CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY
Chapter – II
METHODOLOGY AND THEORIES RELATED TO AGING

After discussing the various aspects of aging and review of literature in the preceding introductory chapter, an attempt has been made to select an appropriate research design and methodology in Section – A of this Chapter. Section - B attempts to highlight various theories in the domain of aging.

SECTION – A

2.1 (a) STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

An elaborate review of aging and middle-aged research studies have been dealt with in the preceding introductory chapter, which shows that aging and middle age have been studied from various social, psychological and biological perspectives. However, the statement of the problem lies in the fact that very few studies have been dealt with the problems of middle-aged women in the context of India; much data in this regard needs to be collected and researched.

This chapter is an attempt that could help to form one’s own conviction and dare to see differently women’s midlife experiences, so that these can lead to attitudes, actions and decisions that, on a day-to-day basis, would favour the cause of women. This would help one to understand a little better the capabilities of women and inspire us to reflect on the feminine genius from a feminist point of view. It is also important for women to have accurate images of what a woman’s experience of middle life is. Just what, if anything, do women like about middle age? What do they dislike? What do middle age women see as their strengths and vulnerabilities? These questions are not in the true sense explicit among women. Our study is a humble attempt to answer these questions which will help Goan women share their experiences. Goans are a unique kind of people compared to other States. Women of Goa today are highly westernized. Regardless of caste, creed or religion, they enjoy considerable freedom in all walks of life imbibed by the Portuguese. With this in view it will enable women of Goa to construct new images and build new knowledge. Not only will their experiences help women struggling in isolation with emotional, psychological, social and physical changes that they feel no one talks about, they will
help women in the next stage of adulthood to look at life in a more confident, validated way.

The utility of this study is to identify experiences of Goan women which will further the growth and development of their personality and lead them to new useful and creative roles which will provide a sense of life fulfillment in Goan society that is fast changing. It will enable individuals in the middle years to find ways of achieving meaningful personal goals, capacities, outlooks, interests and conceptions of self. It will also help to get an understanding about the aging of the population as an achievement which has created an opportunity to be grasped, rather than a set of problems to be solved and assist in building a more favourable climate than has existed before. In view with the statement of the problem we need to list out the main objectives of the research task, hypotheses, sampling procedure and key concepts used. It also deals with the method of data collection, limitations of the study, sampling design and the statistical techniques used to analyze data on various issues and aspects of the study.

(b) OBJECTIVES:

With the above background, this research work has identified the following objectives:

1) To assess the distinguishing features of middle age women and to observe what physical changes generally occur during midlife years.
2) To study the factors that affect health at mid-life with due importance to pre-menopause, menopause and post menopause.
3) To recognize basic individual needs of midlife, their capacities, outlooks, interests and conceptions of self.
4) To examine kin-relation/intergenerational relations among middle-aged women between their parents, children, spouse and in-laws.
5) To assess strategies and coping mechanisms of middle-aged Goan women.

(c) HYPOTHESES:

1) Women in middle age face health problems, both mental and physical.
2) Women in Goa are in a flux when it comes to self identification.
3) Goan women feel that they can cope up with family obligations and multiple responsibilities very well.
4) Most of the women in Goa do not want to accept the fact that they are crossing middle age.
5) More middle-aged women are entering the work force and are less available to take care of the family.

(d) LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

1) The study has excluded male respondents.
2) Family members of the respondents like spouse, children, in-laws were not interviewed.
3) The study was confined only to North Goa District of ten villages communities and two towns i.e., Mapusa, the capital of North Goa and Panaji, the capital city of Goa.
4) Barren women of middle age, single women who are divorced, separated, widowed and spinsters were excluded form the sample.

(e) KEY CONCEPTS:

Aging population, aging, middle age, chronological age, menopause, andropause, cohort, mid-life crisis, Goan women, prime of life, transition stage.

2.2 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION:

As the research work studies the transition of women in a process of aging, an attempt is made to collect the data on the various issues and aspects of the life of middle-aged women who are neither young nor old but have crossed adulthood and are nearing old age. This was done by application of appropriate data collection methods.

a) Selection of Area:

Middle-aged women residing in North Goa from the two main towns viz: Panaji and Mapusa and ten village communities viz: Calangate, Aldona, Nachinola, Moira, Saligao, Bastora, Sangolda, Tivim, Parra and Arpora.

North Goa is perhaps the most important district of Goa and extends to the North East of Tiswadi. It is the most populous district in Goa and indeed the richest. Mapusa is the capital of the taluka of Bardez. It is about eight miles from Panaji, the capital city of Goa, occupying almost a central position in Bardez taluka to which it belongs. The taluka of Bardez has thirty nine villages and over twenty seven parishes. The name ‘Bardez’ is said to be derived from twelve ‘desh’ or divisions of which it once consisted.

According to 2001 census, the population of North Goa district was 7,58,573. According to 2006 Report of Government of Goa, the literacy rate of Goa at present is
83.7 percent. North Goa is characterized with larger population and higher literacy level as compared to South Goa. North Goa also has the highest population of Christians. It also has the largest scheduled caste population as compared to South Goa. In general, Goa practices high age at marriage, high family planning acceptance and consequently has low population growth. These are the main characteristics of Goa as a State.

The sex ratio of Goa is 967, notably higher than India’s sex ratio of 927. Keeping all the above perspectives in view the area for field work was selected. The topic selected therefore, is quite relevant especially to the Goan context, as the state shows a favourable sex ratio for females and hence the population of females is more in Goa. The topic is relevant to Goan society in general and Goan women in particular.

b) Tools:

A structured Interview schedule was prepared to elicit information regarding age, sex, race, social class, religion, marital status, education, occupation, income, family size, life style, etc. of middle-aged women selected for study from the voters list of North Goa Assembly constituency. A few open ended questions were also set so as to give freedom to respondents to spell out spontaneously their experiences of middle life.

Data was elicited on experiences of middle age, health problems, adjustment with spouse, children, in-laws, neighbours, community, level of participation in various activities, adjustment to conditions of middle age, attitude towards middle age, socio-economic problems, empty nest and responsibilities towards family members, getting ready for old age... Valuable data was thus collected keeping in mind the objectives of study.

c) Interview:

Interviews were informally conducted so as to yield rich data to gather information through interview schedules. Secondary data was also obtained from books, journals, thesis, websites on sociological, psychological and historical studies pertaining to aging and midlife. Census Reports to procure population, sex ratio and literacy was also utilized.
**d) Sampling Design:**

The respondents were drawn from a sample consisting of only married, middle-aged women living with spouse and children and not barren women or single middle-aged women who are divorced, separated, widowed and spinsters; such women were excluded from the sample. The sample also included Foreign National women who have married Goan men. The actual list of respondents selected for the research study was on the basis of Purposive Random Sampling with deliberate selection of sample units that conformed to the above pre-determined criteria of women in North Goa. This was done in order to secure a cross section of a population to obtain the typicality and specific relevance of the sampling units of the study, as it would guarantee inclusions of relevant elements in the sample. This selection was done with much prior extensive information about the population to be studied.

North Goa, the area under study consists of six talukas of which Bardez and Tiswadi are a part. Panaji is a town of Tiswadi taluka, while Mapusa town and the ten villages belong to Bardez taluka. Bardez has 39 villages with a total population of 227695. For our study we have selected only eleven villages from Bardez and a town of Tiswadi, namely Panaji, in order to give a wide geographical coverage.

The sample consisted of 360 middle-aged female population between the age group 40 to 60 years, using a Purposeful Random Sampling technique to yield a representative sample from the towns and villages mentioned in the table 2.3.

**Table – 2.1**

Middle-aged population of entire Goa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five year age group</th>
<th>Total persons</th>
<th>Total female population</th>
<th>Rural women</th>
<th>Urban women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 – 44</td>
<td>82539</td>
<td>38474</td>
<td>19053</td>
<td>19421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 49</td>
<td>75632</td>
<td>37566</td>
<td>19021</td>
<td>18545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 54</td>
<td>64311</td>
<td>31429</td>
<td>16269</td>
<td>15160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 59</td>
<td>46905</td>
<td>23842</td>
<td>13101</td>
<td>10741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Directorate of Census Operation Goa; Census of India 2001.*
AREA UNDER STUDY - NORTH-GOA
Table 2.2
North Goa area under study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five year age group</th>
<th>Total persons</th>
<th>Total female population</th>
<th>Rural women</th>
<th>Urban women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 – 44</td>
<td>46975</td>
<td>21642</td>
<td>11633</td>
<td>10009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 49</td>
<td>42588</td>
<td>21187</td>
<td>11732</td>
<td>9455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 54</td>
<td>36258</td>
<td>17892</td>
<td>9946</td>
<td>7946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 59</td>
<td>27312</td>
<td>13934</td>
<td>8330</td>
<td>5604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Directorate of Census Operation Goa; Census of India 2001.

Table 2.1 and 2.2 depict the middle-aged population of total persons, total female population and population of rural and urban women between the five year age groups 40 to 59 of entire Goa and of North Goa, the area under study.

Table 2.3
Sampling Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Area under study</th>
<th>Total female popln.</th>
<th>No. of resp. selected</th>
<th>No. of resp. answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Panjim town</td>
<td>29155</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mapusa town</td>
<td>19486</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Calangute</td>
<td>7328</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aldona</td>
<td>3523</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nachinola</td>
<td>1130</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Moira</td>
<td>2170</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Saligao</td>
<td>2746</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bastora</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sangolda</td>
<td>1624</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tivim</td>
<td>3731</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Parra</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arpora</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>360</td>
<td>304</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table 2.3 indicates the towns and villages of North Goa District, area under study with female population of each town and village selected, total number of respondents selected from data base voters list and total number of respondents who answered the interview schedule.

Out of 360 only 304 respondents gave information. The remaining 56 respondents did not answer because they had either lost the interview schedule, some found the questions too personal, many could not make time to answer, while some others returned incomplete schedules.

e) Pilot Study:

To call for a good deal of knowledge of the subject matter of the study and its dimensions so as to gain previous knowledge of the subject matter, an extensive pilot study of preliminary investigation was conducted on 35 respondents from two neighbouring villages of Mapusa – Pomburpa and Corjuvem. The researcher was able to develop better approaches to target population as regards introduction, rapport, and time required for interviews. It provided information for structuring and restructuring questions and also develop an appropriate plan of analysis. The researcher was able to identify field problems to be encountered and accordingly used remedial approaches.

f) Data Analysis:

The data collected for the purpose of the study was analyzed with the help of SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. By accessing the data, tabulation was done using appropriate statistical techniques; keeping in mind the objectives and hypotheses.

