Annexure I: Narratives
Narrative 1

It was a humid day and Pushpa was seated on a wooden box, next to a roadside fruit shop, and showed a welcoming gesture. Although she looked tired and wanted to take a nap, she still sounded energetic. She was wearing a red sari and her hair was neatly combed. Pushpa lived at the corner of a small temple complex, situated in a prime locality in Chennai.

Pushpa is a widow. Immediately after her husband’s death, Pushpa had to give up her small house in the slum to pay off her husband’s debts. Her maternal family refused to provide her any shelter. She narrates about her daily routine and recollects her past:

“I get up early morning around 4 am. I take bath in the common toilet and dress up in the brightness of the dawn. The common toilets are usually less crowded early morning. I never expected a situation like this will happen to me [cries]. I did not know what to do after the death of my husband. I never thought of a stage like this in my life. I have nobody to support me. Nobody from my in-laws’ side was ready to support me as both my mother-in-law and my husband left this world. My own sisters’ did not call me and even if I called them or wanted to visit them, they allow me to stay only for a few hours at their house. They used to give me a cup of coffee and shoo me off. In retrospect, I feel I could have studied and got some decent job so that I could have been independent. Right now, I have no choice but to reside on the road.”

Pushpa was born into a family of seven children. Her family lived in a slum situated in central Chennai. Her father was an autorickshaw driver and mother was a vegetable vendor. Although Pushpa’s parents wanted her to get educated, she was not so keen to go to school and, therefore, assisted her mother in household work and helped other siblings complete their schooling. She ended up learning to write only her name in her mother-tongue Tamil and gained some knowledge of functional arithmetic from her siblings.

She was married to an automobile painter at the age of 20. She began her life happily with her husband. She took pride in handling and managing household chores. She reflects:
“My mother-in-law was very kind to me and often said that I am her daughter. She was very old and I took care of her well till she lived in this world. She supported me in all my attempts to change my husband’s alcoholic behaviour. Whenever my husband hit me, it was my mother-in-law who protected me most of the time. I consoled myself and started accepting his habit of drinking and violence after he genuinely accepted his impotence. Prior to his admission, I used to consult many doctors on my fertility status and used to feel guilty of my sick body. None of the doctors told me the truth. They took it for granted that I may be sterile.”

After this incident, Pushpa lost all hope in medical professionals as she felt that she was treated unfairly and unnecessarily. In fact, she began believing that she had a healthy body after she came to know about her husband’s status.

Now, whenever she falls sick, she goes to the chemist instead of a doctor as she has no money to spend on her medical expenses in private nursing homes. She is also afraid to visit the government hospital alone due to her past experience.

She recounts:

“I used to accompany my mother-in-law to the government hospital. I did not like the way they treated the patients there. We were, in fact, treated like objects in the hospital. My mother-in-law was upset and sad, so I took a decision to admit her in a private hospital and met the expenses by pledging my jewellery. Moreover, I was afraid to go alone to the public hospital as it involved many procedures and without someone’s assistance I could be lost. I am thankful to God for showing me the medical shop as a good alternative for treating my sickness.”

Pushpa has no access to homemade food as she lives in the temple. The temple administration does not allow her to cook her own food either. She usually eats the roadside food. Whenever her niece visits her, she brings some packed homemade food for her.

Pushpa works at a roadside fruit shop as a helper and is paid around 50 to 70 rupees per day. She works from 10 am to 9 pm, apart from cleaning the temple early morning, for
which she is not paid. Somehow she manages her expenses and pleased that she is not
dependent on anyone. With the help of the fruit shop owner, she came to know about the
old age pension scheme.

She narrates:

“I searched for a job everywhere. The moment they realise that I am
homeless, they are afraid to appoint me, even for a house-keeping job.
The fruit shop owner next to the temple once asked me to look after his
shop for few hours as he had to attend some emergency at home. The next
day I asked for a job. He was happy and offered this job. My shop owner
reads the newspaper daily and one day, he told me about the old age
pension. I was not sure how to apply for it. He took the initiative and
approached government officials for my pension. I am really thankful to
him. I was refused support from my siblings. This unknown person made
sure I got the pension.”

Pushpa feels that the old age pension gives her hope and confidence to survive. She
receives the pension regularly and gives 10 rupees as a token of appreciation to the
postman for his commitment to deliver the money. She spends some money on the temple,
buying items for rituals because she believes that it is her duty to give back to God.

She fears about her safety at night, when she sleeps alone in a small corner near the door
of the temple. She shares:

“I can’t get proper sleep at night. Even in the slum, I had a safe place to
sleep. Now, the stars and clouds are my roof and I am afraid of dogs and
cats. I am worried that my belongings will be robbed. I am afraid that
someone may come near me at night. I am disturbed most of the time and
start my prayers in the middle of the night. I never anticipated a situation
like this in my life. I cannot afford to rent a house. I have written to an old
age home, with the help of one of the customers at the fruit stall, to
provide shelter. I am thankful to God for making the authorities approve
my stay in the temple because usually people from our caste (Schedule
Caste) are not allowed near the temple. I feel proud that they have
accepted me. They give me part of the offerings, which includes bananas, prasadham (food offered to God), etc.”

In recent times, Pushpa has realised the need to talk to people. She was experiencing loneliness and a sense of vacuum filled her and now, she craves association. She makes it a point to talk to customers about their family and conveys wishes to them and it makes her happy. She admits:

“I sometimes feel that I might lose my ability to talk. I keep sharing my thoughts with God. I want someone to ask me ‘How are you?’, ‘Did you have lunch?’. I sometimes call my niece, but I cannot spend too much money on public phones. I feel I should join the old age home soon. At least, I can meet many women of my age and talk to them. Hope the time will come soon.”

Pushpa also has started to search for the meaning of her existence and growing old has made her realise that she was living for others all this while. Now, she is left with no resources and passion to live her life and is waiting for eaman [the lord of death] to arrive and take her.

She shares:

“I don’t want to live. I have no meaning in life and it is most awful to be alone and homeless. I am willing to work as a domestic worker in my relative’s house. But they don’t want me because they feel my presence might bring bad luck to them as you know that I am childless and a widow. How can I be responsible for that? I don’t know for whom I should live.”
Narrative 2

Kasturi belongs to a Marwari family from Rajasthan. She appears energetic despite being skinny. She has a fair complexion. Her husband runs a pawn-brokering shop in South Chennai. Their shop is part of her three-storeyed house. She has four children. Her elder son lives with them on the first floor.

Kasturi’s day begins at 5 am. She says her prayers for two hours and performs all the rituals on an empty stomach. She religiously follows all the prayers and makes sure that her husband’s needs are met. She goes to the market every day, and buys fresh vegetables for lunch. She manages her husband’s shop in the afternoon, when he takes a nap.

She starts:

“I was married at the age 16. Now, if I think, it is too early for a girl to be married. It was my step-mother who insisted that I should get married. I had just completed my tenth standard in Chidambaram (a town and municipality in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu). My father had a gold jewellery shop. My mother died when I was in the second standard. I had two elder brothers and one elder sister. My father got married in the next few years. I had two step-brothers and one step-sister. My step-mother took care of me well. She insisted that I get married soon because I had dark skin compared to most of the women in my community. My step-mother was afraid that I might not get a suitable partner in my community. So I was asked to discontinue schooling after tenth standard and got married to this person.”

