Chapter IV

Elderly Women and Labour
ELDERLY WOMEN AND LABOUR

“I felt it was my responsibility to care for my parents and nephew. I was unmarried and unemployed. I spent my life thinking about my parents’ and nephew’s lives.” - Rani

“My family lived in a slum in central Chennai. My father was an autorickshaw driver and my mother was a vegetable vendor. Although my parents wanted me to get educated, I was not so keen to go to school. I assisted my mother in household work and helped other siblings complete schooling. I learnt to write only my name in my mother tongue, Tamil, and some functional arithmetic from my siblings. My mother-in-law was very kind to me and often said that I am her daughter. She was very old, but I took care of her well till she was alive. She supported me in all my attempts to change my husband’s alcoholic behaviour.” - Pushpa

“My daughter is a widow. I never thought that such an incident will happen to my daughter. I have to take responsibility of my daughter and my grand-son in my dying age.” - Mohana

“My husband is sick and my daughter is working. She sometimes asks me to take care of her children, especially during weekends. I don’t have the guts to tell my daughter otherwise, because I feel like I would be a bad mother if I refused my daughter.” - Sarala
Traditionally and culturally, women’s identity was constructed on the platform of domestic chores in India. Especially their rearing pattern revolved around learning the skills of cooking and household management. Even today, this is observed in most of the families. Although women are now educated and working, they are expected to manage the dual burden of work and family.

The recent census report on work force participation points out that women’s participation in the main and marginal workforce has seen an increase and there is also a one percent increase in the work participation of women belonging to the age of sixty and above. However, it is inappropriate to interpret that women’s increased participation in work reflects their emancipation.

Indian feminists have argued at many junctures for recognition of women’s labour at household level. Maithreyi Krishnaraj, in her paper 'Women’s Work in Indian Census: Beginning of Change’, criticised the definition of work and argued that the definition fails to value women’s household labour as work. The paper critically looks at various labour activities carried out by women in their households and seeks reexamination of categories in the census.

Even in old age, women’s work seems to be never ending. Women’s status in her family is related to her participation in household chores. This is evident from the study conducted by Gowri et al (2003), which shows that women are engaged in household labour, even when their physiological health was deteriorating in order to be respected and treated with dignity.

Women spend more time and energy on unpaid work as compared to men, across countries (Budlender, 2010). The unequal distribution of unpaid work prevents women from realising their potential and adds to their vulnerability of being dependent on others for basic survival requirements. The perception of considering male members as breadwinners and women as nurturers reinforces unpaid household and ‘care’ work as a vital element of women’s identities.
The United Nations report on ‘Extreme Poverty and Human Rights’ published in August 2013 spells out that unpaid care work is a human rights issue. The report says that disproportionate and intense care responsibilities on women act as an obstacle for gaining equal rights and pushes women towards poverty. Further, the report analyses the relationship between unpaid care works, poverty, inequality and women’s human rights.

The report defines unpaid care work as “meal preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection, direct care of persons such as children, older person, person with disabilities, and able body adults”.

The report points out that women’s commitment towards unpaid care work limits them from accessing education, reduces their participation in income-generating activities, thereby, increasing their vulnerability towards poverty. The report suggests that each country should take responsibility in addressing issues of women’s unpaid work through human rights laws.

Women’s unpaid labour of direct care for family members and others is underpinned in the patriarchal system. On the other hand, it is seen that care work is ignored and unnoticed by policy makers in most countries.

Women continue to take responsibility of unpaid household labour even though they are employed in the labour market and feminist literature terms this situation as ‘dual burden of women’. It has been demonstrated by feminists that this double burden on women is due to the male-dominated hierarchical relations, in which women is expected to sacrifice her self-interest for the welfare of the family.