Statistical methods like percentages, mean, Chi-square test bivariates and multiple response frequencies and percentages are used for analyzing data with the help of SPSS package. The percentages show rounded figures.

Besides the above statistical methods, graphic representations and figures were utilized to facilitate the understanding of masses of statistical data at a glance and portray the data from a bird's eye view.
SECTION – B

The ubiquity and importance of aging have made analysis of its causes and its consequences on society a central concern of scholars. Its multidimensional implications interrelated with important aspects of aging process, encompass or affect all age groups. Aging is a subject that straddles many disciplines and is one that cannot be neatly compartmentalized. No single discipline covers the interrelated and complex process of human aging. Given its diversity it is approached differently by different disciplines using paradigms, theoretical perspectives and methodologies.

2.3 ROLE OF THEORY:

A theory is an account of the world which goes beyond what we can see and measure and embraces a set of interrelated definitions and relationships that organizes our concepts of an understanding of the empirical world in a systematic way. Theoretical statements should be translated into empirical, measurable or observable propositions, and systematically tested. This approach is usually characterized as positivism. Theory should explain phenomena, identifying causal mechanisms and processes which, although they cannot be observed directly, can be seen in their effects (Marshall Gordon, 1998). A theory should be much more definitely refined and operationalized, so that it can be used by others and its reliability can be checked for further investigation. Theory should therefore point to areas yet to be explored and indicate which facts to observe while defining them clearly, thus enhancing new findings and empirical generations which are used to alter the existing theory, if this is then warranted (Peace Sheila et.al., 1996).

While the phenomenon of ‘aging’ has come to be widely recognized, the issue of theories of aging needs to be discussed academically. Sociologically, the multifarious dimensions of aging in India can be thought to be a series of transition from one set of social roles to another and such roles are structured by the social system (Bhatia, 1983). The process of aging is not uniform for all individuals in the society. In contemporary society, the status and role of old age population have been diminished due to technological developments that have colonized the outlook of the youths. Some argue that the elderly individuals are in a state of ‘decay’ they rarely have any role or function to contribute to our times. On the other hand it is also believed that elderly persons are the guardians of our generation, preservers of the
joint families, foundation of experience and knowledge and resource of traditional values, norms and cultural practices. Thus at this juncture, social scientists should be engaged in this debate in providing biological, sociological and psychological perspectives on the transitional state of affairs of the aging and aged and advocate alternative approaches for their emancipation to mainstream life. Attaining old age itself is a virtue. It appears that age and virtue are tied up together. In respecting the aged we are respecting the virtue itself as age does not stale.

**Theories Related to Social Gerontology:**

As cited by Peace Sheila; Bond, John; Briggs, Roger; Coleman, Peter (1996) and R.A. Baron, (2002). Several scholars have discussed the various theories related to aging and old age, as classified under:

I) **Biological perspectives**
   a) Programmed aging
   b) Unprogrammed aging.

II) **Psychological perspectives**
   a) Experimental psychology
   b) Developmental psychology - Ideas on the development of personality
      - Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)
      - Carl Jung (1875-1961)
      - Alfred Adler (1870–1937)
   c) Stage theories that consider development beyond adolescence
      - Erik Erikson’s stages of life (1950)
      - Robert Havighurst (1952)
      - Kohlberg (1973)
      - George Valliant (1977)
      - Daniel Levinson (1986)
   d) Life-span developmental psychology
   e) Contextual theory of development

III **Sociological Perspectives**

Structuralism as a broad Approach
   a) Structural functionalism – a consensus perspective
      - Disengagement Theory
      - Activity Theory
b) Structuralism – a conflict perspective  
c) Symbolic Interactionsim  
i) Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology  
ii) Modernisation Theory and Age Stratification Theories  
iii) Social Role Theory  
iv) Continuity Theory  
v) Critical Social Science Theory  
vi) Integration versus Segregation Theoretical Approach.

Let us examine briefly the above mentioned theories relevant to the study of aging.

I. Biological theories of aging:  

a) Programmed aging:  

Theories that attribute physical aging primarily to genetic programming are called Programme Theories. According to this theory every living organism contains a king of built-in biological clock that regulates the aging process. Very recent findings suggest that it may involve, at least in part, strips of DNA that cap the ends of our chromosomes – teleomers (Gladwel, 1996). Each time a cell divides, the telomere becomes shorter. When this shortening reaches some critical point, the cell can no longer divide, and this may contribute to the aging process. For instance, in skin cells when the telomers are shortened, the cells cannot divide, depriving normal repair processes that keep skin healthy and young and begins to break down.

b) Unprogrammed aging or stochastic theories:  

They are also known as wear and tear theories of aging, suggest that we grow old because of cumulative damage to our bodies from both external and internal sources. Because such damage is not completely repaired we simply 'wear out' over time. It emphasizes the role of free radicals – atoms that are unstable because they have lost electrons. According to this theory, these highly unstable particles are continuously produced by body metabolism; once formed they react violently with other molecules in cells, thus producing damage. When this damage affects DNA, free radicals can interfere with basic aspects of cell maintenance and repair. The theory proposes that this damage cumulates over time thus producing the declines associated with aging (Robert Baron, 2002).
Biological implications of programmed and unprogrammed theories of aging:

No single theory by itself can explain all causes of aging nor is there any reason why one cause should operate to the exclusion of all others. In general terms, it seems reasonable to support that:

1. The replica of genetic material is the basic property of ‘life’.
2. Such replication has an inborn risk of error due to random physico-chemical interactions (non-programmed).
3. The process of natural selection would ensure a balance between catastrophic error and extinction on the one hand and too little error to allow necessary changes on the other so that aging (programmed) represents a stable evolutionary strategy.

It should be noted that aging processes originated at a time when few animals or human beings lived far into their lifespan; in such circumstances, the risk of accidental death or starvation was extreme to warrant expending excessive energy on the maintenance of highly accurate, potentially immortal, cells. Only the rapid and profuse reproductions were likely to preserve the gene pool, a more important goal than the prevention of senescence in the individual. Since most of us reach old age, evolution may take humans in different direction in generations to come.

II Psychological perspectives of aging:

In recent times more emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary study of aging and therefore psychological aging was placed with a historical, environmental and biological context to make the study of aging, a model for other areas of psychological research linking it with other disciplines.

a) Experimental psychology:

It was first cultivated as a laboratory-based science towards the middle of the nineteenth century with a focus on analysis of human intellectual functioning and ability, ‘cognitive’ processes by which the person gains knowledge or becomes aware of his environment. The key topic under study are perception, discrimination, memory, learning and reasoning. It developed more strongly in the U.S. and Britain and the findings were put to practical use.

The model also presented psychological development and aging showing the sequence of growth and rapid build-up of abilities in early life followed by a period of gradual stability and eventually by a long period of decline. This area of
psychology has become a more attractive topic to researchers. Research on older individuals could be perceived to provide an additional dimension to investigations on the explanations of general theories of cognitive functioning (Peace, Sheila et.al. 1996).

b) Developmental psychology:

The contributors to this field of psychology in cognitive development are Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Riegel (1973).

Psychology of Anglo-American perspective viewed young and old and compared them against an ideal standard of functioning. European psychologist gave more credence to the idea of developmental stages.

❖ Ideas on the Development of Personality:

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), revolutionized the thinking about human behaviour by proposing causes for human motivation which opened up interest in much broader fields of psychology. He emphasized that people do not always act in rational ways nor were they aware of the bases of their action. Freud and his associates were actually clinicians involved in the treatment of mentally disturbed people. The ideas and knowledge that was produced by them often conflicted with other psychologist in the study of normal individuals.

❖ Implications of Freud’s Study on Aging:

Freud himself was not interested in aging and his description on developmental stages is limited to the very early periods of life.

Carl Jung (1875–1961) was a young colleague of S. Freud who broke away from Freud and established a rival school of ‘psychoanalysis’. Jung emphasized his study on what he called the second half of life. For him midlife was a crucial turning point when the individual was provided with opportunities for new developments. The emphasis was more on interior processes rather than the involvement with the outside world. He termed this interior processes ‘individuation’ (Peace Sheila et.al., 1990). Jung was the first major theorist who worked on adult development, held that healthy midlife development calls for individuation, the emergence of the true self through balancing or integrating conflicting parts of the personality, including those parts that previously have been neglected. Jung opined that until about age 40, adults
concentrate on obligations to family and society and develop those aspects of personality that will help them reach external goals. Women emphasize expressiveness and nurturance; men are primarily oriented towards achievement. At midlife, people shift their preoccupation to their inner spiritual selves. Both men and women seek a “union of opposites” by expressing their previously “disowned” aspects (Papalia, 2004).

❖ **Significance of Carl Jung’s Work on Aging:**

Just like Freud, Jung’s work does not have a direct impact on studies of aging, however his work and contributions are more relevant to midlife but he disagreed with Freud.

Alfred Adler, (1870–1937) another associate of Freud also studied different aspects of human motivation. All individuals pass through a feeling of inferiority phase to some extent because of the inferior position they once occupied as children, when power and privilege were exerted by adults. Some feel this more strongly than others. Individuals compensate for such feelings of inferiority and this could take positive remarkable achievements but could also be expressed negatively in expressing self assertive behaviour. Adler himself proposed that the most successful resolution of such an inferiority to be in involvement with others, in the development of ‘social interest’.

❖ **Significance of Adlers Views on Aging:**

Adler’s study is relevant to gerontology as his thinking lies in the fact that in the aging process feelings of inferiority and loss of self-esteem can become major issues in late life, as a result of physical decline, loss of status, beauty and other abilities. There could be possibilities of diminishing friendship and close relationships also, resulting in disengagement problems from fear of inferiority. To overcome this problem he suggests a therapy in a constructive manner by helping individuals develop a wider interest in others and cultivate a sense of belonging (P. Sheila et.al. 1990).

c) **Stage theories that consider development beyond adolescence:**

Stage theories suggest that all human beings, no matter where or when they live, move through an orderly progression of stages in their development. Erikson
proposes eight stages, meant to extend from infancy to old age. Each stage focuses on a crisis, a challenge, or a turning point in the life span. Each crisis is considered to be salient at a particular age period, and optimal development is supposedly characterized by a sequence of eight successful resolutions.