Kasturi and her husband have a cup of tea around 4 p.m and then she gets herself ready to take evening tuitions. She cleans the living hall for tutoring children for Hindi. Her Hindi classes begin around 5.30 p.m and it goes up to 7 p.m. Nearly 10 students attend her Hindi tutorials on alternative days. She charges them 1,500 rupees per month. She feels encouraged and motivated with the tutorial classes as it has reduced her stress over income and how to meet the day-to-day expenses of her family. She recollects:
“I always wanted to study. But because of my colour, I had to get married. I am glad that I expressed my interest to study further to my husband. He understood my desire to study and suggested that I continue my education through distance education. I completed my pre-degree course, graduation, post-graduation and pre-doctoral degree course in Hindi. During the process of my education, I also delivered four children. My mother-in-law, who died a decade ago, was not aware that I have so many degrees. All this was possible because of my husband’s effort. My own brother, who retired recently, was a college professor, but he did not encourage me or his wife to get educated. I am fortunate to have a life partner who encouraged my desire for education.”

Kasturi manages her household chores and medical expenses from the income she receives through the tutorial classes. The income from her husband’s business has now reduced. Moreover, her sons are not interested in joining their father’s business. Since all her children have completed post-graduation and are into their own businesses and consultancy firms, they want their father to close the shop.

Kasturi is currently recovering from poor health due to her surgery. She and her husband have used most of their savings in the hospitalisation and recovery process. They are now worried because there is no guarantee that their children will take care of them in the future, if such an emergency arises. This makes Kasturi a little worried about the future. She shares:

“I had undergone a hysterectomy surgery a year ago. My husband had to sell few gold ornaments of mine that my parents gave me during my marriage. My children couldn’t help us, as they had their own family commitments. It was my younger son who supported us by paying the hospitalization fees partially.”

She continues:

“I was a little upset that there was no one to take care for us. My daughter-in-law is working and my daughter lives abroad. My son and his family visited me. My elder daughter-in-law prepared food for me and for my husband. The hospital expense was high and we couldn’t negotiate
and we didn’t have any insurance. I was not aware that I will get such health problems. We didn’t save any money for ourselves. We spend all our earnings on our children’s education and for their marriage. We only have a house to stay now.”

After her surgery, Kasturi started paying for her own and her husband’s health insurance. Kasturi always had the desire to work, but her husband was not co-operative. Although he supported her to get educated, he expected her to perform her role as wife, daughter-in-law and as a caring mother. He was particular that she doesn’t deviate from these roles. But when she sees her daughter-in-laws, she gets a little agitated as they are independent and modern.

She elucidates:

“I am an educated mother. But I never moved from the role of a dutiful daughter-in-law. It is really a challenge to make my daughter-in-laws understand these things. I was caring towards my mother-in-law. I used to massage her feet at night. I used to seek blessings from her every morning by touching her feet. My daughter-in-laws never do such things, though they are from our community. I feel that I am not respected. I agree that times are changing, but I believe that respect for elders does not change with time..”

Kasturi thinks that her health has started deteriorating after the surgery. She was advised to take rest and not to lift heavy things, not even a bucket of water. She has hired a maid for her house, referred to her by a friend from the community temple. She has to pay her 2,000 rupees for cleaning and sweeping the house, and washing the vessels. Her youngest son supports her by paying the maid’s salary.

She shares:

“My youngest son had a broken marriage and he lives in a flat near his office. He visits us once a week. He is caring and is paying money to the maid. Recently, he arranged a tour to Rameswaram temple for us. He didn’t come with us, but he made sure that everything was going fine with us during the travel..”
Kasturi regularly visits her community temple. The temple is the place where she feels more connected and respected. She attends all the poojas and sings with the group. She believes her presence is felt more in the temple than at home. She elucidates:

“I feel it more meaningful when I visit the temple than when I’m at home. My husband sits in the shop and chats with his friends. My children and grand-children talk to me when they need any favour. I am happy to meet my friends in the temple. We share our thoughts and read religious books together. I feel more accepted and respected in the temple..”

Kasturi usually sleeps around 10 pm. Of late, she gets disturbing thoughts about the future and is also haunted by the responsibility of finding a bride for her younger son. She wakes up in the middle of the night and drinks water. Apart from these issues, her major concern is about her husband’s health and her two sons’ constant pressure on her to sell the house.

She narrates:

“Now-a-days, I don’t get peaceful sleep. The thought of my younger son keeps coming repeatedly. I feel responsible as a mother to find a suitable bride for him. I am worried about who will take care of my husband after my death. I could see my children, especially my two elder children, wanting that we sell the property and divide the share. My husband recently changed the property in my name and my elder son was upset that we didn’t sell the property. He also demands for financial assistance for his business. I feel children mustn’t depend on older parents for financial assistance as we have spent a lot of money on their education. I feel hurt when they keep pester me for money. I work hard and saved some money for my husband’s health. Children have to treat their elderly parents with respect, seek their guidance and not ignore their presence, when they become old..”

She is apprehensive about her children’s constant compulsion to sell the property to a builder. Kasturi is promised that she will get a single bed room flat in the same place if the property is sold to the builder. Nevertheless, she doesn’t want to sell the property till she is alive. She feels secure when her husband is around her, much more secure than she feels about the single bedroom flat.
Narrative 3

Manjula is a 62-year-old widow, who works as a home nurse in Chennai. She has been living in Chennai since the past six years, taking care of a 74-year-old widower. She never thought of spending her old age in a city in which she was born and educated. Manjula is a Malayali, born and brought up in Chennai. She completed her tenth standard in a famous Christian school and all her siblings are settled in and around Chennai. Yet, she lives like a refugee in the city. She begins:

“My father was a constable. I have two elder brothers and two elder sisters and one younger brother. My father was the breadwinner of our family. However, he made sure that all his children complete high school. After my father’s death, my elder sister and elder brother took up the responsibility to feed the entire family. Later, I started working in small companies as a secretarial assistant, as I had a certificate in typewriting and shorthand."

Manjula earns 15,000 rupees per month for taking care of the elderly man, whom she addresses as Appa (father in Tamil). Appa is a widower and his children are settled abroad. Manjula has a daughter who lives at Palakkad in Kerala. Her daughter got married at the age of 15. This was partly due to Manjula’s turbulent married life.

She recounts:

“Neither I nor my family members had much information about my husband’s family background before my marriage. I trusted that my sibling would choose a right partner for me. Within a few years of marriage, I was shocked to know that he was already married and his family lived in the village. My sibling didn’t want to take any responsibility of the situation. They didn’t confront him regarding the same. He asked me to live with him in the village. I was disappointed, disheartened and I had no other option, but to live with him as I was pregnant during that time.”

She continues:
"Things started to get worse when he started borrowing money and consumed alcohol every day. He started suspecting me of having an extra-marital affair and tortured me physically and emotionally. When I was in my last few months of my pregnancy, I had an opportunity to move to my mother’s house. No one was willing to help me and my siblings said it was my fate. My mother was helpless as she was dependant on my brothers. After my daughter’s birth, my family members convinced my husband to stay in Chennai and to find a job in Chennai. My husband decided to start a real estate business. He took me and my daughter wherever he went in the country. Once he took us to Mumbai and we rented a house, I didn’t see him for the next two weeks and I was really scared. Somehow I managed to take a train with my daughter and reached my mother’s house. My brothers felt that I was a burden on them and were not so accommodative. I My mother and I decided to stay in my mother’s village in Kerala as she had a small house there. My mother motivated me to work as nursery school teacher for a salary of 500 rupees per month. Life became harder for me when I came to know of my husband death. Although he was not contributing to our lives, but his presence protected me from other men in the village."