Thus, irrespective of her position in the labour market, women have to abide to the rules set by the gender differentiated family authority. Although this is seen as a common scenario in India, women do struggle to overcome the barrier and have claimed respect. However, most women have to deal with this double burden of responsibilities and this impacts their health and their functioning in old age.
In this study, the researcher tried to understand the spectrum of labour performed by elderly women in their life time. The researcher tried to explore how the working status of women has impacted their life experiences in old age. In addition to this, the study investigates how ‘care work’ is perceived by the elderly women in their old age. The researcher chose to define the components of paid and unpaid work from Ingrid Robyns list of gender-specific capabilities. They are:

1. *Domestic and Non-Market Care*: Being able to raise children and take care of others.

2. *Paid Work and other Projects*: Being able to work in the labour market or to undertake projects, including artistic ones.

The narratives show that elderly women have spent most of their life time “caring for others”, especially for their family members. These women took up caring as a responsibility attached to their social roles as daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers.

Even in their old age, these women are willing to care for others, but they also expect the same from others. The elderly women expressed that they have to find a job or continue in the current workplace in order to take care of themselves. Most of them choose to work if they possess good health.

*a. Caring for Family Members*

Lakshmi, who is 62 years old, takes care of her elder sister and mother. She prepares breakfast and lunch for them before she leaves to work. She is upset that her brothers and sister, who live in the same compound, do not show any interest in her well-being. Lakshmi and her elder sister took up the responsibility of nurturing their younger brothers and sister, especially, when their father chose to live with his second wife. Lakshmi decided to remain single, thinking of her siblings’ future and for the sake of her mother.
She shares:

“‘I wake up around 6 a.m. and start my day with a short prayer. I prepare breakfast for my mother and elder sister. I attend to my elder sister’s and mother’s needs and leave for work in an autorickshaw around 10 a.m. I could sense that my brothers are not willing to care for my elder sister and mother, who often fall sick. Although I am 62 years old, I still care for my elder sister, who is 66 years old, and my mother, who is 82 years old. I have taken up a job in order to meet the needs of their medical expenses. My sister and I took up the responsibility of nurturing our brothers and sister, as my father decided to live with his second wife.’”

Meenakshi spent her life caring for her sister, niece and grand-daughter. At the age of 60, she manages all the household work and it brings her happiness and satisfaction. In the same way, Rani spent her life taking care of her older parents and nephew since he was five years old.

Meenakshi elucidates:

“‘I am an early bird; I wake up early in the morning. I take bath and begin cooking, meanwhile, I also assist my elder sister, who is 65 years old. I prepare breakfast and pack lunch for my niece and her daughter. I do all the household work, and take care of my elder sister, who is five years older than I am. This gives me happiness.’”

Shanti spent her life caring for her father, nieces and nephews. She liked her role as an aunt as it gave her life more meaning. Similarly, Manjula invested all her earnings in taking care of her mother and her daughter.

Shanti shares:

“‘I was busy attending to my father’s needs, teaching at school, preparing dinner for my nieces and nephews, who came to my house every evening to study. I have
three nieces and two nephews. My brothers and sisters-in-laws left them at my house as it was safe for their children”.

Rani spent her life taking care of her older parents and her nephew. She planned her daily routine according to the needs of her parents and nephew. She never took time off to think of herself.

“I felt it was my responsibility to care for my parents and nephew. I was unmarried and unemployed. I spent my life thinking about my parents and nephew.”

Chandrika was raised to be dependent on her family. She has an elder sister and she lived in a very protected environment. Her life revolved around her parents and sister. Even in her old age, she is taking care of her sister. She shares:

“I lived my life according to my parents and now, I’m living according to my sister. They all wanted me to care of them and I am doing it.”

Pushpa took care of her family members throughout her life. When she was young, she assisted her mother, and when she got married, she assisted her mother-in-law. In a way, her life was engaged in caring for elders in the family, before and after marriage.

She explains:

“My family lived in a slum in central Chennai. My father was an autorickshaw driver and my mother was a vegetable vendor. Although my parents wanted me to get educated, I was not so keen to go to school. I assisted my mother in household work and helped other siblings complete schooling. I learnt to write only my name in my mother tongue, Tamil, and some functional arithmetic from my siblings. My mother-in-law was very kind to me and often said that I am her daughter. She was very old, but I took care of her well till she was alive. She supported me in all my attempts to change my husband’s alcoholic behaviour.”
Kasturi spent most of her life fulfilling her role as a nurturing mother, a dutiful daughter-in-law and caring wife. Although her husband encouraged her to complete her post-graduate studies, she was never encouraged to work in the formal sector.