The most famous stage theory of development are the eight stages namely:

Stage - 1: Basic trust versus basic mistrust
Stage - 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Stage - 3: Initiative versus guilt
Stage - 4: Industry versus inferiority
Stage - 5: Ego identity versus role diffusion
Stage - 6: Intimacy versus isolation
Stage - 7: Generativity versus stagnation
Stage - 8: Integrity versus despair

He suggested that development proceeds through a series of distinct stages each defined by a specific crisis. These crises in turn, result from the fact that as individuals grow older, they confront new combinations of biological drives and societal demands. The biological drives reflect individual growth and physical change, while the societal demands reflect the expectations and requirements of society for people at different ages.

During adulthood, Erikson suggests, we pass through these major crises. The first of these is the crisis of intimacy versus isolation. During late adolescence and early adulthood, Erikson suggests, individuals must develop the ability to form deep, intimate relationships with others. This does not mean simply sexual intimacy; rather it involves the ability to form strong emotional attachments to others. In short, the first crisis of adult life centers in the capacity to love — to care deeply and consistently for others. People who fail to resolve it successfully will live in isolation, unable to form truly intimate, lasting relationships.

Erikson labeled the second crisis of adult life the crisis of generativity versus self-absorption: the need for individuals to overcome selfish, self-centered concerns and to take an active interest in helping and guiding the next generation. For parents, such activities are focused on their children. After the children are grown, however, the tendency toward generativity may involve serving as a mentor or guide for
members of the younger generation, helping them in their careers and lives. People who do not become parents can express generativity by providing help and guidance to young people – students, younger coworkers, nieces and nephews and so on. Individuals who successfully resolve this crisis and turn away from total absorption with their own lives discover new meaning. People who do not resolve this crisis successfully become absorbed in their own lives and gradually cut themselves off from an important source of growth and satisfaction.

Erikson termed the final crisis of adult development *integrity versus despair.* As people reach the final decades of life, they look back and ask, “Did my life have any meaning?” “Did my being here really matter?” If they are able to answer yes, and to feel that they reached many of their goals, they attain a sense of integrity. If, instead, they find their lives to be lacking on such dimensions, they may experience intense feelings of despair. Successful resolution of this final crisis can have important effects on how individuals come to terms with their own effects on how individuals come to terms with their own mortality – the inevitable fact of death – and on their psychological and physical health during the final years of life.

To summarize, according to Erikson and others who view adult development in terms of discrete phases of stages development during our adult years follows an orderly plan, reflecting the fact that at different times in our lives, we all experience the same problems, events, challenges, or – as he puts it – crises. The way in which we deal with each of these turning points then determines the course and nature of our lives from this point on. Several other influential stage theories of adult development exist (eg. Kotre, 1984).

❖ Significance of Erikson’s study to aging:

According to Erikson, the task of the last stage of life that is old age is to achieve ‘ego integrity’, an assumed sense of meaning and order in one’s life and in the universe as opposed to despair and distrust. This involves acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that by necessity, permitted of no substitutions. Despair may be expressed in feelings that one has failed and does not have the time to attempt another life or an alternative road to integrity, and also in a disgust with other people, particularly the young.
Robert Havighurst (1953), proposes a slightly different model of life-span development in which the stages are a series of "development tasks". Each time of life calls for the solution or completion of a set of tasks. The success of these accomplishments is related to life satisfaction in that period. The following sets of tasks must be done in early adulthood and middle age, respectively:

**Tasks of early adulthood:**

Select a mate; learn to live with a marriage partner; start a family; rear children; manage a home; get started in an occupation; take on civic responsibility; find a congenial social group.

**Tasks at middle age:**

Achieve adult civic and social responsibility. Establish and maintain an economic standard of living. Assist teen-age children to become responsive and happy adults. Develop adult leisure time activities. Relate to one's spouse as a person. Accept and adjust to the physiological changes of middle age; Adjust to aging parents.

❖ **Significance of R. Havighurst's study to aging:**

Havighurst's opines that it is not important to know only how people get from one stage to another or that development in adulthood is not only closely related to chronological age, but the important starting signals for any psychological changes that occur during the long period of life seem to be social. He believes that we have to look to "life events" eg. Marriage, parenthood and job. It is not being forty having lived forty years that moves a man or woman into re-evaluation of his or her condition, but having been married 20 years, or being at the peak of a career or seeing the youngest child move out of the home matter more.

❖ **Kohlberg's stage theory:**

He has adapted Piaget's theory of stages of cognitive development to moral judgment and sees this development as continuing through the adult years (Kohlberg, 1973). Piaget (1980) and many of his followers have considered true development – structural change – to end during adolescence, with only growth in "wisdom" continuing thereafter. In a way, what Kohlberg presents is an elaboration of this growth in wisdom, so that it is in fact true developmental progression, not just what
Piaget calls "horizontal decalage" or generalization of formal thought to moral issues. According to Kohlberg, moral development is based on cognitive development but independent of it. One must have reached the requisite cognitive level before one can develop the equivalent moral-judgement level, but one could also have mastered formal operations cognitively and not ever reach the highest level of moral judgement. Thus cognitive level is a necessary but not sufficient pre-requisite for moral level. Kohlberg has most recently proposed an additional stage, occurring late in adulthood, which he compares to Erikson’s last stages of ‘ego integrity’. He describes it as a “Cosmic perspective”, when “we begin to see our lives as finite from some infinite perspective and value life from this standpoint”.

Within a given culture, the occurrence of similar experiences at similar junctures of life could make it appear as if there is a necessary sequence to life’s progression, as implied by stage theories. At best, stage models describe what has occurred in our society so far. Thus they have a ‘ceiling effect’ and are cumbersome for predicting what differences we would get in development if cultural or historical circumstances changed. For present day developmental psychologists, some adaptation of learning theory may provide a more useful kind of model.

Significance of Kohlberg’s theory to the study of aging:

People change physically across life span is obvious. We can see such changes with our own eyes but not cognition. Our cognitive abilities rest ultimately on biological processes – events occurring within our brains. It is reasonable therefore to expect some declines in cognitive functioning with age. On the other hand as we grow older we also gain in wisdom/experiences, practice with various tasks, and our overall knowledge base. They definitely compensate for inevitable biological decline.

Vailliant George (1972) is considered as Erikson’s heir. Erikson believed that personality changes throughout life. Variations on Erikson’s theory grew out of pioneering studies by George Vailliant and Daniel Levinson. These are normative stage models, all of which originally were based on research with men, hold that everyone follows the same basic sequence of age-related social and emotional changes. The changes are normative in that they seem to be common to most members of a population. And they emerge in successive periods, or stages sometimes marked by emotional crisis that pave the way for further development.
In 1938, 268 eighteen year old self reliant and emotionally and physically healthy Harvard undergraduates were selected for the grand study. By the time they reached midlife, Vaillant (1977) saw a typical pattern at age 20, many of the men were still dominated by their parents. During their twenties, and sometimes their thirties, they achieved autonomy, married, had children, and deepen friendships. Somewhere between the twenties and the forties these men entered a stage of career consolidation. They worked hard at their career and devoted themselves to their families. They followed the rules, strove for promotions and accepted “the system”, rarely questioning whether they had chosen the right woman on the right occupation. The excitement, charm, and promise they had radiated as students disappeared; now they were described as “colorless, hard working, bland young men in gray flannel suits” (Vailliant, 1977).

In comparing how the young men in the grand study adapted to the circumstances of their lives Vailliant identified four characteristic patterns, or adaptive mechanisms (1) Mature (such as using humor or helping others), (2) immature (such as developing aches and pains with no physical basis) (3) psychotic (distorting or denying reality) (4) Neurotic (expressing anxiety or developing irrational fears). Men who used mature mechanisms were mentally and physically healthier, as well as happier than the others; they got more satisfaction from work, enjoyed richer friendships, made more money, and seemed better adjusted.

👀 Significance of Vailliant’s theory to the study of aging:

Vailliant study is longitudinal studies of men only in major midlife shifts from occupational strivings in the thirties to reevaluation and often drastic restructuring of lives in the forties to mellowing and relative stability in the fifties, Vailliant, like Jung reported a lessening of gender differentiation at midlife and a tendency for men to become more nutrient and expressive.

❖ Levinson’s stage theory (1986)

Levinson’s theory deals in part with aspects of social development during our adult years (Baron, Robert, 2002). Levinson’s theory – a concept he terms the ‘life structure’. According to Levinson, individuals have different life structures at different times during their adult years and move from one to another through transition periods lasting about five years.
Levinson divides our adult years into four major eras, each separated from the next by a transition period. These eras are summarized (in Figure-2) as we may observe, the first transition occurs between the pre-adult era, the time before we are adults and early adulthood. Taking place between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two, this transition involves establishing one’s independence, both financial and emotional. It is marked by such events as establishing a separate residence and learning to live on one’s own.

![Figure-2: Levinson's theory of adult development.](image)

Once the first transition is complete, individuals enter early adulthood. Two key components of their life structure at this time are what Levinson terms the **dream** and the **mentor**. The dream is a vision of future accomplishments what the person hopes to achieve in the years ahead. Mentors are older and more experienced individuals who help guide young adults. Both the dream and the mentor play an important part in our early adult years.

At about age thirty, Levinson suggests, many people experience what he terms the **age thirty transition**. At this time individuals realize that they are nearing the point of no return; if they remain in their present life course, they will soon have too much invested to change. Faced with this fact, they re-examine their initial choices.
and either make specific changes or conclude that they have indeed chosen the best course.

Now after the relative calm of the closing years of early adulthood, individuals move into another potentially turbulent transitional period – the midlife transition. For most people this occurs somewhere between the ages of forty and forty-five. It is a time when many people must come to terms for the first time with their own mortality. Until this period, most people view themselves as “still young”. After age forty, however, many come to view themselves as the older generation. Levinson’s findings suggest that for many persons this realization leads to a period of emotional turmoil. They take stock of where they have been the success of their past choices, and the possibility of reaching their youthful dreams. This leads to the formation of a new life structure, one that takes account of the individual’s new position in life and may involve new elements such as a change in career direction, divorce, or a redefinition of one’s relationship with one’s spouse.