Manjula’s daughter works as Hindi teacher in a school in Palakkad, Kerala. She is able to sense that her health is declining, she may not be able to work as home nurse and provide care of another elderly person. She may soon have to depend on her daughter.

She remembers:

“I somehow managed to educate my daughter up to tenth standard. Our neighbour, who was a spectator of our struggles in life, proposed her son as a suitor for my daughter. He was 10 years elder to my daughter. I agreed for the marriage because I thought marriage will provide safety to my daughter. She is married to a Tamilian. The boy’s family is from a different caste. I don’t believe in caste. My marriage was within the same caste, but what happened?”
In recent times, Manjula has a feeling that her daughter is ignoring her and treating her like a bank account. Her daughter talks to her whenever she needs money. Her daughter doesn’t invite her to her house. Whenever Manjula goes to Kerala, she stays at her friend’s house, her daughter and grand-children meet her in the temple. Manjula's daughter communicated to Manjula that her in-laws suspects that Manjula is a not a good woman and fear that she might take shelter with her.

Manjula elucidates:

“I never expected this from my daughter’s family. Even my daughter has changed a lot. She visited Chennai to attend a marriage. She called me for shopping and I had to spend nearly 25,000 rupees that I saved from my salary. She did not even buy a biscuit packet for me. I am really disappointed. Last week, she came to Chennai for some other function and she wanted me to join her for shopping. Since Appa was not feeling well, I communicated to her that I can’t come. I asked her to come to my place. To my shock, she didn’t even call me back. She left without meeting me. I strongly feel that she needs my money only and not me anymore.”

After this incident, Manjula started believing that her daughter will not take care of her in old age. She is planning to work in the elderly man’s house till he is alive. She now wants to save money for herself and decided not to give her daughter any money in the future. The fear of the unknown future is haunting her.

She says:

“I have no shelter other than this house. My siblings are not willing to accept me. I don’t want to lose my self-respect by staying with my daughter. The only other way in which I can live with dignity is to save some money and stay in some free old age home. It is a nightmare for me to think about my life after the death of this old man, but I believe in God. I attend Christian prayers regularly because it gives me the strength to survive.”
Manjula has developed a bond with many people in the neighbourhood. She feels that interacting with people gives her hope to survive and makes her feel alive. Now, her health is deteriorating.

She interprets:

“I know that my health is deteriorating. Previously, I used to easily lift this elderly man whenever he fell in the bathroom. Now-a-days, I find it very difficult. I pull him to the side of the wall and I take the support of the wall and then I left him. Moreover if I fall sick, I can’t take care of another elderly person.”

When Manjula joined as a home nurse, she also took up responsibility of managing the house. She cooks, makes the provisions list, supervises the other maids who come to clean the house, apart from taking care of the elderly man. The elderly man treats her like his daughter. She elucidates:

“During the initial days, I used to be really scared of the elderly man’s son. He used to come home at odd times at night, drunken and used to quarrel with his father. After the quarrel, Appa used to fall and I had to run to assist him in the middle of the night; even Appa used to drink alcohol at night. I was so frustrated with life. Since I didn’t have anyone and not educated much and no shelter, I have to tolerate all these things because I have nowhere else to go. One day, he drank too much and vomited on the bed and I had to clean it up. That moment I decided to leave the house. I packed my luggage and was ready to leave. Unfortunately, on that day, we received the news that his second son had committed suicide in Delhi. Appa was really upset. I had no option of immediately leaving the house. His elder son and daughter requested me to take care of him, so I stayed back. Appa also started to give me my salary, regularly, from his pension. He began trusting me and handed over the money for running the household. If he used to get any increments, he used to give me money to buy dresses as he knew that no one, including my daughter, gifted me anything. I feel like I am living with my father and I will have shelter and safety till he is alive.”
Manjula speaks to her school friend once in a while and makes phone calls to other friends whom she has met in her life’s troublesome journey. She makes an attempt to call her daughter too. Her mind now revolves around the thoughts of her survival. She spends her time on television shows about health care, alternative medicine and, listens to devotional songs. She wishes to have a ration card from Tamil Nadu so that she can receive rice for much less money. She wants to be in Chennai as she can recollect her childhood memories.
Narrative 4

Mary is a 75-year-old Christian woman. Her day starts with a Christian prayer at 5.30 am. She prays for existence of peace around her home, cordial relationships between her sons and her husband. She then goes out to buy the newspaper in two languages (Tamil and English) and, on the way, she picks up milk from the bag. Her daughter-in-law prepares coffee for her. After having a cup of coffee, she cleans her elder son’s shoes. She keeps a prayer card on the dining table along with a 20 rupees note for her son. She eats her breakfast along with her grand-daughters. After her son and granddaughter leave for school, she takes coffee for her husband, who stays in a small room on the terrace. She gives him a bath and assists him to the dining table for breakfast. After his breakfast, they both watch the prayer channel for an hour. At around 11.30 am, she gives her husband some fruits or snacks to eat.

She begins:

“I get up in the morning and pray to God that my elder son and my husband don’t get into any arguments. I have two sons. Both are married and my younger son lives with his wife in the next street. My elder son works as a school teacher and takes tuition classes in the evenings. My elder son gets angry with my husband for his activities and he blames me for the situation. My husband has suspicious thoughts and he argues with everyone. He suspects that we will kill him and take away his money. I have tried my level best to convince my husband, but he never understood it.”

Mary was born in a village in Andhra Pradesh. Her father worked as a school teacher. Her mother was a homemaker and she committed suicide because of cancer. Mary was sixteen years old when her mother committed suicide and she took the responsibility of providing care for her sister and brother. In due course, Mary completed her schooling in Telugu medium. She started working as a teacher in schools managed by the church. Her sister was educated to become an engineer and her brother got a job in railways.

By then, Mary was 30 years old and wanted to remain single. However, her choice to remain single was challenged when she learned from the village elders that if she chose to
be single, her siblings’ marriage might become difficult or they might not get a good alliance. Therefore, she had no other choice, but to get married.

She recounts:

“It was difficult to find a boy for me in the village because of my mother’s unnatural death. She was suffering from uterine cancer. One day, she committed suicide by jumping into the well, so people in the village believed that our family was cursed. My father wrote a letter to my aunt in Chennai regarding my marriage, and she proposed this alliance. At that moment, I didn’t know that my life would be filled with worries and fears.”

Mary’s husband worked as a record clerk in a government office. He never shared information about his income to his wife and often went on official tours. Mary and her two sons managed to live alone in Chennai and survived with the money she got from her husband.

She elucidates:

“I begot children twice within the same year. My elder son was born in January and my younger son in December. My father supported me throughout my pregnancy. I was disappointed with my husband’s behaviour of chatting constantly with women in the neighbourhood. He told these women that my father and I had come into his life to take away his money. My father immediately left Chennai but my husband gave a telegram that I died. My father has to rush back to Chennai. He wanted me to come with him to the village. I couldn’t do it because of my siblings, as I thought that their life might be in trouble if I live with my father.”

Mary started working as a primary school teacher as it was not possible for her to manage the needs of her two children without an additional income. Her husband visited her once in a while, and gave her some money. If she questioned his disappearance, he trashed her severely. She had no strength to argue with her husband. With the support of nuns in the church, she was able to educate her children.
She recollects:

“I can’t believe that my husband could do this to us. My elder child was awarded a scholarship from Japan. My husband wrote a letter to scholarship authorities to cancel the same because the school is not good. The scholarship was stopped not only for my child, but also for other children. I was threatened by parents of other children in front of my house. I had to tell them that my husband was mentally disturbed.”