She narrates:

“I start my day at five in the morning. I say my prayers for two hours. I perform all the rituals on an empty stomach. I religiously follow all the prayers, and, at the same time, make sure that my husband’s needs are met. I go to the market every day and buy fresh vegetables to cook with. I manage my husband’s shop in the afternoon, when he takes a nap. I always had the desire to work as a teacher, but my husband and was not cooperative. Although my husband supported my dream to get educated, he expected me to perform my role as wife, daughter--in-law and a caring mother. He was particular that I shouldn’t deviate from these roles.”

Mary takes care of her husband’s needs without fail. She is afraid that her elder son might perceive her as a burden, so she helps him manage the tutorial centre at their house. Mary takes a small nap in the afternoon and spends most of her time in household work, along with her daughter-in-law. She recounts:

“My day starts with buying the Tamil and English newspapers and then, on my way, I pick up milk. I take coffee for my husband, who stays in a small room on the terrace. Apart from this, I collect tutorial fees and write accounts in a book every day, and my elder son types it in the computer. Even after I have fallen asleep at night, my son wakes me up to clarify doubts in the expenses.”

• **Mothering in Old Age**

The narratives of Arokiyaamma, Susheela, Mohana, and Sumati reveal that women, irrespective of their ageing process, perform their motherly role, not out of choice, but because social and cultural structure demands this of them.
These women even refuse to think critically about their role as mothers as they fear it might stain their identity.

“I have to feed myself and my daughters at home. Even though I am old, my daughters demand that I care for them, when, in fact, I’m in need of care. I don’t know whether being a mother is a good option” says Arokiyamma

“I can’t work peacefully in the hospital as my mother is alone at home. My brothers have refused to take care of my mother” says Susheela

“My daughter is a widow. I never thought such an incident will happen to her. I have to take responsibility of my daughter and my grand-son in my dying age” says Mohana

“My husband is sick and my daughter is working. She sometimes asks me to take care of her children, especially during weekends. I don’t have the guts to tell my daughter otherwise, because I feel like I would be a bad mother is I refused for my daughter” says Sarala

Kala spent her married life managing the household chores, raising her children and performing the expected roles of a mother, wife and daughter-in-law. Indeed, she was very happy performing these roles and expressed her views on family decisions, even though it was not considered as important by her husband.

Kala recollects:

“My life revolved around the four men - my husband and three sons. I was the only woman in the house. I used to decide the menu for the day. I felt like a queen inside the house. I kept the house neat and clean and disciplined my children. I washed everybody’s clothes by hand and ironed them. I was happy even though my husband was dominating. My opinions were confined to kitchen activities, not on any major decisions in the family, still I expressed my view, even though it was not considered imperative.”
Manjula invested all her earnings in taking care of her mother and daughter. She did not think of herself, and life situations did not allow her to think of saving for the future.

She shares:

“I decided to work after I shifted to the village with my husband. He didn't go to work and most of the time, he drank alcohol. I had to feed my child, so I started working in a primary school. My earnings were spent in meeting the expenses of my daughter and mother.”

Even in her old age, Karpagaamma supported her children financially, whenever they were in need. She felt that it was her responsibility as a mother to help her children, even ignoring her own survival struggles.

“I save my salary and help my daughter and son whenever they face financial issues. I don't have a lot of money, but saved whatever I could from my 3,500-rupee salary. I feel proud to fulfill my responsibility as a mother even in my old age.”

Annam, Lisa and Bhayalakshmi are currently married and continue to perform the duties as mothers sincerely. Ageing has not changed their role from mothering and their roles as mothers are even extended towards caring for their grandchildren. Although they are happy to have their grandchildren around them, these elderly women are unable to show the same care towards their grandchildren because of their old age. They feel guilty about the limited care they can provide to their grandchildren.