Many persons experience another period of transition between ages fifty and fifty-five, a transition in which they consider modifying their life structure once again for example, by adopting a new role in their career to viewing themselves as a grandparent as well as a parent. However, this transition is the often less dramatic than one that occurs somewhere between the ages of sixty and sixty-five. This late-adult transition marks the close of the middle years and the start of late adulthood. During this transition adults must come to terms with their impending retirement and the major life changes. As they move through this period of readjustment, their life structure shifts to include these changes. For example they may come to see themselves as persons whose working career is over or almost over, and who will now have much more leisure time to pursue hobbies and other interests.

Significance of Levinson’s theory to aging:

In several respects Levinson’s picture of social development during our adult years seems to match our commonsense ideas about this process. Relatively long periods of stability are punctuated by shorter, turbulent periods in which we came to terms with changes in our goals, status and outlook. However, it is important to note that Levinson based his theory primarily on extensive interviews with only forty participants all men, and of ages thirty-five to forty-five. It has been criticized for too small and too restricted a sample on which to base such a sweeping frame work
Women in many societies face a different set of issues and problems as they age. More than men they have the responsibility of caring for their elderly parents; also if they have remained at home to concentrate on child rearing during at least a portion of their lives, women may experience greater changes than men do when their youngest child sets out to establish an independent life.

To deal with the issue of gender, Levinson conducted further research on a sample of forty-five women ages thirty-five to forty-five; some were home makers, others had academic careers, and a third group had careers in the business world (Levinson, 1996). He reported that the women in his sample went through the same sequence of eras and periods, and at roughly the same ages as men. However he did find differences between men and women in several respects. For example during the midlife transition, many women who had chosen the traditional role of homemaker expressed strong regrets about their choice and had what he described as a "rock-bottom" experience in which they questioned whether the sacrifices they had made for their marriages and families were justified.

This finding has been further explored by other researchers in a longitudinal study of women of two ages thirty-six and forty-seven. The researchers found that many of the women in the study expressed regret over their earlier choice to become a homemaker, and many stated the desire to change their lives and careers. Those who expressed regret and a desire to change and then actually made changes in their lives reported higher physical and psychological adjustment than those who also expressed regrets but had not made such changes. These findings suggest that as Levinson proposed, many women review their lives in midlife and both seek and make important changes, especially if they regret their earlier lifestyle choices.

Thus, from Levinson’s theory we can conclude that “there is a single human life cycle through which all our lives evolve” (Levinson, 1996), but that we must take careful note of gender, race, and socio-economic factors that may strongly affect various aspects of this cycle.

d) Life span development psychology:

Erik Erikson can be rightly considered one of the precursors of what has come to be known as life span developmental psychology (Sugarman, 1986). It provides a fruitful context for the study of the psychology of aging. In contrast to Jung who saw
midlife as a time of turning inward, Erikson described an outward turn. According to him, the years around age 40 is the time when people enter their seventh normative stage 'generatively versus stagnation'. Generativity, as Erikson defined it, is a concern of mature adults for establishing and guiding the next generation, perpetuating oneself through one's influence on those to follow. Looking ahead to the waning of their lives, people feel a need to leave a legacy – to participate in life's continuation. People who do not find an outlet for generativity become self-absorbed, self-indulgent or stagnant. The "Virtue" of this period is care: "a widening-commitment to take care of the persons; the products, and the ideas one has learned to care for" (Erikson, 1985).

Generativity can be expressed not only through parenting and grandparenting, but through teaching or mentorship, productivity or creativity, and "self generation", or self-development. It can extend to the world of work, to politics, art, music, and other spheres – or as Erikson called it "maintenance of the world". In Gandhi's Truth, Erikson (1969), pointed out how Gandhi – who was not a good father – emerged as "father of his country" at age 49, expressing generativity in his concern for the well-being of an entire nation.

A later theorist, Kotre, (1984), distinguished four specific forms of generativity; biological (conceiving and bearing children), parental (nurturing and raising children), technical (teaching skills to apprentices), and cultural (transmitting cultural values and institutions). Regardless of the form, Korte said, generativity can be expressed in two ways or styles; communal (involving care and nurturance of others) or agentic (personal contributions to society – creative, scientific, or entrepreneurial).

How does generativity arise? According to one-model (McAdams, 2001), inner desires for symbolic immortality or a need to be needed combine with external demands (in the form of increased expectations and responsibilities) to produce a conscious concern for the next generation. This, together with what Erikson called "belief in the species", leads to generative commitments and action (Papalia et.al, 2004).

e) Contextual theories of development:

Development in response to environment (Baron, Robert, 2002). Life expectancy was shorter in the societies of ancient Rome, Egypt and India, especially
for people who did not belong to the privileged classes. Consequently, ideas about when people became "old" were quite different from the views we hold today. On the other hand, however, all of these societies revered the old and were viewed as important sources of wisdom and good judgement. In contrast, during contemporary times, in many societies today, ageism is widespread today.

Contextual theories of development take careful account of such differences. These theories suggest that because life events and conditions may vary from culture to culture and over time, adult development must be viewed against this backdrop of social and historical factors. A notable example of such contextual theories is Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), suggests that to understand human development, we must focus on relationship between individuals and their environments – ecology. Such relationships exist at several levels. First, the micro system; settings in which the developing person interacts directly with people and objects at home, at work, in school, in the neighborhood, and so on. In addition we must consider what Bronfenbrenner describes as the mesosystem – relationship between settings in which the individual participates. For instance, what happens to people at work is often influenced by events in their home life, and vice versa. Above this is the exosystem, settings the individual doesn't experience directly but which still influence his/her life for instance, the company in which the persons spouse works, the local school board (whose decisions influence the persons, children and taxes) and so on. Finally, the macrosystem – widely shared cultural values, beliefs and laws, which influence all of the inner systems, and hence the person's life and development.

According to Bronfenbrenner, it makes no sense to try to understand how people change over the course of their lives without considering the ways in which they interact with, and are affected by these aspects of their environments. And because environments differ from one another and change radically over time, the course of adult development, too, may vary; it will not necessarily follow the orderly sequence of events suggested by stage theories.

A concrete example illustrating the difference between these two approaches that is stage theories and contextual theories will help understand. Consider the meaning of age. In stage theories such as Erikson’s various life crises and changes occur at specific ages, or at least within clearly defined age ranges. Contextual
theories, in contrast suggest that the links between chronological age and various aspects of development are much more fluid and can vary greatly in response to varying environmental conditions. Consider, for instance, the meaning of chronological age. All societies have what Neugarten (1987) described as social age clocks – internalized calendars telling us when certain events should occur in our lives and what we should be doing at certain ages. When should we finish school? Get married? Have children? Retire? the social age clock of our society tells us. And all these are important points; because the clock is really many different clocks (Schroots S. Birren, 1990), which can vary greatly depending on our occupation, socioeconomic status, and when and where we live. For instance, Olympic gymnasts are considered “old” at sixteen or seventeen; professional baseball players are not “old” until they are over thirty or even thirty-five. Similarly, persons with college degrees tend to get married and have children several years later than persons without college degrees (Lemme, 1999). In short, the social context in which we live determines when various events are supposed to occur in our lives; these do not take place solely on the basis of our chronological age or in response to the orderly unfolding of specific stages. In today’s society chronological age matters less (Montepare and Lachman, 1989). Contextual theories suggest, adult development is more a function of social definitions and beliefs than it is of specific age-linked stages.

Significance of contextual theory to study of aging:

Bronfenbrenner’s contextual approach is significant to the study of aging because development during adult years is purely a biological process because of the alterations in our bodies and brains that take place as we grow older and also perhaps, some of the changes we experience have their roots in our life experiences, or in the specific society or time in which we live. Perhaps ideas about aging and about what is appropriate behaviour for people of different ages depend on the social or historical context and ecological systems. Thus, the contribution of Bronfenbrenner’s theory to the understanding of aging is rather significant.

III Sociological perspectives:

Several perspectives have been suggested to study the sociology of aging. To name a few – Structuralism, Symbolic Interactionism, Ethnomethodology,
Modernization theory, Age stratification theory and the like. Let us examine these theories pertaining to the study of aging.

a) Structural functionalism – a consensus perspective:

The most prominent analogies with biology is an organic analogy in which society is seen as an organic whole, each of its constituent parts working to maintain the others, just as the parts of the body also work to maintain each other and the body as a whole. The consensus perspective of functionalism is based on the assumption that, on the whole societies can be regarded as stable and generally integrated wholes but differ in cultural and social structural arrangements. Since this sociological perspective in sociology owes a great deal to the natural and biological sciences there was a thrust towards scientific method modeled on the natural sciences.

The emphasis on societies as integrated wholes was also based in part on the crude analogy between social and biological organisms. Both have propensity to survive against all odds and propensity to decay. Almost all biological organisms are systems made up of a number of distinguishable interrelated parts which affects and responds to changes in other parts of the organisms. Different parts of the biological system fulfill different functions and roles. Similarly individuals and institutions fulfill a variety of functions and roles for its sustenance. Structural functionalism describes society as an adaptive open system whose different parts function to keep it as a whole relatively unchanging.

The structural functionalist perspective has offered two theories in the study of aging viz., the disengagement theory which phases the old people from certain roles to perpetuate the functioning of society. Activity theory on the other hand suggests the need to keep old people active so as to integrate them into society to perpetuate the smooth functioning of society (Shiela et.al., 1990).

It refers to any sociological approach which regards social structure as having priority over social action. Conflict theorists tend to regard themselves as radical critics of the consensus theorists, with their emphasis on maintaining the status quo. In the study of aging the conflict perspective is represented by a theory known as the political economy of old age.
b) **Structuralism:**

As a rule, Structuralists concern themselves with the logical implications of ways for organizing social systems conceived as social positions and roles and eschew any discussion of norms or other expectations. A major refinement of this, however, is to view the components of social structure as in consensus with each other or alternatively to view them as in conflict (Marshall Gordon, 1998).