She continues:

“Once he hit me in the school. I fell down and the teachers took me to the nearby government hospital. That was the day my family issue became public. The staff understood and helped me whenever I had problems. I worked in the same school for the next 16 years. Till today, I don’t understand whether my husband had some mental problem or was he pretending to act in such a manner. We had taken him to a psychiatrist, but he didn’t cooperate with the doctors for the treatment.”

Mary was diagnosed with vitiligo (a condition that causes depigmentation of the skin) when she was around 47 years old. She was hesitant to work in school as parents of the schoolchildren were afraid that her condition might be communicable to their children. Her husband, initially, financially supported her for the treatment. On the other hand, he used it as an opportunity to avoid visiting her. She stopped working in school and she started taking home tuitions from 6 to 9 pm. She was able to educate her elder son up to the post-graduation level and her younger son became a chartered accountant – all this by taking home tuitions. She recollects:

“One day, my husband came home, took all the books of my children and burnt it. He dismantled their bicycle and threw it in the dustbin. My children used to see me as a helpless woman. It was very difficult to understand my husband. If he was at home, he would get up in the morning, wash all the utensils, draw rangoli in front of the house, and clean the kitchen. I was confused most of the time with his behaviour. Today, my children are grown up and my elder daughter-in-law is very good. She accepted my husband behaviour and treated him like her
father. But my younger daughter-in-law couldn’t tolerate him. She lives in the next street. I live with my elder son. He keeps blaming me for marrying his father. Often, he tells me that I have spoiled his life and his brother’s life. They are ashamed to have a father with such behaviour. My husband also never changed his behaviour. He now stays with us. My husband transferred his pension to my bank account. All this happened after his accident a few years ago. We took care of him well in the hospital and he is at home till today. Despite this, my husband had complained in the church that we are not taking care of him. The church pastor advised my children in front of others.”

Mary believes that a marriage happens once in life time and it is arranged by God. Since she has promised in front of God in the church, she feels responsible towards her husband. She accepts him despite how badly he behaves. She is 75 years old now and suffers from pain in both her knees and this is caused by osteoporosis. She is dependent on her son rather than her husband. She cries during her prayers, seeking death, as she feels that she is crushed between her son and her husband.

Till last year, she was taking tutorial classes and earned for her own expenses. Apart from this, she collects tutorial fees and writes the accounts in a book every day. Her son types it in the computer. Even if she is asleep at night, her son wakes her up to clarify doubts about the expenses. The other tasks for the day is cleaning the tuition classroom, filling the water bottles and assisting her daughter-in-law in household work. She believes that her children might treat her like a useless object as they treat their father.

As she is suffering from osteoporosis, she is unable to walk continuously for 10 minutes. So she avoids going out and restricts her movement within the house. She makes calls to all her friends and relatives on the first of every month, with a hope that they would make a mercy call in return. As she can’t travel out due to her knee pain, she doesn’t go to church often. She goes once in a while, and donates money for the church regularly. She is upset about her health as it has restricted her mobility. She feels that if she lives longer, her children might not respect her or acknowledge her presence. Her prayer is to die soon and she wants to be released from the bond of being a wife and a mother.
Narrative 5

Meenakshi lives with her elder sister, niece and grand-daughter. Her life revolves around these three women. She is an early rise and takes bath and begins her work in the kitchen. Then, she assists her elder sister, who is 65 years old. She prepares breakfast and lunch for her niece and for her grand-daughter. Her niece works as an administration assistant in a private firm, and her grand-daughter works in a company. Her niece and her granddaughter are the breadwinners of the family.

Meenakshi is 60 years old. She has studied up to the fifth standard. Although she wanted to continue her education, her father was not interested in educating her, as he believed that women should be trained for household chores only. Her father was an active member in a political party, and was also a member in the management of temple properties. He was a respected person in the neighbourhood and, especially, in the temple. At home, her father’s decision was the ultimate one. She has two elder brothers and two elder sisters. Her brothers studied up to graduation. Her younger brother is a Tamil poet who writes short, devotional poems. With her father’s permission, she attended tailoring classes and also taught tailoring for 20 years.

Meenakshi begins:

“I wanted to complete my schooling, but my father didn’t allow me to study. He told my mother to teach me the art of household management. We were three sisters and, most of the time, we were cleaning the house. As my father was part of the temple management team, we had many guests, visiting frequently. Cooking for them and helping in the temple festivals was our life when we were young. My elder brother was blessed with the skill of writing poetry on the Goddess. I am proud that my family had traditional connections with the temple.”

Meenakshi decided not to get married after a tragic turn of events in her sisters’ life. She elucidates:

“My father sold the agriculture land to finance one of my elder sister’s weddings. My parents broke down completely when the bridegroom told my sister, few hours after the wedding, that he married her because of his
parent’s compulsion and that he now wants to walk out. My sister was in tears and my brothers tried to convince my brother-in-law. Nothing worked out. My sister was staying in our house with lot of hope that her husband will return. My mother died within a month of the incident which was another blow for all of us. It was really a bad time for our family as my eldest brother-in-law died of a heart-attack in the same year. My elder sister had five daughters and my brother-in-law’s death shuttered our lives. My elder sister, thus, became a widow at the age of 30 and my second sister was abandoned by her husband within a few hours of marriage. After witnessing these situations, I felt that being single is better than to get married. I took a decision to be with my second elder sister. It was very difficult to share my decision with my family members. My father and my brothers were a little disheartened, but they agreed as they were afraid of similar incidents in my life.”

Meenakshi and her second elder sister decided to adopt one of their nieces as their child. For Meenakshi, her niece was a purpose and meaning in her life. She started taking tailoring classes at home and she has tutored nearly 200 students in tailoring in the past 20 years. She spent her earning in educating her niece and took care of her abandoned sister. Meenakshi was made the legal owner by her father as her brothers were not willing to take the responsibility of the sisters. She shares:

“My father was worried about us. He felt my brothers might not share the burden of taking care of us. So he decided to give me the ownership of the house. I was feeling very happy and confident when I got the property and felt that I had a duty to take care of my sister, my father and my niece.”

In the regular and mundane life, the thought of the Goddess gives Meenakshi peace and happiness. She elucidates:

“My father was upset because he was unable to contribute to the temple management due to his ill-health. After my father’s death, our relationship and participation in the temple have reduced drastically. Now, we don’t like the current temple management because they don’t decorate the Goddess as we used to do previously. I tear up when I see
the Goddess not treated properly. For us, the Goddess is everything. I don’t know whether you believe it or not or you may call it an irrational belief, but the Goddess of the temple lives in our house. Our house is filled by her presence and we don’t want to sell it to another person. I have told my niece and my grand-daughter not to sell the house even after my death as the Goddess dwells in our house. Her presence gives us the strength to overcome every struggle in our life.”

Meenakshi was able to arrange a marriage for her niece. Her niece was married to an accountant. It was another bad situation for Meenakshi’s family. Her niece’s husband insisted to transfer Meenakshi’s property to his name as there were no male members to take care of them. Meenakshi’s niece refused to adhere to her husband’s wish on the property. After her refusal, a divorce was filed and from then onwards she is with Meenakshi.