“Even at this age, I do not have a maid for the household work. I do all the work at home. My husband does grocery shopping and all the outdoor work. I get tired after cooking. I am unable to take rest as I also have to baby-sit my grandchildren.
Although I don’t want to do such jobs now, I can’t avoid it as grandmothers are expected to take care of the grandchildren in our society” says Annam

“I take care of three grand-daughters. My daughters-in-laws are engaged in some household work or the other and they are all employed. Although I have a maid to help clean the house, but my granddaughters’ expects me to be with them. I am finding it difficult to fulfil all their demands at this age” says Lisa

“My daughter lives close by and visits me every day. Although she is married and has her own family, she still expects me to take care of her. Sometimes, she is very demanding and, often, we get into arguments” says Bhayalakshmi

b. Seeking the first job in old age

Widowhood pushed Puspha into looking for paid work in her old age. She was never employed before and to overcome homelessness and to protect herself from starving, Pushpa chose to work. She works as a helper in a road-side fruit shop for more than eight hours and receives 50 to 70 rupees in a day, depending on the sales. Although she never expected to have her first job at the age of 60 years, she believes that it is good and gives her the confidence to fight poverty.

She admits:

“I work in a road-side fruit vendor shop as a help, I am paid around 50 to 70 rupees per day. This is the first job of my life. I work from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Somehow, I manage my expenses and I am pleased that I am not dependent on anyone.”

Kasturi was disappointed when her sons showed less interest in supporting her financially. Her husband had to close his business due to losses. She decided to use her education to generate income for livelihood by conducting tutorial classes for schoolchildren.
Previously, Kasturi has never been part of any income-generating activity in her life. With the small income she gets, she takes care of herself and her husband’s day-to-day expenses.

She shares:

“My husband and I have a cup of tea around 4 p.m., and then I get ready for the evening tuitions. I clean the living hall, used for tutoring children in Hindi classes. The classes begin around 5.30 p.m. and go on until 7 p.m. Around ten students attend my Hindi tutorials. I charge them 1,500 rupees per month. I manage my household chores and medical expenses from the income I receive through the tutorial classes. The income from my husband’s business has now reduced, moreover, my sons are not interested in continuing their father’s business.

Sumati recently joined as a cleaner in a relative’s hotel. She never expected to work at the age of 60. She took this decision as treatment for her husband’s illness started became expensive and her daughter was unable to support them. She feels proud that even at the age of 60, she was capable of surviving by herself as previously, she was always dependent on her husband.

She shares:

“I didn’t have any other alternative, but to find a job. As my husband is unable to work because of his illness and my daughter is dependent on my son-in-law, I just took a decision to work though I have never worked before. I am too scared to take on a job that requires heavy lifting. One of my distance relatives has a hotel. I requested for a job in his kitchen as I know only cooking. But he asked me to work as a cleaner. I work for eight hours, removing used plates and cleaning the dining table in the hotel.”

Rani and Sarala are currently staying in two different free old age homes. However, both have similar situations with respect to jobs.
They both have decided to work in the old age home as employees. They do not want to remain idle in the old age home. Rani is in charge of cooking and Sarala is in-charge of the library. Although Rani and Sarala hail from different socio-cultural backgrounds, they feel proud to take up their first salaried job in their late years.

They share:

“Although my nephew dropped me in the old age home without my consent, it gave me an opportunity to find my first full-time job. I work as the kitchen in-charge and I am busy the whole day in planning and organising meals for older people in the home” says Rani

“Till last year, I was a member in the library. After my husband’s death in the old age home, I became depressed. Witnessing my mental status, the old age home gave me charge of the library for a salary of 800 rupees. I accepted the offer as I felt like an employee rather than an inmate. Although I donate my salary to the old age home once in six months, I feel like I now have a commitment in life” says Sarala

c. Continuing Work in Old Age

Manjula worked as a teacher in a nursery school in her village in Kerala. She decided to move out of the village when she encountered mistreatment. As she was educated only up to the tenth standard, she could not get the post of a teacher in a nursery in the town. Instead, through an agency, she was offered a job as a caretaker for the elderly. She was trained by a psychiatrist on home-nursing and was employed at different places. She lives in Chennai for the past five years, working as a home nurse.
She explains:

“I work as a home nurse in Chennai, taking care of an 80-year-old widower. I get a salary of 15,000 rupees since the last two months, previously, I was paid 10,000 rupees. Apart from being a home-nurse, I also take the responsibility of the household management. The elderly man treats me like his own daughter.”