**Theory of political economy of old age:**

Political economy is understood to be the study of interrelationships between political structure, economic structure and social structure or essentially between government organization, the labour market, social classes and status groups. It stresses on the interaction between the economic and political structure in society and the way they effect the distribution of resources and social goods (Pratt, 1976). In Britain, Townsend (1981), Walker (1982) and Walker and Philipson (1986) have taken a political economy perspective which has a central concept the idea of structured or structural dependency that describes the development of a dependent status resulting from the restricted access to a wide range of social resources, particularly income. This is reflected in the large numbers of elderly people who live in poverty.

**Significance of political economy theory to study of old age:**

Townsend (1989), reviewed on secondary data on earnings, incomes and assets, housing circumstances and benefits in kind shows that about one in four elderly people have incomes which are equal to or below the State poverty line. Since the elderly may not be in ‘productive’ work it has long been established that elderly people feature in the lower levels in the income distribution. Society is inclined to reward present work but not past work and therefore society does not reward old age. Very often elderly people are discriminated against by economic and social polices which usually benefit the young employed and the well-off. Thus dependent status in old age due to poverty are related to low resources and restricted access to resources through the life cycle. Retirement also restricts access to social resources in the form of a reduction in social relationships once the retiree is away from the world of work (Philipson, 1982). The political economy theory follows the Marxist tradition and indicates class inequality and relationship between economic production and later life.
Gerontologists have criticized on the narrowness of this theory that concentrates on inequality resulting from poverty and economic disadvantage.

c) Symbolic interactionism:

The theory is a social psychological theory which focuses upon the ways in which meanings emerge through interaction. Its prime concern has been to analyze the meanings of everyday life via close observational work and intimate familiarity, and from these to develop an understanding of the underlying forms of human interaction (Marshall Gordon, 1998).

The emphasis is on understanding social action by reference to social systems rather than on social action as generated through individuals in their particular circumstances.

*Mead and symbolic interactionism:*

The main ideas of symbolic interactionism were provided by Mead (1964) in Chicago, and Mead’s approach is the assumption that there is a difference between animal reaction and human conduct. Conduct requires the possession of mind which is distinctive to human species. To this is added the concept of self. Mead regards human action as very different from human behaviours is limited to a stimulus – response relationship. The concept of action depends on individuals’ ability to plan their actions, reflect on past experiences and reflect on them in the same way as they look upon other kinds of objects in the environment. It is the capacity for self-consciousness which makes human beings different from animals, and central to this is the ability of the individuals to take the same attitude towards himself as others take towards him. Thus he becomes an object like any other object; to look upon oneself as an object is to see oneself as others do.

Different individuals perceive the same object but with different meanings which will depend on factors that have been experienced and current purposes (Cuff and Paynes, 1994). Meanings are modified through an interpretative process.

*Blumer, W.I. Thomas and Goffman–symbolic interactionism:*

Blumer, (1900-86), contends that circumstances do not exist in themselves as stimuli to which individuals react. Rather, what constitutes circumstances depends on the purposes, plans and knowledge that the individual has in mind social action
therefore has to be interpreted as the mindful action of individuals initiated to bring about certain purposes, W.I. Thomas (1863-1947) theory of the ‘definition of the situation’ suggested that when people define situations as real they become real in their consequences’. This definitional approach has had particular applications to what has come to be known as the labeling theory of deviance that is how members of society come to define and label some of its members as deviant in certain respects and interact with them in such a way that the person takes on the characteristics related to the label. In the study of aging labeling theory has been used to explain the way in which elderly people are forced to act out specific roles. Thus, once a person has been labeled old or receive a retirement pension, they are expected to act the role of elderly or retired persons and not try to seek employment.

Goffman (1971), is concerned with the ways in which people play roles and manage the impressions they present to each other in different settings. He also reveals his abiding concern with the interaction order – with what people do when they are in the presence of others.

*Sub-culture theory of aging:*

Although interactionist theory underlines a number of studies on aging and old age there are a few interactionist theories specific to the study of aging. The main contribution is the sub-culture theory of aging (Rose, 1965), which postulates that sub-cultures tend to form when members of any group in society such as elderly people interact with each other significantly more than they do with other people in society. The development of a sub-culture would be encouraged by elderly people having a positive affinity for each other and their exclusion from interactions to any great extent with other groups in society. The influence of compulsory retirement will encourage group affinity, while the decline in family contacts, the development of retirement communities and the explosion in day care will encourage the development of a sub-culture. The strength of some family relationship, particularly in times of ill health and disablement, the continuation in employment and an inbuilt resistance to becoming old might restrict the development of sub-culture.

1) **Phenomenology and ethnomethodology:**

The ethnomethodological perspective has been widely used as the underlying theoretical perspective in studying aging, but has produced no grand theories (Mills, 1959) of aging.
It is from Husserl’s (1859-1938) philosophy of phenomenology that the basic assumption of ethno methodology has been derived. Husserl attempts to describe the ultimate foundations of human experience by ‘seeing beyond’ the particulars of everyday experiences to describe the ‘essences’ which underpin them. By grasping such essences do we have a foundation for all experience which enables us to recognize and classify it in an intelligible form? One will be able to grasp the essence only when one will disengage from one’s usual ideas about the world, to examine the stream of experiences available to him with the trio of past, present and future. On phenomenology the basic act of consciousness is typification; bringing together typical and enduring elements in the stream of experience, building up typical models of things and people and buildings shared social world. (Schutz, 1972) talks about sociology as creating a world of rational puppets which we then manipulate to discover how people might act in the real world. We use common ways of classifying objects or people like elderly or aged as mental tools. Phenomenologist and ethno methodologists are concerned with how members of a social group perceive, define and classify the ways in which they actually perform their activities, and what meanings they assign to acts occurring in context with their everyday lives (Sheila, et.al., 1990).

ii) Modernization and age stratification theory:

They run into the problem of aggregate data obscuring within group differences even within one culture, let alone in a cross-cultural context. It is implied that older people as a category may be viewed as the new proletariat, it observes the fact that some old people are independently wealthy and educationally privileged above the average citizens. Sometimes family is seen in the less developed nations to pick up the slack and provide the older generation a safety net whereas the older people in the modern society are seen as more wealthy and self-sufficient but isolated from their kin. Further, specification of the work life cycle involvement is needed to be able to make any categorical claims on the relationship to the means of subsistence on group level. Is sustenance depending on the older person’s own labour, the labour of family members, saved up economic resources, or state and social welfare provisions? Are people structurally disadvantaged, caught in age strata without equal access to means of production? Without the separation of the opportunity structures from actual social participation, it is not possible to fathom the
reality of age stratification, or the real differences between the situation of older people in development, modernized nations and the traditional, less developed ones.

Life course data will provide a wealth of information of individual paths, if they are profiled against the web of opportunity structure in the society the subject live in. Of course, some people never take the opportunities offered them so that attitudinal and motivation studies are also needed.

Whether exchange money, human capital, or services, age is obviously a factor. Life is seen as a series of social exchanges that regulate one’s depository of power and prestige (Moschis, 1994:201). In short most of the theories would profit from domain specification, which the web of the life cycle involvements provides. Of major importance is the need to keep the structural dimensions separate from the social, psychological or behavioural aspects of the life course.

### iii) Social role theory:

The theory was developed by George Herbert Mead (1943) and Linton (1936). The ‘role’ concept is most frequently seen in the works of many other sociologists such as Talcott Parsons (1951, 1968); Robert Merton (157, 1968); Irwing Goffman (1959); Jonathan Turner (1962); Herbert Blumer (1968) and Stryker (1980). Their study emphasized that the rights and duties that correspond to a status results ultimately in role performance.

In olden times, the aged were an integral part of the family and accordingly also of the society. However, they are now being segregated for a variety of reasons such as breaking of the joint family, economic pressure, paucity of accommodation in the urban areas and the change in attitude and value systems of the sons and daughter-in-laws. This has led to the loss of many roles of the aged in the family, resulting in greater degree of isolation of the aged. The nuclear family results in segregation of the sons from their old parents. In such situations the old and aged suffer from a role less status. Retirement has been viewed in the context of role theory. This will depend upon the extent to which an individual is able to replace the work role by other roles which are found acceptable to him and to society around. The feeling of powerlessness and loss of normalcy generate isolation and absence of meaning in their life. This problem becomes more acute when one of the spouse dies earlier. On the one hand, the aged have to come to terms with their physical, economic and social
limitations, on the other, there cannot be any substitute for old age security provided by the family (Activity approach).

Muller (1965), contends that for an individual the ‘work role’ is an important and major source of self identification. The sudden and drastic shift from one role to another leads to many problems of adjustment. For an individual pursuing an occupation gives him satisfaction as it permits him to exercise authority in the occupational hierarchy; it also gives him a steady source of income, giving him the satisfaction of being a breadwinner and provides for the family and very often has to depend on others as the pension earned may not fetch the needs for his daily requirements. Mead (1980), points out that “for many people, retirement represents a major transition from the state of being retired or unemployed”. The period immediately after retirement is a transitional period and concepts like role-changes, role-conflict, role-management, role-less role, role loss and role deficit have been used by sociologists in different studies during this period of transition.

Thomas, W.E. (1958) has applied the role theory in his study of “Pre-retirement anticipation and adjustment”. He contends that adjustment to a new status after retirement, including the creation of a corrective role is facilitated if one cultivates an accurate anticipatory ‘cognitive map’ – knowing what to expect after retirement can thus prepare an individual to successfully programme a pattern of post retirement living which can satisfactorily help him to adapt to a new role.

Burgess (1960) endorses that after an individual retires, he feels imprisoned in a “role less role”. Since he seizes to perform vital function the society offers him no useful role to compensate him for the loss of his functional role. However, this problem could be compensated by investigating new patterns of leisure activities and new roles with a functional value to the older persons. Burgess suggest that this might be accompanied by organizing old age groups and independent subgroups, within the society.

A major role loss occurs when an individual’s status as a worker changes to that of status of a retired person. Turner Majda (1974, 85) has rightly observed that, “Retirement invariably involves some disruption of long standing commitments and behavioural patterns and may further evoke stress in the area of social relationships in goals and aspirations and in the maintenance of personal identity and self-esteem”.