She recounts:

“I never imagined this situation for my niece. My sister and I nurtured her as our daughter and wanted her to have her own family. Unfortunately, her husband loved our property not our niece. She was depressed and didn’t know what to do with her life as she had a girl child. She decided to accept the divorce as she felt it is better to be with us than to be tortured every day. My niece decided to work as we were getting older and now, it is my niece and my grand-daughter who support us.”

She continues:

“My granddaughter has completed engineering. She works in an IT firm. Now, we are searching for a good-hearted man for our grand-daughter. My niece earns 10,000 rupees and my granddaughter earns 15,000 rupees. We are managing our lives.”

Her swollen keens reflect her hardwork on the tailoring machine to support her family. Now-a-days, she has difficulty standing up immediately, if she sits for a long time in a chair. She prefers to lie down and rest, rather than being seated, as she finds it very uncomfortable and painful. She says:
“I can’t work anymore because the doctor has advised me to take rest. See my swollen knees? This is because of the continuous tailoring work.”

Fear is gripping her now as she finds herself weak and fragile. Her satisfaction in life by taking care of her near and dear ones leads her to think that she can to die once her grand-daughter gets a good life partner. She shares:

“We know that God is with us. We are four women living alone in this house. Although this is the place where we have grown up, it is difficult for us to live fearlessly. Whenever we see news about murder and other thefts, we are afraid and can’t sleep at night. I check the doors many times at night to ensure they are locked. My niece and my grand-daughter tell me not to panic, but I am losing my confidence. As I can’t walk fast as before, doctor has advised me to undergo a surgery. But I don’t want to do anything because of the financial situation. I don’t go out or attend any of community functions because they feel I am unlucky but I am lucky to be living with them. I heard from an astrologer that I might die at the age of 65. I am waiting for the same as I am satisfied with life. I wish my grand-daughter gets a good match for her marriage.”
Narrative 6

Rani begins her day with her kitchen work in the old age home. She is tall and appears to be strong. She celebrated her sixtieth birthday last year. She is paid 1,000 rupees per month for her contribution in the kitchen. Her foremost task in the morning is to unlock the kitchen door around 6 am. She selects all the vegetables and ingredients needed for the day’s cooking. She washes the vegetables and soaks the required quantity of grains and rice in the water. She cuts the vegetables finely. The kitchen assistant joins her at 7 am. and she gives him instructions for preparing breakfast. She then leaves the kitchen, gets ready for her breakfast and coffee.

She begins:

“I never expected that I will be living in an old age home during the last few days of my life. But I like this place because I have the freedom to cook and take care of people older than me. I accepted this as my home. I was born into a family of two elder brothers. My father was a teacher in a school and my mother was a housewife. My brothers were educated. My father didn’t like me getting educated at school. My father taught me to read and write at home. He was a strong believer in astrology. My family astrologer had told my father that I will be in danger if I venture out. The solution was to stay at home and I was advised to get married only after I become 30. Thus, my brothers got married first in our family and migrated to northern India for their work. Later, my father was engaged most of his time in searching a groom for me. He was disappointed when my horoscope didn’t match or when my horoscope was rejected because of my age. My father used to get feedback from marriage brokers that I had crossed the age for marriage. My father was even willing to give the house as a dowry, but it never turned to his favour. I was sad and refused to stand in front of anyone like a doll, being discriminated against in front of others. My father used to feel very sad and was stressed most of the time.”
Life was harsh on Rani. She lost her elder brother when she was still in her early thirties. Her father’s sudden death soon followed. This brought her life to a standstill. Her little nephew was the only meaning in her, encouraging her to continue. She shares:

“We were shocked to hear the news that my elder brother and his wife died in an accident. My father couldn’t accept their death and was in grief. Within a few months, he died. Later, it was me, my mother and my little nephew who began living together. Our lives survived on our father’s pension and the rent we received from letting out our terrace.”

Rani was admitted in the free old age home two years ago by her nephew. Her nephew wanted to sell her house and had a plan to purchase a flat in South Chennai and invest the remaining money in real estate business. Although he works in an IT firm, and earns enough, he decided to do so as it gave him extra income for his family. He never shared this idea till his grandmother was alive. His grand-mother died two years ago. It, then, became easy for him to convince his aunt (Rani) to transfer the power of autonomy in his name.

She sobs:

“My nephew is now an engineer and has two sons. I never expected that he could do this to me. I begged him not to sell the house till I am alive, but he told me that real estate is good in today’s context. I was shattered when he dropped me in the old age home one day, without sharing any information about it. I can’t forgive him and I’m sure God will punish him for this sort of behaviour. I don’t understand why he has to lie that he will visit me at regular intervals and my stay in the old age home is only for a short period of time. I was shocked to know from the administrative department that my nephew said that I am an orphan and he found me on the road. This was something I never imagined that my nephew can do. I never nurtured him in this manner. I always showed him love and care as he lost his parents.”
Rani had never worked before, all she knew was cooking and managing household chores. She loves cooking and serving cooked food for others. Even at her home, she used to cook and serve food for her brothers and parents. She believes cooking food is an art that needs care and commitment. She accompanies the old age home staff to the market and sees that the vegetables are fresh and she preserves it in a proper manner in the kitchen.

Rani suffers from arthritis, but it is impossible for anyone to believe that she has this condition because she works continuously in the kitchen and never shows that she is tired. The other inmates in the old age home are motivated by her hard work.

She visits the temple on her parents birthday’s and performs pooja in their names. She believes that her parents are her God. She believes that they are the ones protecting her from many problems in her life. She sometimes speaks to her niece, who stays in Bangalore. Initially, her niece was shocked when she heard about her aunt circumstances, picked up an argument with her cousin-brother, but it was hopeless as her husband didn’t support her in helping her aunt. Her niece is a housewife and her husband wanted her to focus on the family.

Often, her niece calls her and shares her helplessness with Rani. But Rani never wanted any help from her niece. She has only requested her to cremate her body after her death, and she doesn’t want her dead body to be lying down like an orphan. Rani learned to accept her life in old age home as she knows there is no other alternative. She admits:

“I am thankful to my nephew. At least he had the sense to bring me to the old age home. If he had deserted me on the road, I might have committed suicide. Yes, it is really hurtful and painful for me to know that I’m at an old age after I became useless for my nephew. I took care of my parents with a lot of care when they were old and also my nephew when he was very young. But today, my nephew felt I was a burden to him.”

She recollects:

“After my mother’s ill-health, I was unable to meet the needs of my mother and my nephew. I felt it was my responsibility to take care of my nephew. I happened to learn from the temple that there is a demand for homemade food in the apartments in our locality. I started to contact
people in the apartments through watchmen and gave my contact number to them. I started getting orders for breakfast and lunch boxes. People used to come and collect food parcels from me. Through this, I was able to earn some money to run the family. My nephew got a good job through campus placement, and within a few months, he got married to the girl of his choice. He didn’t share with us and stayed separately with his wife. I wanted him to show care and love for me. I gradually understood that he didn’t want me to do lunch box business as it became a prestige issue for him. I even had an argument with him regarding the same. I explained to him that it gave me an identity and self-satisfaction and self-acknowledgement that I am not dependent on anyone, moreover it gave me the dignity to live. I never expected that one day without any communication he would drop me at the old age home.”