Lakshmi was employed as a chief doctor in the ESI Hospital in Chennai. After retirement, she works as a honourary doctor for a non-governmental organisation. Lakshmi likes to continue her medical practice to meet her family expenses and working also gives her a sense of independence.

She admits:

“I retired as a chief doctor from ESI hospital. I work as honourary doctor in a non-governmental organisation. In the evening, I attend to patients in the clinic at my house.”

Shanti worked as a school teacher, teaching Sanskrit in a CBSE school. She used to take home tuitions before becoming a teacher. Now, she has decided to restart her tutorial classes to meet her day-to-day expenses.

She narrates:

“I teach Sanskrit to school children in the evenings. I am planning to begin taking tuition classes again at my house in the evenings so that my mind is engaged. I feel that silence at home is louder than words. My decision of taking evening tuition has begun again after 30 years. I have asked students to pay 800 rupees per month as I don’t receive any pension.”

Karpagamma was engaged in different jobs. Her experiences range from counting bottle covers, pasting labels on wine bottles to working with a blacksmith. She has to work to meet the needs of her children. Her husband spent his earnings in drinking alcohol.
In her old age, she is working as a cleaner in a government hospital on a contract basis. As she does not have a shelter to stay in, she stays in the ward with the permission of the staff nurse and she also does night duty, whenever it is necessary. Yet, she is happy that she has a safe shelter and a regular income. She explains:

“I work as a cleaner in ward 233 at the Government General Hospital in Chennai. All my ward staff is very fond of my work. They gave me the work to clean up the toilet, bathroom and sweep the ward twice a day and whenever necessary. They started liking me from the second month of my job. I got the job at the hospital for a salary of 3,500 rupees per month.”

Arokiyaamma sells water packets near a public park. She makes a one-rupee profit for each water packet sold. She plans to sell at least 100 packs in a day, but ends up selling 50 or 60 packets. She was managing her family from the income she used to get as a small-scale vendor. She used to sell flowers near the temple and, now, due to her age, she decided to sell water packets in the evenings between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m.

She explains:

“I was also working as a road-side vendor. I started as a flower seller near the temple. With the income from that shop, I managed my family members’ needs, but with age, I can’t be as active as before. I now sell water packets in the evenings and I know that till I die, I have to work. God has not given me the gift of rest in my life.”

Susheela has a similar situation like that of Arokiyamma. She is now employed in the housekeeping department at a private hospital. She has no choice but to work in old age as her husband and son died in an accident and she lives with her mother. In the past, she was working as a helper in a school.
She elucidates:

“I am tired of working, but I have to work as I have to care for my mother. It is difficult to take up this task in old age. My mother’s presence is the only motivation for me to work. If she dies, I will join some old age home as I want to take rest.”

d. Seasonal employment

The narratives of Rani, Mary and Meenakshi show these women took up opportunities to work where they were residing. For instance, Rani used her cooking skills to generate income for her family. She distributed packed lunch boxes from her home on demand. She never wanted to make it a business as she does not have anyone to support her. Now, Rani is paid 1,000 for her work in the kitchen at the old age home.