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Rosow (1974) has highlighted the effects of role ambiguity after an individual retires. He contends that this ambiguity of role of older persons also affects their psychological stability and promotes depression, anxiety and refusal to come to terms with old age. This condition is attributed to role loss and society’s failure to develop clear and positive norms pertaining to the role of the elderly.

R.J. Havighurst (1960), in his study emphasized on ‘Role flexibility’ or the key to successful adjustment to the process of aging. He contends that a significant change occurs in an individual’s role complex between the ages of 50 and 70 years. Some roles are reduced or discontinued, while others are intensified with effort, while still others may be assumed for the first time. A deliberate plan of action during the middle years in which a variety of new roles are explored and new interests are developed can lead to role complexity which can help the individual to make a successful transition from middle age to old age. There is, however an increasing recognition that effective aging takes place much earlier. Thus, by the end of the fourth decade of one’s life most individuals are aware of their declining physical energy and the need to look towards mental activity as the source of personal rewards.

Ramamurti, P.V. (1972) has conducted a study of role availability, role utilization and the problems of adjustment of the middle-aged and older people, which is based on a sample drawn from urban and rural areas of Chittor district (Andra Pradesh). The analysis showed changes in roles consequent on aging and retirement. There was a loss of several roles, while the new roles, acquired were lesser than roles lost. The study also emphasized that individuals in joint families had a slightly higher role activity than those in nuclear families. Those who had their spouses living showed a more role activity and satisfaction than those who did not have their spouses. There were no notable rural-urban differences in mean roles though the nature of roles varied. The role activity was higher among the better educated. The elderly displayed more problems related to health, finance, home and family, social relationships and leisure utilization. They had less problems related to occupation. There were no significant differences in the nature of problems between those living in joint families and those in nuclear families. Rosow (1976), analyzed the role and status in his study of the life span of the elderly and the middle-aged. He notes that both role and status are social phenomena that can occur either simultaneously or independently of each other.
Continuity theory and evolution of activity in later adulthood:

Atchley (1989), endorses that if we are to understand how activities evolve in later adulthood, we need solid concepts to enable us to think clearly about activities and theories of adult development to help us explain how activities fit into personal evolution in later adulthood. Continuity theory deals with theory of adult development which proposes that in making adaptive choices middle-aged and older adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing psychological and social patterns by applying familiar knowledge, skills and strategies. Applied to activities, continuity theory maintains that adults gradually develop stable patterns of activity and that, in adapting to aging, adult engage in thought and take action designed to preserve and maintain these patterns in their general form.

iv) Perspectives used in continuity theory:

Continuity theory is evolutionary. It assumes that the patterns of ideas and skills, which people use to adopt and act, develop and persist over time; that a course of development direction can usually be identified; and that the individual's orientation is not to remain personally unchanged but rather consistent with the individual’s past, to influence the direction and degree of change in accordance with the individual’s goals. Thus individuals are presumed to play an active part in their own development.

Continuity theory is constructionist. It assumes that people in response to their life experiences, actively develop individualized personal constructs; Kelly, (1955), ideas of what is going on in the world and why. Some of our most important personal constructs concern our concepts of self and our personal life-styles. Continuity theory also acknowledges that our personal constructs are greatly influenced by the social constructions of reality that we learn from those around us and from mass media.

Continuity theory is about adaptation. It assumes that individual choices are made not only to achieve goals but to adapt to constantly changing circumstances. Accordingly, continuity theory deals with the development and maintenance of adaptive capacity, particularly in the later part of adulthood. One of the main ideas in continuity theory is that, in adapting to aging, people attempt to preserve and maintain long-standing patterns of thought and behaviour that they believe constitute important
and potent adaptive skills and arrangements. In other words, when faced with adaptive challenges, people tend to rely on what they see as their established adaptive strengths.

Continuity theory is about selective investment. It presumes that people make decisions, based on feedback from experience, about where it is best to focus their efforts to develop skills and knowledge. People select and develop ideas, relationships, environments and activities based on their personal concepts of desired developmental direction and of available opportunity.

Continuity theory is not a theory of successful aging. Unlike Activity Theory and Disengagement Theory which gave opposing prescriptions for successful aging; Havinghurst, (1963), continuity theory predicts that in their choices people will show a bias toward what they perceive to be continuity. Success may be indeed the result of these choices, but in some cases it will not, endorses Atchley (1989). Continuity theory presumes that continuity and change, are both present and that people prefer more continuity than change all other things being equal. A rigid overemphasis on continuity, however, might well interfere with successful adaptation to aging.

In discussing continuity, it is important to understand the relationship between continuity and change. Continuity is not an absence of change. Continuity refers to a coherence or consistency of patterns over time. Specific changes tend to be given significance in relation to a general notion of a relatively continuous whole. Individual change and evolution are usually perceived as occurring against a backdrop of considerable continuity. Continuity in adult development is paradoxical; there is both similarity over time and obvious change – one can be identifiably similar in comparison with a past self and still have changed considerably.

Continuity is emphasized more than change based on observations by many investigators that aging people use continuity much more than change in describing their own development (eg., Fiske and Chiriboga, 1990; Kaufman, 1987). People are apparently motivated not only to perceive themselves as characters exhibiting continuity over time but also to act to extend that continuity into the future as well (Markus and Herzong, 1991). Continuity theory thus contends that middle-aged and older adults are both predisposed and motivated toward inner psychological continuity as well as outward continuity of social behaviour and circumstances.
Continuity of ideas and orientation leads to effective adaptation. Accordingly, continuity theory is about development and adaptation, but not necessarily about successful aging.

Aging often motivates people to restrict their activities. In doing so, they use selection processes that have served them over their entire adulthood as they experimented, developed and refined their activities. Thus even the process of adapting activities to meet the challenges of aging often rests on continuity of adaptation patterns from the past.

Different approaches and professionals look at aging and the aged differently. Since our research topic is multidisciplinary in nature, there is a need however to have an integrated approach to the problems of aging and middle-aged.

**Activity approach:**

Accordingly to activity approach the aged can themselves be engaged in work which they themselves postponed to old age, it ignores the contingencies of present old age. The theory was developed by Robert Havighurst (1963). It is primarily an action theory for successful aging. It consists of three basic ideas.

1) Majority of normally aging persons maintain a fairly constant level of activities.
2) The amount of engagement or disengagement is influenced by pre-retirement styles if they have been working and socio-economic status rather than by an intrinsic and inevitable processes.
3) If one wants their aging experiences to be successful than it is necessary to maintain and develop substantial levels of social, physical and mental activity.

The activity approach is an attempt to understand the social behaviour of the elderly in terms of how successfully they are able to integrate themselves into society. Successful aging consists of being or behaving as much as possible like a middle-aged person.

**Erdman Palmore (1968, 1969)** conducted longitudinal study at Duke University which was carried out for over a period often years. He supported the theory by proving that even though people aged, they generally tended to show almost no overall reduction in their activities or in their levels of life satisfaction. Palmore observed that aged people who were relatively healthy were better integrated and active than those who were less healthy. He also observed that social and physical
activity were significantly related to high morale and high levels of life satisfaction. The more active a person was the more likely he was to be happy as an elderly. Palmore concluded that continued engagement rather than disengagement was typical of a normal healthy older person.

Bernice Neugartan (1968), also supports the theory. Both Palmore and Bernice noted that majority of elderly people did not discharge themselves from the society when they became old but they engage themselves in so many other type of useful and fruitful work from which they derive satisfaction.

Passive or disengagement approach:

This approach was developed by Cumming Elaine and Henry William in 1961. This theory is inspired by the functionalist perspective. The study is based on their study in Kansas City in U.S.A. According to this approach the aged withdrew themselves from their social roles. During the period of disengagement a person accepts a secondary position, transfers family responsibility to the younger members and minimizes social participation. He disengages himself from worldly ambitions. However total disengagement from the society even under the Indian Ashram is extremely difficult. Both Cumming and Henry directed the study to find out the disengagement between individual and society. The significant proposition outlined in this theory are:

1) There is a process of mutual withdrawal between aging individuals and the society from each other;
2) The process of withdrawal is inevitable. It cannot be avoided.
3) This process of withdrawal is necessary for “successful” aging.

The theory summarizes that all people eventually have to die, but is necessary for society’s institutions to survive in order to maintain social stability and cohesive social functioning. The participation in society is minimized by an orderly method of transferring power from the older members of the society to the younger. It supports the idea that society benefits from phasing out individuals whose deaths would have otherwise disrupted the smooth functioning of the social order if they are allowed to work until their death. This process of phasing out older persons from the mainstream of work becomes institutionalized, as stable and routine norms are developed to indicate what category of individuals should be disengaged. Societies develop norms
accordingly then for individuals to disengage from work at a certain age, followed by
a 'rite of passage'. For example, working individuals are prepared to accept the set
norms for superannuation within their society. The required individual and the
society develop a new equilibrium, benefiting both. The probability of
disengagement considerably increases if both the society and the individual are
prepared.

Cumming and Henry maintain that individuals themselves select the stage of
withdrawal from certain social roles when they become old. the more the individual
withdraws from roles the less the individual is found by society’s norms. He thus
plays a specific social role by getting disengaged, which allows him then to become
increasingly more interested and more preoccupied with his personal interests due to
the leisure time now at his disposal. It opens avenues for him as an elderly person to
enjoy more freedom and free time to pursue his interest which he postponed to old
age.

The Disengagement Theory is comparable with the concept of *Vanaprastha
Ashram* in the Indian (Hindu) culture, according to which an aged person after the
age of 50 was expected to withdraw himself from his work and utilize his time for
service to the community. This was followed by Sanyas Ashram after 75 years of age
when a person completely disengaged himself from worldly affairs and was expected
to spend his time away from his home and family in studying religious books, spread
of spiritual knowledge, etc. The society became responsible for his food and meeting
his other minimum needs in the Sanyas Ashram, thus providing the fullest opportunity
for self-expression. This also calls for complete effacing of the self (Passive
approach).

v) Critical social science:

This perspective covers a number of sociological perspectives such as post-
Marxist perspective, post-structuralist and post-modernists unified by their criticism
of industrial and post-industrial society.

The 17th and 18th centuries in the West are known to be the enlightenment
period in Western thought and culture and that period was dominated by the idea that
by means of science and technology human life would improve on the whole. This
thought is evident in modern capitalism which supports the view that economic
growth and technological change would increase the wealth for the benefit of everyone.