Rani believes that her purpose in life is to cook healthy and tasty food and to serve people in need. She fulfils that in the old age home. She is happy in the old age home and takes her medicines regularly. She feels that she should die in kitchen, while cooking, as it brings her joy and happiness.
Narrative 7

Lakshmi works as an honorary doctor in a non-governmental organization. In the evening, she visits her own clinic at home. Lakshmi retired as a chief doctor from ESI hospital. She loves attending to her patients needs. She wakes up around 6 am and starts her day with short prayers. She prepares breakfast for her mother and for her elder sister. She attends to her sister and mother's needs and leaves to work in an autorickshaw around 10 am.

She begins:

“I like my profession so much that I just can’t sleep without seeing at least one patient a day. It gives me more satisfaction and adds meaning to my existence. When my father wanted me to learn shorthand, I refused and expressed my interest for medicine. As I was adamant, he agreed, and I joined a medical course. My elder sister joined in a central government office and I joined the ESI hospital after my studies. My two younger brothers are engineers and my younger sister is not as educated like us. We felt it was good for her to get married and have a happy life than to be single.”

Lakshmi’s father had his own business of hardware. He used to travel very often. It was her mother who took care of the family independently, and managed household chores and the children. It was a breakdown for her and for the family when they heard about their father’s relationship with another woman.

She elucidates:

“I had a lot of respect for my father. He always told us to be proud of our caste because I used to feel isolated sometimes in college because of the caste I belonged to. But my father wanted me to work hard, and focus on our studies. As my father had his own business, he didn’t have any financial problems; we used to wear decent dresses to college.”
She continues:

“All the respect I had for my father vanished when I heard that he has another family. I didn’t want to trust any man anymore in my life, when my father disclosed his relationship with another woman. My mother was willing to forgive my father as he took care of the family well. I started hating him more when my sister’s marriage proposal was rejected because of my father’s affair. We had our own house and some properties, but my relatives started suspecting our behaviour. At one stage, my mother felt that it was my sister’s fate for not getting married and not because of my father’s affair. As days went, my sister showed less interest in marriage and we both decided to remain single, thinking of our two younger brothers’ and our younger sister’s future. My sister and I took up the responsibility of nurturing our brothers and sisters, as my father decided to stay with his second wife.”

Rani and her siblings live in the same compound. She lives in a house with her mother and elder sister. Her brothers and sister live with their families in the row houses built inside the compound. Her younger sister solely depends on her for financial assistance.

She recounts:

“We wanted our younger sister to get married at a young age because my mother wanted to see her married before she died. As per the wish of my mother, she got married once she completed her higher secondary school education. Unfortunately, our brother-in-law turned out to be a alcoholic. He tortured my sister for money. She blames us for the situation. I never thought of this situation in her life. Her husband denies her money for managing the house. She is dependant on us for her needs and for her schooling son’s needs. My sisters-in-law don't want to live in the same compound. There is pressure on us from our brothers to sell the property. I am really upset with my family circumstances.”

She continues:

“After my retirement from active service, my confidence of handling family issues has reduced. I want to run away from the family
commitments. I have started to feel that my family members perceive me as an ATM machine.”

Lakshmi is upset that her brothers are not willing to care for her elder sister and her mother, who is often falling sick. Although Lakshmi is 62 years old, still she cares for her elder sister, who is 66 years old, and her mother, who is 82 years old. She has to take up a job in order to meet the needs of their medical expenses.

She pours out her heart:

“I don’t depend on my family members for financial needs. I expect only care and concern. I could see my younger sister in a helpless situation. On the other hand, my brothers have taken me for granted and my nephew and niece turn to me for pocket money. I can’t say no to them. If I say no to them, they don’t talk to me. I have faith in them that they will take care of us once they get a job. Sometimes, my half-brother visits us. They are caring towards my mother. My mother wanted me to care for my half-brothers too.”

Lakshmi feels that her family members perceive her as a motherly figure. They all turn to her for help, both financially and emotionally, but she associated herself with the identity of a doctor. She makes sure that her health is in good shape. She never communicated to her family members that they are demanding, but expressed it through irritation and anger. Her family members take decisions without her consultation. But if expenses are involved in those decisions, Lakshmi is asked to contribute. This adds to her irritations. Thus, it is Lakshmi who provides for the family. Her life after retirement is stressful. She manages the stress by taking a walk every day.

Her central position in the joint family gives her joy and happiness even though it is demanding most of the time. She worries about whether she will be respected if she doesn’t support her family through her income. She has these doubts especially when her nephew and niece get angry with her if she fails to give them pocket money.
Narrative 8

Kala lives with her husband in a paid old age home. Her husband decided to take this decision because they did not want to be perceived as dependants. Kala has three sons. Her husband retired as a librarian. With her husband’s pension and the interest they receive from bank deposits, they are able to meet the day-to-day expenses. They have to pay 15,000 rupees per month for accommodation, food and medical emergencies. They were asked to deposit 5 lakh rupees as a caution deposit. She is provided a single room, which has an attached toilet and bathroom. It appears like a one-room flat, and food is served in the dining hall and every floor as its own television.

She opens up:

“I thought I will live with my grand-children and cook delicious food for them. However, I had’ to obey to my husband’s decision of living in a paid old age home. Initially, it was difficult and I was angry with my husband and with my sons as both didn’t want to adjust. I have three sons, two are settled abroad, and they don’t want to be back. They didn’t want the property and don’t want to take any responsibility of us. My youngest son lives in Bangalore and he wants us to shift to Bangalore. My husband was adamant and disheartened about my children’s decisions. He didn’t want to stay at my son’s house, so he sold the house and gave the share to our sons. They didn’t accept it, so we deposited the money in the bank.”

She continues:

My husband’s decision was influenced by his heart attack. Two years ago, my husband had a massive heart attack and there was no one around us to take him to the hospital. It was our neighbours who helped me admit him in the hospital. This incident really affected my husband. He felt it was unsafe for both of us to be alone and my children are not to be trusted.”

Her husband was so adamant about his decision. It was very difficult for Kala to refuse his decision. She recounts:
“He didn’t want to have a home nurse. He felt that a paid home is a better option, where we can at least have good service for the money paid. I was really upset with his decision. But there is no one to challenge his decision. I was really upset when we sold our house. I am attached to each and every corner of that house.”

Kala came to live in Chennai after her marriage. Her mother-in-law was a widow. She gave her the responsibility of going to the market every day. She soon became familiar with the neighbours. Kala was always cheerful and chatted with all the people in her neighbourhood. The moment she became a mother, she became very busy with their schooling. Her husband always isolated himself.

She recollects:

“My husband worked as a librarian in a college. He read lot of books. When he brought his own house in Chennai, he was not initially welcomed by the neighbours, as he belonged to a lower caste. As he was educated, neighbours gradually began interacting with him and my mother-in-law. In our village, I never knew about caste discrimination. But when I got married and shifted to Chennai, I learned about caste discrimination from the locality. During the initial days of my marriage, I never spoke to anyone in the neighbourhood. Then I mingled well, but my husband did not. Till now, his rapport is very weak with people. Most of the time, his focus is on books. He wanted his children to be well-educated. He spent most of the money on the children’s education. Now, all my three sons are engineers. Not only that. All my daughters-in-law are also graduates.”

Kala spent all of her married life in her in-law’s house. She was allowed only to go to market and expected to return home within half an hour. If she got late, her husband would get disturbed and would begin searching for her in the market.