She shares:

“I used to prepare breakfast and lunch boxes at my house and distributed it in the neighbourhood. I never went out to sell the food packets. Today, I begin my day with work at the old age home kitchen. I am paid 1,000 rupees per month for my contribution in the kitchen. My foremost task in the morning is to unlock the kitchen door around 6.45 a.m. I select all the vegetables and ingredients needed for the day’s food menu. I wash the vegetables and soak the required quantity of grains and rice in the water. I cut the vegetables finely. The kitchen assistant joins me at 7 a.m. and I give him instructions for preparing breakfast. I never worked before anywhere; all I know is cooking and managing household chores. I love cooking and serving cooked food to others. Even at my home, I used to cook and serve food to my brothers and parents. I believe cooking food is an art that needs care and commitment.”
Meenakshi was educated up to the fifth standard. Although she wanted to continue her education, her father did not allow her. Her father approved her interest to learn tailoring as he considered it a feminine job. Meenakshi started earning through her tailoring classes and by stitching clothes. Today, because of her swollen knees, she is unable to work. She feels terribly restricted because of this problem.

She recounts:

“I started taking tailoring classes at home and I have tutored nearly 200 students in tailoring in the last 20 years. I spent my earnings in educating my niece and taking care of my abandoned sister. I worked very hard in tailoring classes to meet the day-to-day expenses of the family.”

Mary worked as a school teacher in Chennai to meet her family’s expenses. After she was diagnosed with vitiligo, a chronic skin disease that causes depigmentation, Mary could not continue her work as a teacher because she was stigmatised by the parents in the school. She quit her job and decided to take home tuitions for children from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. With this income, she was able to educate her children. Till her seventy-fourth birthday, she was earning for herself through the tutorial classes. Now, she wants to spend time with her grand-daughters. Moreover, her ill-health is preventing her from working.

She explains:

“I was diagnosed with vitiligo when I was around 47 years old. I was hesitant to work at school as the parents were afraid that my condition might be communicable to their children. I worked in the school for 16 years. I decided to quit the school and I start taking home tuitions from 6p.m. to 9p.m. I was able to educate my elder son up to the post-graduation level and my younger son as a chartered accountant, by taking home tuitions. Till last year, I was taking tutorial classes, earned for my own expenses.”
Discussion

Elderly women’s narratives on care work shows that, irrespective of their social position, endowments and entitlements, these women are expected to play the role of a caregiver. In other words, care work is entrusted upon them. The narrative shows that male-dominated social and cultural norms expect women to play the role of nurturers, regardless of ageing. For instance, narratives under theme ‘mothering in old age’ bring out the continuity of women’s roles as mothers even in old age.

A woman is expected to care for her family, irrespective of her marital, educational and employment status. The narratives reflect that women have internalised care-giving as their primary purpose in life. Therefore, social position has no influence on their care-giving practice.

In the gender division of work in a male-dominated society, women are viewed as nurturers. As a result, their care work becomes their responsibility by default and their identity is built on this platform. For instance, the narratives of Kala, Chandrika and Bhayalaksmi share the view that irrespective of their marital status, these have spent their entire lives taking care of family members.

However, many theoretical propositions and empirical studies have tried to define the care work of women from different perspectives. The classical theory calls care work as ‘work at home’, the Marxian theory names it as ‘reproduction of labour’, and the neo-classical economic theory says it as ‘consumption’.

Feminist scholars Conaghan and Rittich (2005) argue that women’s work should not been seen from binaries definition of paid and unpaid work as women’s work at home is more ‘relational, emotional and continuous throughout the day.

Although in this study, unpaid work such as caring for others is seen as a freedom one has, but narratives suggest that women did not have the choice to decide whom to care for.
Thus, women’s freedom to show care for others is regulated by others in the social context. In this study, the elderly women’s family has naturalised the caring role of women as an integral part of their identity.

Capability framework offers a view that elderly women have spent their entire lives caring for the family and social and cultural contexts also demanded for the same. These elderly women did not have to face challenges or barriers while performing their role of caring for their family members. This indicates that the social and cultural system, they lived in, gave them the opportunity and freedom to show care for, but restricted the freedom of choosing whom to care for.

The narratives reflect that they took up lessons from their family that caring for family members is one of their responsibilities or purpose of their existence. Thus, their structural and social contexts reinforced such practices that reduced their personal potential.