But critical social science theory opposes and challenges the enlightenment philosophy suggesting that societies oppress individual members who are unaware that their lives are controlled by these social forces. Marx exposed this idea within his concept of class consciousness. Classical Marxist like Gramsci went further than Marxist ideas about class and class consciousness and suggested that the state was essentially suppressive so as to control apposition to the capitalist system. This repression was achieved through the control of knowledge and science, since social knowledge is subordinated to the needs of capitalism.

Though we may consider the different institutions in society, for example education and economy to be helpful, post-structuralists and post modernists argue that we are actually being suppressed by them. The fact that we are perfectly happy with our society and do not feel suppressed and controlled does not nullify this view but supports it. It proves how trapped we are within the structure of our ways of thinking.

In our day to day life we take most things for granted which is obvious from our traditions-customs which we practice and have inherited them through the medium of language considered to be the most stable institution which was created and developed in particular times and places. Post-structuralists and post-modernists therefore try to understand language and social categories that it describes and we take for granted by taking a historical perspective. This involves the examination of the conditions under which our taken for granted ideas were created and developed.

Therefore, the greatest challenge of critical social science is rooted in the critique of instrumental reasons – critique of the effort to explain the natural and social world in order to predict or control it. A critique of experimental reason exposes the link between knowledge and domination. It shows how the interest of gerontologists in explaining aging is linked to a covert strategy of social control by the dominant social group (Bond John; Colman, Peter; & Peace, Sheila, 1996).

vi) Integration versus segregation theory:

In the ultimate analysis neither of the two approaches referred to above can be considered as basic or fundamental. The third model based on integration theory
could be that of social adjustment of the aged. The level and the mode of adjustment in the individual aged would be reflected in the manner he is able to satisfy his needs and fulfill his social obligations. In different countries, the status of the aged differs. In Japan, which combines modernism and traditionalism, the aged are still respected. They are eligible for a minimum economic assistance from the government. Elder's day is a popular national holiday in Japan. They continue to be useful in housekeeping child care, shopping, etc. On the other hand the Indian Ashram Theory of life enjoins upon the aged to relinquish normal life when they reach the stage of Sanyas after 75 years of age. These create more psychological problems for the aged. In the West the aged do not have this type of social status nor is there any particular age of retirement.

Integration theory:

Assumes that an individual is well integrated into the family and the social organization while pursuing a career. After the individual retires, he feels isolated and becomes segregated and the degree of segregation increases with advancing old age. The degree of integration depends on certain basic factors such as the nature of living arrangements, the frequencies of interaction with friends or cohorts, maintaining contacts with individuals of other age groups, etc. Lack of these may lead to segregation.

Early sociologists maintained that industrialization brought about disintegration of settled rural communities and extended families. In view of decline in fertility older persons have now, fewer children and grand children to take care of them. The shrinking size of family thus corresponds to the shrinking in functions of the family. This has resulted in the loss of useful functions which the elderly once performed in the family, ultimately leading to a greater degree of isolation among the aged.

Talcott Parsons (1964) identifies the 'isolated' conjugal family as consisting of only a married couple and their dependent children. This is the 'normal' household in American society. Parsons point out that old people do not have a place in such a system. Further, old age in the U.S.A. is not valued highly as there is a romantic idealization of youth; secondly the older generation do not have place in the nuclear family of their married children. In many cases the elderly are isolated due to
geographical separation from their adult children who move along with their jobs to pursue their career.

Simmons (1960), is of the opinion that, information that is available generally shows that old people are isolated from the families of adult children as a result of industrialization. Some scholars, however, are critical about this theory. Rosow (1964), Shanas and associates (1968), on the basis of their study do not agree with the above assumptions. They conclude that the aged are securely knitted into the social fabric and there is no evidence of a decline in contact with children earlier due to old age or retirement.

Social adjustment approach:

Personal fear of growing old may be the reason for the negative views towards aging and the aged, therefore, certain roles are withdrawn from them and accordingly the aged may feel demoralized. Loss of job and income and also health and vigour change the self-supporting role of the aged to the role of dependence on children. Lack of regular interaction with the family members may result in social isolation and loneliness of the aged. Absence of purposeful activities may result in boredom in the remaining years of life of a person. The nature and extent of social adjustment of an aged may vary accordingly to his personality make-up, based on experience and the family and community environment in which he lives.

(c) Development approach: The development approach is preventive and life-enhancing rather than curative. The following are the necessary tasks for the later years:

1) Redefinition of social identities with development of new social goals in an associational context.
2) Linkage of past and present to the future with regard to family, peers, associations, services and community.
3) Adjustment to physical and mental changes.
4) Development of new self-image transcending societal expectations of behaviour of older people, and
5) Development of sense of integrity - a profound concern for system, order and meaning of human existence.
Theories applicable to the present research study:

Different theoretical ideas are available in the field of social gerontology and we have dealt with them in a manner to focus on different aspects of the aging process. We have seen how they make different assumptions, use concepts in different ways, pose different questions and arrive at different explanations of the aging process.

Our task now is to apply those theories relevant to our study of middle age. Not all these theories can be applied to the study of middle age because each theory may focus on aging from a different point of view. However, there are a few theories that are psychological and sociological in nature that can be adopted in general to our study of middle age. Let us consider some of these theories pertinent to middle-age.

Aging represents an interaction between the individuals with previous patterns or styles of living, and constraints placed upon the ability to follow those patterns by the processes of aging. Throughout our lives we develop preferences, habits and activity patterns and we tend to maintain those characteristics as we age. People are not reborn on their sixty-fifth birthday, and neither activity nor disengagement should be assumed to be a "natural" way to age. The aging individual makes sense of the present and adapts to it in terms of his own past. Thus the individual seems to continue to make her/his own "impress" upon the wide range of social and biological changes. He continues to exercise choice and to select from the environment in accordance with his long established needs. He ages according to a pattern that has a long history, and that maintains itself, with adaptation, to the end of life. (Neugartan et.al., 1968).

Aging however represents more than simple personal continuity. There are many types of constraints on individual ability to maintain continuity. Biological decline and poor health affects capacities and activities. Changes in roles and relationships, such as those which accompany retirement and widowhood, will also limit continuity and require adaptation. Different societies provide varying opportunities for older people. Social policies and institutional arrangements, and the values which they reflect, will affect the employment, health and housing of the aged. Even societal attitudes towards aging will affect the meanings attached to growing older by the individual, since it is in terms of those meanings that the individual reacts to his increasing age and the changes which accompany it.  

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A developmental view of aging suggests an adaptive interaction between the individual and the accompaniments of aging. As such aging is seen as a dynamic process. One needs to take into account personal meanings for aging, roles and relationships assumed or lost, personality and life style, situational factors which may prevent stresses and personal capacities and coping skills (Rosow, 1963). For some the outcome will be disengagement, for others engagement and for still others something quite different from either of these. Every individual ages differently.

One should see the world as an opportunity for growth to viewing it as complex, dangerous, and not easily shaped to one’s needs and demands.

The idea that there are specific developmental tasks which must be faced and dealt with at each stage of life cycle is not new. Erik Erikson’s theory of ego development is perhaps the most familiar of these schemes and relevant to our study of middle age.

He suggests that in middle adulthood one must develop a sense of establishing and guiding the next generation (Generativity), thereby achieving a sense of contributing to the future. In late adulthood, the need is to develop a feeling of ego integrity. Ego identity in adolescence is the development of a self with a personal set of values. Ego integrity is the sense that one’s life has been appropriate and meaningful – that the right choices were made, Erikson suggest that the failure to achieve ego integrity results in despair and a crippling fear of death.

Middle age might be thought of as a “confrontation between myth and reality (Sarason, 1977). From youth, one’s life is typically structured by early decisions concerning work and family life. This structure begins to loosen in middle age, as children leave home and the career moves toward retirement. Middle age may require adjustment of early aspiration to current realities. One tends within themselves to check the processes that occur within the post-parental family and find out it their children turned out what they wished them to be or their satisfactory spousal relationship now that their children are gone. The middle-aged may also experience a variety of “partial deaths” – of physical attractiveness, physical strength, career opportunities. Since physical strength and attractiveness begin to decline middle age must come to value mental powers which withstand aging more successfully and also develop emotional stability. For middle-aged people this period may be of many losses which relate to a need for a flexible self-image. First, those who can find self-
worth in a variety of activities and roles will be more successful than those whose role bias of identity is the work role. Second, old age almost inevitably brings physical problems, which Peck (1950), suggests must be transcended or people will be overcome by their bodily “insults”. Finally, the new prospect of personal death must be overcome. He is not suggesting passive resignation or denial, but rather the recognition of this possibility without letting it rule one’s life. This would probably be easier if the other developmental issues, including ego integrity were dealt with successfully. For example, for most people when their parents die, children grow up and leave home, and their circle of friends and relatives of similar age begins to be broken by death.

Middle age is also a time when one’s own death becomes psychologically closer. There may be a shift in perspective “time yet to live”. Active reconstruction of the past peaked in middle age, Lowenthal (1975) from one’s past career choices and to one’s closing career options. For some this process is successful, as they work through their doubts.

Aging is confronted earlier by woman who play the stereo-typed domestic female role as she retires from her career, of being a mother. It is a wrenching transition for women and heightens personal change in middle age. Most women show signs of desperation over children leaving home and limited possibilities for breaking out of the confines of the family to achieve personal growth (Neugarten, 1968). This indicates that aging experiences vary accordingly to different roles played by men and women.

With regards to old age, a time of “summing up” Erikson’s (1950) concept of ego integrity implies that the aged need to review the appropriations and meaningfulness of their lives, as in middle age. There is some evidence that reminiscing promotes adaptation through a sense of self-continuity.

Another developmental theme of old age is adjustment to new realities created by aging, and that is a changing perspective on time, which begins in middle age. There is a realization that one’s future is limited, as death becomes a significant possibility for the first time. Such biological and time changes may lead older people to believe that they have less ability to adjust to the world. There is some evidence, for example that the subjective “speed” of time is greater for the aged (Wallach and
The feeling that time is running out may paradoxically have opposite effects, as is recognized by most students approaching a tough exam. Activity may be intensified to take advantage of what little time remains and use the time that is left to the best of ability.