She explains:

“My husband is a very good man. But there are certain characteristics in him that I still can’t understand. He is not suspicious about me, but he is
afraid that someone might cheat me. I am, therefore, scared to talk to new people. If my husband says that those people are good, then I speak to them. I was not like this when I lived in my village in Dharmapuri. I used to talk to everyone and I did not have any problem. But I don’t understand why my husband is so fearful of the city. After my mother-in-law’s death, his fear has increased. He comes along with me to the market, drops me back home after the purchase, then goes to do his work. My children were not allowed to go alone too. My husband assisted them every time. He loved his sons so much. He was upset with their decision to have nuclear families.”

Kala is now 62 years old. She has never taken a decision of her own. It was either her father or her husband who decided what is good for her. She never opposed either of them as she didn’t know what the alternative was. Kala is the only child of her parents. She got married to her own cousin. Even though her husband was her cousin, she had rarely met him before marriage.

She wanted to work as a teacher. She expressed her wish to her husband regarding continuing her education, and she was not encouraged. Her husband expressed that women should be educated to help their husbands and children. According to him, it was not necessary for them to work.

Kala’s life had revolved around the four men. She was the only woman in her house. She decided the menu to be cooked for the day. She felt like a queen inside the house. She kept the house neat and clean. She was happy though her husband was dominating. Her opinions were confined to kitchen activities, not on any major decisions in the family.

Today, Kala’s life is completely different. She lives in a room with a washroom. The food is provided according to her wish from the menu card. There is a television in her room. She doesn’t have to do any work. Yoga classes are conducted in the evenings. Although her husband asks her to interact with the other inmates in the paid home, she feels depressed most of the time. She feels more depressed listening to life stories of other elderly in the home. She manages her time by reading the newspaper and visiting the library.
Narrative 9

Shanti likes to recite Sanskrit slogans in the temple situated near her single-room apartment. She teaches Sanskrit to school children in the evenings. She is highly organised and a highly-independent person. She is considered a strong and strict woman in the neighbourhood. She used to stay with her father. But after his death two years ago, she lives alone. Her brother lives in the next building in the same compound.

Shanti is a member of the organising committee in the temple. After her retirement, she spends most of her time in the temple and related work. She never misses out on any rituals or festivals. Her neighbours call her the most spiritual woman in the locality. She fasts regularly and cooks food with a lot of cleanliness. In her spare time, she likes to listen to programmes related to Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

She elucidates:

“I am the youngest of the family. I was born in a family of three elder brothers and two elder sisters. Now, I have only one brother who is alive. He lives with his only son in the next building. I visit him in the evenings. My father worked in the post office and my mother took care of us. My brothers were also employees of the post office. My elder sisters didn’t go to school as my mother wanted their help in household work. I was interested in going to school. As I was the youngest, my mother didn’t restrict me from attending school. I completed my tenth, but couldn’t study further. As my father retired, we had to live on his pension amount only. All my siblings were married by then. I started to learn Sanskrit from my father, who sang devotional songs in the temple. After his retirement, I assisted him in the temple functions. I got interested in Sanskrit language. My brothers’ encouraged me to do graduation in Sanskrit language through distance education. I completed my B.A in Sanskrit. I was very happy when I received my degree. I started taking tuitions at home to support my parents. My father refused to take money from my brothers, as they had to care for their families.”
She continues:

“As our house was very small, my brothers and their families lived in rented houses nearby. My mother passed away due to stroke and this was completed unexpected. My father lost confidence in life. I was his only pillar of support. I took a decision to be with my father, and never got married. My brothers and my father were not supportive of this decision. However, I remained adamant about my decision.”

Shanti began her career as a tuition teacher at her rented house. She took tuitions in the mornings and evenings. In the afternoon, she spent time with her father in the temple. She loved teaching children and liked to be surrounded by them. She wanted to work in school, as she couldn’t meet the expenses of the house. She applied for a teaching position at a CBSE school and began teaching students Sanskrit.

Shanti as a Sanskrit teacher gave her identity and added meaning to her life. She spent more time teaching students devotional songs. She even created a library of devotional songs in her house. She was liked by everybody at school. Shanti’s personal life revolved around her nieces and nephews. Whenever she went on a tour with schoolchildren, she bought dresses for her nieces and nephews. She encouraged them to take part in extra-curricular activities at their schools. She feels proud that both her nieces are doctors, and nephews are engineers. She is proud to be called aunty by them. She shares:

“I am so happy that all my nieces and nephews are well settled. They are all married and have their own families. At the same time, it is sad to know that none of them are next to us. They are settled in different countries. They prefer to lead a quality life in that land. My eldest brother died in a road accident five years ago. Another elder brother is bedridden. I have not felt so much of loneliness. I was busy working in the school and taking care of my nieces and nephews. Now, I feel very much alone as no one is around to ask how I am doing.”

She continues:

“After retirement, I am feeling alone and want to be surrounded by people. I have started experiencing a fear of being alone in the night after
reading newspaper articles on murder and theft. I am afraid to be alone. I don’t want to disturb my brother. I have decided to live in this flat as I have my own space. My decision to take evening tuition began after 30 years. I have asked students to pay 800 rupees per month as I don’t have pension. I have some savings. I do take a health check-up once a year. As of now, I don’t have any problems, expect some issue with my eyesight. I don’t have servants in my house because I am afraid of them. My life is not busy now, but occupied.”

She wants to live and die in India. Teaching is her passion. She wants to continue it till she is alive. She admits:

“I want to die when I am healthy as I know I will not have anyone to take care of me in the hospital. We are left with old people helping each other. My niece had once called me to visit her in America. I visited her. She wanted me to stay with her to take care of her children after my retirement. I refused. Living in a new land at an old age is difficult for me. Teaching Sanskrit gives meaning to my life. I decided to be in my flat till I die. I have requested my neighbours to contact me once in a while as I don’t have anyone in my flat to communicate my own death, if it happens suddenly.”
Narrative 10

Karpagaamma works as a cleaner in Government General Hospital, Chennai. All the ward staff is very fond of her work. She has been working as a cleaner for the past five years. She sleeps in the same ward. She sleeps on a blanket at one corner of the ward and wakes up early in the morning to clean the toilet, bathroom and sweeps the ward. She drinks tea in the staff canteen, and also brings tea for the nurses in the ward.

She begins:

“Ward number 233 has become my house for the past five years. It will continue to be the same till I die. I am lucky to have good people around me. All the nurses and doctors treat me with respect. I realised only hard-work provides food and shelter. The doctors and nurses have become my family members in the past five years. When my sister asked me to leave her house, I was shocked and didn’t know what to do. It was one of my relatives who asked me to join the hospital as cleaner. When I started working at the hospital, I was scared about the doctors and nurses as I have never worked in a hospital setting. They assigned me the duty of cleaning up the toilet, bathroom and sweeping the ward twice a day and whenever necessary. They started liking me from the second month of my job. I decided to continue the work. I used to sleep in the corridor outside the hospital. Once my ward’s staff nurse saw me and asked about my family. I said that I don’t have a place to stay. The staff nurse requested me to sleep inside the ward from that day onwards.”

Karpagaamma has studied up to the fifth standard. She had seven siblings, of which only four survived and Karpagamma is the seventh child. Her father was a tailor and mother was a housewife. She discontinued school as she found it difficult to study English in the school. She and her siblings helped her father in the tailoring work. Her father owned a tailoring shop. When Karpagaamma was about to get married, she lost her father during the week of her marriage. She recounts:
“After my father’s death, my family had no guidance or support. My marriage didn’t take place, and my brother was very young to take up the responsibility of arranging for dowry, which my father had promised them. I started working in a manufacturing company that packs soft drinks; I used to stick labels on nearly 100 soft drink bottles in a day. My mother saved money from my salary for my wedding. Later, I was married to one of my brother-in-law’s relative. My husband collected milk from the dairies and distributed it in the city every day. He earned 700 rupees per month.”

