family grown in the past 5 years in terms of economic, educational, employment, health care, social security aspects?
- 2) Mention three specific priority areas in which your family will have to develop in the next 5 years?
- 3) What do you want your male children to become and to be in future?
- 4) What do you want your girl children to become and to be in future?