**Psychological theories applicable to middle age:**

Stage Theories of Erikson, Havighurst, Jung, Adler, Valliant, Kohlberg and Levinson provide numerous examples of midlife transitions relevant to our study. The changes during transition are not sudden or surprising. Typically there will be patterns of dissatisfaction, interests or characteristics that will contribute to the nature and extent of the change. There are also various aspects of one’s life that may have been touched by mid-life changes. The changes would differ from individual to individual or many people make no major changes in their lives at all. Trying to understand what types of changes are made – or not made – is a major task of theories investigating midlife.

Of course all this assumes that there is some form of midlife crisis or transition. And not all theorists agree that there is. Many researchers argue that middle age, and all of adulthood, is marked by substantial stability in personality functioning (Atchley, 1989). Theorists who have described midlife transitions including Erik Erikson, Daniel Levinson and George Valliant also were influenced by psychoanalytic theory. The impact of psychoanalytic thought on our understanding of middle-age change should not be surprising, since psychoanalyst have long believed that there are stages of development which would, of course, be marked by transition and that early influences will resurface to shape adult life.

Valliant (1977), interprets his findings as supportive of Eriksons’s theory. He therefore views midlife as a stage marked by generativity concerns. Erikson himself had been somewhat unclear about the precise timing of the generativity conflict. Although generativity is typically seen as midlife issue, it does directly follow the intimacy crisis. There may also be stage between intimacy and generativity. This is Valliant’s argument. He suggests a stage of career consolidation. This stage is an adult analogy to Freud’s latency stage or Eriskon’s industry versus inferiority crisis. It is a period of relative quiet in terms of inner development. Instead of dealing with internal psychic conflicts, the individual works on learning a job, establishing a place in a chosen field and providing for family.
In the forties careers are fairly established and families are substantially raised, which permits a return to identity issues. Just as there is a reassessment of childhood values and goals during the adolescent identity crisis, the midlife crisis involves the reassessment adolescent and early adult beliefs and accomplishments. As Erikson and other ego psychologist have argued, then Valliant views development as a lifelong process of identity formation and re-formation. Such questioning will, in healthy people lead to generativity. But both the questioning and the generativity are made possible by the maturation of the ego defenses. Valliant does not single out one event or factor. He does give special attention as Jung did to parental death. Parental death can free a middle-aged person from various constraints and allow a new look at values and goals. Valliant also introduced a stage occurring later in middle years, between Erikson’s stages of geneativity and ego integrity. This stage is marked by the conflict of keeping the meaning versus rigidity. There is a waning of the internal questioning and a recognition of socio-cultural values, their role, and how they can (and should) be perpetuated. The person is moving toward the tolerant attitude that marks ego integrity, but has not quite achieved it. Thus, there is often some complaining still about the younger generation’s lack of appreciation for the “older” or more “traditional” values. There is also some concern with one’s own deteriorating physical status. Although this has not yet typically led to concerns about death, the physical declines do lead a person to question what is important and valued and to recoder use of time.

Valliant then outlines ten stages of ego development rather than the eight suggested by Erikson. He sees the transitions as attributable to biological evolution, environmental factors and personality development. The midlife transition, like other transitions, represents maturation in ego functioning and adaptation to changes in life circumstances.

Robert Havrighurst’s theory is also relevant to our study as he sets a series of developmental tasks which have to be accomplished in early adulthood and middle age. He suggests that we have to look to “life events” like marriage, parenthood and job and not to chronological age; only then we find a congenial social group. Kohlberg, on the other hand presents the growth in wisdom. Our cognitive development is sharpened in late adulthood and terms it as “cosmic perspective”. This compensates for the inevitable biological decline. Levinson’s stage theory marks
middle adulthood as beginning at 40 and ending at 65, a period of transition in which middle-ages consider modifying their ‘life structure’ once again by adopting new roles in their careers. It is composed mainly of the person’s relationships with the outside world (Levinson, 1986). Relationship may be stable or temporary, with a single person or a large group, reciprocal or unilateral. For most people, the relationship involved in marriage-family and occupation are the core components of the life structure. Levinson’s concept is quite similar to Jung’s; he argues that the introspection of middle age allows the individual to more fully develop, or at least acknowledge, all aspects of his or her personality.

The integration of the polarities is in many ways the central task of middle age. Levinson particularly emphasizes the young/old polarity. There are many visible signs of aging that occur in middle age. There is no denying thinning or graying hair, presbyopia, menopause, and the increased rates of illness and death among peers. Children are also a constant reminder of aging, since they are now adults; our parents, too, remind us not only that time marches on, but also what it has in store for us. They may need our care. At work we are no longer the junior faculty or junior executives. We have seniority as well as a good sense of what our final level of career achievement will be. This all reminds us that we are getting older. Of course, this is not the first time that realization has hit us. Grown up children lament not being able to do things they did when they were younger. The young/old polarity then is a recurring issue in development. Levinson, agreeing with Jung, represents the issues as archetypes, with _puer_ being the young and _senex_ the old archetype.

Stage theories are a reminder to middle-agers that it is important that people accept the aging process and become middle-aged rather than staying young adults. Levinson is also seen to be agreeing with Erikson in emphasizing generativity and guidance for the next generation.

**Contextual theories:**

The contextual theory is relevant to the study and can be applied to study of middle age. These theories suggest that because life events and conditions vary from culture to culture and over time, adult development must be viewed against this backdrop of social and historical factors. It may not follow the orderly sequence of events suggested by stage theories. Contextual theories in contrast, suggest that the links between chronological age and various aspects of development are much more
fluid and could differ greatly in response to varying environmental conditions, for example the social age clock prescribed by Neugarten (1987), telling us when particular events should occur in our lives and what we should be doing at certain ages. This clock can vary greatly depending upon the middle aged women of Goa, their occupations, socioeconomic status and when and where they live. Besides many women in Goa have late marriages which means a temporary marked increase in birth rate (baby boom), and wait until they are well into their thirties to have their first child. Similarly, many middle-aged women pursue education several years later than young persons. These events do not take place solely on the basis of our chronological age. Times have changed because women are experiencing emancipation in a Goan set up.

Sociological theories applicable to middle age:

Among sociological theories the three major theories below are applicable for the present research study namely; (1) Symbolic Interactionism, (2) Sub-Culture Theory of Aging and (3) Role Theory.

**Symbolic Interactionism** is a theory which focuses upon the ways in which meanings emerge through interaction. Its prime concern has been to analyze the meaning of everyday life. Interactionsists are always concerned to study the ways in which people give meaning to their bodies, their feelings, their selves, their situations and indeed to the wider social worlds in which their lives exist. There is a broad affinity here to semiology which seek the structures of language. Attention is fixed not upon rigid structures but upon streams of activity with their adjustments and outcomes. Interactionism highlights the social world as precisely interactive where humans are always connected to ‘others’. The theory is therefore relevant to the study of middle age as women in our study are both ‘caretakers’ and ‘care givers’. Besides the most basic unit of interactionist analysis is that of the self, which stresses the way in which people can come to view themselves as objects and assume the role of others through a process of role taking. Middle aged women play multiple roles of looking after the needs of others in all such seemingly disparate groupings. Social life, in this view is constantly in a flux for middle aged women.

Symbolic interactionism is particularly influential in the development of the labeling theory of deviance. The labeling theory has been applied in the study of middle age. These women are forced to act like middle-aged women by their society
and label them as 'aunty' just because they do not look young nor are they too old. The women are judged from their external looks with physical changes. The labeling theory is a reminder that you are not as young as you use to be, and several other like middle-age spread, empty nest syndrome, time to launch your children – especially daughters, midlife crisis, the “change”, screenings for breasts (mammography), Pep smear (cervical cancers) and colon cancers. A question passed to middle-agers – is there nothing positive about being middle-aged?

The sub-culture theory of aging:

This theory is another theory which has branded out from the theory of symbolic interactionism and has its relevance to the study of middle age. If a group of middle age interact with each other considerably more than with other groups in society – say cohorts – it would lead in cohorts of a sub-culture of middle agers. These cohorts have identical problems, interests, symptoms, characteristics and the like. The awareness that they share similar problems and are placed in similar situations make them a sub-culture of cohorts. They develop social contacts which eventually strengthen in time and thus form a sub culture of middle agers. They share, discuss and show sympathy to each other and derive support from each other.

Role theory:

Role theory concerns the tendency of human behaviours to form characteristic patterns that may be predicted if one knows the social context in which those behaviours appear. It explains those behaviours patterns (or roles) by assuming that persons within a context appear as members of recognized social identities (or positions) and that they and others hold ideas (expectations) about behaviours in that setting. Role theory originated when social scientists took seriously the insight that social life could be compared with the theatre, in which actors play assigned “roles”.

The role theory is relevant to the current study on middle age. Thomas, W.E. (1958) has applied the role theory in his study of “pre-retirement anticipation and adjustment”. One must prepare ones self to adjust to a new status after retirement. Middle-aged must anticipate the future role that they will have to undergo and create a mind set for the future. This will include the creation of a corrective role which can be facilitated if one cultivates an accurate anticipatory ‘cognitive map’ and know what he should expect after retirement so that the post retirement living will satisfactorily
help him to adapt to his new role without lamenting of the past and enjoy the present
and future too. A middle-aged must plan deliberately a plan of action to make a
successful transition from middle age to old age all his leisure activities and hobbies
which he can pursue interestingly in his retired life.

To conclude, thus, which group of theories is most accurate? No one theory is
supported by sufficient evidence to be viewed as conclusive. The best scientific guess
at present is that aging is caused by several different mechanisms and results from a
complex interplay between environmental and genetic factors.

Whatever is the cause, aging is a fact of life. What steps we can take to slow it
down? The answer depends on each one of us. One should practice certain ‘Do’s and
‘Dont’s to live long and healthy lives.

We can now look at adulthood as the middle of life, a long lasting time that
blends into an equally long old age. As a result we need to re-evaluate our ideas
about adult change and development. We can adopt the poet Browning’s hope,
expressed through the thoughts of Robbi ben Ezra: “Grow old along with me! The
best is yet to be....” (Browning, 1961). It is now possible that humans will continue
to develop for a longer period of time than ever before, to levels that have so far been
attained by only the most fortunate individuals.