She continues:

“I didn’t go for work after the marriage as I had three children. I have two sons and one daughter. My husband got into a habit of drinking, and spent most of the money on alcohol. I started working again to feed my children. I used to drop my children at my mother’s house and worked in an aluminum workshop nearby. I got my children admitted in a good school. As I was not educated, I wanted my children to be educated so that their life would be secured. Unfortunately, one day I saw my two sons playing in the park rather than attending school. I was really upset and didn’t know what to do. I punished them, but still they repeated the same. I asked them to come with me to the iron smith and work, so that they would realise the hard work I put in. They started helping me and told me that they like working rather than getting educated. They felt like they were not motivated much in the school. I started taking them for iron smith work. As they grew up, my elder son learned driving and became a driver in the market and my younger son began working in a packaging company.”

Karpagaamma’s children are married. They live in different places. Her daughter lives in another district of Tamil Nadu. After Karpagaamma husband’s death, she decided to stay alone as her sons showed little interest in accommodating her. It was her elder sister who asked her to stay with her.
She elucidates:

“I lived with my elder sister after my husband’s death. I lived with her for eight years. I used to wake up at 4.30 am, wash the utensils and help my sister with cooking. I didn’t live like a guest in her house. I went to work from her house. She asked me to move out of the house as I was not helpful in taking care of her grand-daughter. She asked me to pay her 50,000 rupees before I leave her house, claiming that it was the amount she had spent on me while I stayed at her house. I was really upset. I didn’t know what to do. I gave all the money I had saved to my sister, which was around 40,000 rupees. I shared this with another relative who worked at the hospital. She told me to apply for the housekeeping job at the hospital. I went and registered at the agency. I got the job in the hospital for a salary of 3,500 rupees per month and took shelter at the hospital ground.”

She continues:

“Once I fell sick. I didn’t have anyone to take care for me. The hospital official asked me to call my daughter. Unfortunately, my daughter was the bread winner of her family, and she had one daughter and one son. Her husband had become a paralytic because of his alcoholic behaviour. Her daughter worked as a daily wage worker in a construction company. If she did not go to work, she had to borrow money on interest. After hearing my life story, the staff nurse took care of me like her mother.”

Karpagamma felt proud to take responsibility of the ward. She is appreciated by the doctors who visit the ward. She is not transferred to another ward because the staff wants her to be in the same ward. The hospital staff has not received any complaint from the patients. She visits each bed in the ward and gives the patients hope that they will recover soon. The staff likes us her so much that she doesn’t have to worry about her daily meals. She gets her breakfast and lunch from the staff. They treat her like their family members. In case they forget to pack food for her, they order some food for her. She is so overwhelmed by their care. She pours out:
“I don’t think even my parents and husband have shown the kind of care shown by the hospital staff. I am thankful to God. Once upon a time, when my sons refused to accommodate me in their house, I started believing that God didn’t exist. But I believe now. God gave me the work and health so that I don’t have to depend on anyone. I have now started praying that I should die in the same ward.”

She continues:

“I save my salary to give my children money whenever they need it. I visit my sons once in a month. I support them with whatever savings I have. Today evening, I am going to visit my elder son to give him 50,000 rupees as he needs the money to repay the borrowed money. I trust him. Anyway, he is the one who is going to set fire to my pyre on the day of my funeral. I didn’t tell this to my younger son and daughter. But I do give them money whenever they need it as well. I want my son to do the last rituals. I do not want to be thrown as an orphan on the road. This is what I expect from my children. I pray that my health should be fine. I can’t read properly now-a-days. I have shared this with the nurse in the ward. I am planning to go for an eye check-up in the hospital.”
Annexure II: Interview Guide
Oral Consent Format

Good morning or Good Evening

I am Laavanya, PhD candidate from School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Work. My study focuses on understanding elderly women capabilities. As part of my study, I am interviewing women aged 60 years and above.

In this regard, I request your permission for interviewing you. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time without any consequence. Your responses will be confidential and will be utilized for academic purpose only (developing an understanding of how you and others in your age group experience old age).

If you accept to be part of the study, please provide your consent in the oral or written form. For any clarifications you can call or email me or my guide.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

P.V. Laavanya

(PhD Candidate)
Interview Guide

I. Demographic Details:

- 1. Name of the research participant : 
- 2. Age : 
- 3. Marital Status : 
- 4. Educational Qualification : 
- 5. Caste : 
- 6. Employment Status : 

II. Leading Questions related to Health, Mental Health and Bodily Integrity

- Can you share how you generally professed (imagined) your health status?
- Do you feel that your perception of your health status changed during the course of time?
- Can you share any experience or incidence that disturbed or distorted your perception on your health?
- Do you feel that your health status is declining with old age?
- Do you think ill-health is a natural phenomenon in old age?
- Do you feel your ill-health or health issues in old age are due to lack of care in your middle or young age?
- Do you ever thought or felt that you are ignoring your health in any stage of life?
- Can you share any experience or incidence in which you felt that you were challenged to take a decision about your health condition?
- Can you share some of your challenges you have in taking care of your health?
- Can you share some of your challenges you have facing today and how you attempted in solving the same?
- Can you share some of your happiest moments of your life?
- Can your share an experience or activities that brings you peace of mind?
• How you feel of been called aged or growing old?
• Can you share some of the moment of happiness in these days?
• Have you ever felt loneliness, worried or sad or grief?
• How do you cope with those situations?
• Are you experiencing, intense feeling of sadness or loneliness’ or worries with your growing age?
• Can you share a recent experience or incidence in which you felt sad or hurt or happy?
• Nowadays, how do you cope with your sadness, or worries or loneliness?
• Do you experience any feeling of fear about future?
• In any circumstances, did you experience any insecure feeling living in your house?
• Are there any thoughts or fear about been hurt or injured?
• Do you feel your space in your house have changed due to aging?
• Do you think or feel your mobility in your house is less nowadays?

III. Leading Questions related to Work (Paid and Non-Paid Work)

• Can you share about your household activities at home?
• Do you feel any change in your household activities with your growing age?
• Do you ever felt that you household activities have become a challenge and you wanted to share with someone?
• Do you ever felt that you are not recognised or respected for the household work by your family members?
• Do you feel your work at home have reduced or increased with growing age?
• Since you are previously employed, how do you feel after retirement?
• Do you wish to work again, if given a chance and why?
• Can you share your experience of managing your household work and your job?
IV. Leading Questions related to Social Relations and Environment

- How often your share or interact with your friends, and also with your maternal and paternal family members?
- Do you feel nice or happy to be surrounded by people?
- How do you feel with life when all your family members around you?
- Do you feel life is becoming full of loneliness as you are growing old?
- Do you wish to part of any recreational classes or activities?
- Can you share an incident or situation in which others presence made you feel very happy or respected?
- These days, how are you spending your times?
- Did feel for engaging in any leisure activities?

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Urkund Analysis Result

Analysed Document: lavnya.pdf (D18195135)
Submitted: 2016-02-26 13:07:00
Submitted By: urkund.mumbai@tiss.edu
Significance: 2%

Sources included in the report:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_approach

Instances where selected sources appear:

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