It is difficult to say that elderly women had a social context for realising their freedom to opt for unpaid work because women in the study were told to value as valued in their social location. As a consequence, women did not have freedom to care, according to their will.

Thus, the social and cultural locations of the women have been structured in such a manner that they had to accept that caring for family members is a role expected of them. Women are expected to care for others, rather than being cared for; they did not have the choice to decide whom they could care for.

The narratives suggest that these women have and had an expectation that they will be shown care, in turn, in their old age. Unpredictably, they continued to accept the role of neither caring nor experience “no care”. We conclude that elderly women were taught to have a capability, but had the limitation of defining the value of the functioning.
Thus, these women continued to internalise the value of care as an essential responsibility and spent their lives towards providing care for others. This left the women with little to explore for them and in a way, caring for others has deprived them from functioning what they value in their life.

With respect to paid work, the narratives shows the women chose to work either to support their family or to support themselves. They mainly decided to work in order to support their families. Their employment and type of employment was the decision of the family members and they were permitted to take only gendered jobs like that of a teacher and doctor. This phenomenon is seen with women from upper castes and class. The women from the lower and middle classes or backward caste or schedule caste had taken up unskilled labour in the unorganised sector.

From the experiences shared, it is seen that those women who took up skilled or professional jobs are able to gain certain financial securities in the form of pension in their old age. Even though they were asked to work in the labour market due to the family circumstances, in old age, their jobs protected them from financial dependence on their family members.

On the other hand, women who were employed in the unorganised sector continued to work in their old age. In their narratives, it is seen that these women would choose to take rest, if given an opportunity, rather than to work. Nevertheless, they take pride in working in their old age as it insulates from reliance on others.

Thus, the narratives in the study reflect that the decision to work, whether it is paid or unpaid work, was not the choice of the women as it is seen that women spent most of their income on family members, ignoring their own requirements. Their decisions to participate in labour is not self-directed, and, only in her old age, do they get to take to allot their income for fulfilling their own demands.
Women’s participation in the labour market is solely dependent on the approval of the male members or because of the absence of the male member. She does not get self-direction to work in the labour market, unless she is faced with such circumstances.

Since women are expected to care for family members, their choice to work in labour force is either to support her family or herself in old age. Even if the women were unmarried, like Meenakshi and Shanti, they took up jobs to support their old parents and continued to work in old age.

The narratives suggest that women’s engagement in ‘paid work’ is largely to support the family. This reflects the phenomena fifty years ago, where women had lesser voice to decide what they wish to do with their lives. Today, women are able to negotiate and articulate their stands on their career and their passion towards the same.

To conclude, one can observe that the elderly women, especially single, destitute and widowed women, take up jobs to manage the demands of ageing. Moreover, they perceive employment and income in old age as something that shows the, respect and they can live with dignity. For example, Mary prefers to work, but due to her ill-health, she is unable to work.

The elderly women in the study perceive that income is essential in old age and irrespective of the ageing process, women who work in the unorganised sector continued to work. Moreover, women, who were widowed, single and childless or from a lower economic status, began looking for a new job in their old age. They end up taking house-keeping jobs and jobs related to domestic fronts. Although these jobs give them only a meager income and involve strained physical activities, and still, they continue to do so as they believe that old age pension is insufficient for their needs.
Hence analysing from the capability framework, elderly women’s engagement with paid jobs in old age shows their deprivation in terms of being with his family and community. It has become the responsibility of the individual rather than the society to care for older people.

Although the elderly population is entering the work force, it is vital to seek the role of community and society for a safer environment for them. The society has to take account of the phenomena. As on today, it is because of gendered notions that influence women’s freedom that women have to struggle alone in old age.

The institutions such as family, community, government should engage in understanding the major reasons for the increase in elderly women’s work participation, as is evident from the 2011 census. Although this study has identified some processes at an individual level, it is vital to understand larger processes as the elderly population work participation is a concern. The findings in this chapter have highlighted that elderly women working in the unorganised sector need immediate attention, irrespective of their social position.