CHAPTER - IX

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In the preceding chapter an attempt has been made to examine and analyze how middle age and its diverse experiences is faced by women of Goa. The rich variety of experiences of Goan women is an attempt to share with others the information we have collected during the research. Knowledge dissemination is as important as knowledge generation and assimilation. It provides an insight into unique experiences that middle aged women face during the transitional stage. The concept of middle age has been discussed with regards the midlife women’s perceptions of the complexities of this stage of their lives. The research work is thus a challenge probed into subtle situations of the crises that these women face. The content is as diverse as the subject it deals with that is, aging and middle age, since there is little known about the period of middle life, especially with regards to women.

At a conceptual level the study demonstrates the unique capabilities for conducting research into women’s lives. This study discloses the experiential meaning of women’s midlife development as more complex. It has brought to light the multifaceted layers of social, historical and cultural influences on individual’s experiences of change in their life course. Most important, this study explored the way in which the interaction between women’s perception of their transitional stage with influence of several factors, initiated changes in perception of self. Almost all women reported significant change in their self definitions as a result of the developmental phase of midlife. This study directly revealed to be a salient feature of the experiences of the respondents involved in their activity of questioning, critically reflecting and reinterpreting self, especially with the multiple response questions. By questioning and critically reflecting on the cultural constructions of their realities and interpreting their midlife physical, psychological and social changes, the respondents started to come to terms with some of the changes.

The women’s question about defining middle age arose as a result of ambiguity between cultural sterotypes which they themselves may have accepted as true in their personal experiences. Also contributing to their need to ask question was simply their lack of knowledge, itself stemming from cultural avoidance of the issues
facing midlife women. Midlife women tend to experience substantial conflicts due to the lack of consistent information about midlife issues.

During this time of transition, issues such as loss and changes in role functions prompted each woman to work toward redefining her identity. The study revealed that middle aged women lacked knowledge and consistent information based on research on this important stage in women's lives.

It is important that people accept the aging process and become middle-aged rather than staying young adults. However, they should not define themselves as too old. Instead there should be ".........an increase in the old qualities of maturity, judgement, self-awareness, magnanimity, integrated structure, breadth of perspective ....... vitalized by the Young's energy, imagination, wonderment, capacity for foolishness and fancy ...." (Levinson, 1978). Indeed, middle age is the centre of life in that there should be an optimal balance of Young and Old.

Main findings and conclusion:

The study is based on middle-aged respondents who have reached forty years of age and are nearing sixties. The assumption is that middle age for women is a critical transitional period and the research task is to explore the various dimensions of women in this stage of development.

Keeping in mind the above discussion the research study has fulfilled the objectives and testing of hypotheses. The research work focuses an promoting interdisciplinary research toward an understanding of the phenomena of aging and middle age. The review of literature shows that aging and middle age has been studied from various social and psychological perspectives, although much data needs to be collected in the Indian context.

Objectives:

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

1) To assess the distinguishing features of middle age women and to observe what physical changes generally occur during midlife years.

2) To study the factors that affect health at mid-life with due importance to pre-menopause, menopause and post menopause.
3) To recognize basic individual needs of midlife, their capacities, outlooks, interests and conceptions of self.

4) To examine kin-relation/intergenerational relations among middle-aged women between their parents, children, spouse and in-laws.

5) To assess strategies and coping mechanisms of middle-aged Goan women.

Hypotheses:

1) Women in middle age face health problems, both mental and physical.

2) Women in Goa are in a flux when it comes to self identification.

3) Goan women feel that they can cope up with family obligations and multiple responsibilities very well.

4) Most of the women in Goa do not want to accept the fact that they are crossing middle age.

5) More middle-aged women are entering the work force and are less available to take care of the family.

Several approaches and theories — interdisciplinary in nature have been blended intricately to promote and provide a meaningful and comprehensive understanding of aging and middle age, so as to attain a reasonable level of objectivity.

The profile of the setting includes demographic and socio-economic composition of the field i.e. North Goa district. The explanation of these compositions is based on the facts drawn from secondary sources.

The thesis has five core chapters to test the hypotheses, and findings based on empirical investigation conducted in North Goa district of Bardez and Tiswadi talukas. The study has covered 304.

1. Majority of the respondents belong to Panaji and Mapusa towns. Most of these being Christians, followed by Hindus and Islams. Brown race is predominant with a small percent of foreign nationals who have married Goan men. Most of respondents belong to upper caste. Literacy is considerably high among Goans. The size of respondents’ households consisted of not more than four members with majority living in nuclear households. Nuclear
family is becoming a norm and weakness the ties between generations. Many respondents’ earnings are at their peak and are financially independent. Table 4.9 reveals that Goan till today practice late marriages as compared to the past. This is because many women a career oriented who considered career settlement as priority and marriage as secondary. Table 4.11 depicts the fact that many respondents age difference between their husbands is more than 10 to 15 years. One respondent showed 21 years difference. In contrast with women’s educational level with men, women surpass men. Another significant aspect that the study elicited is that the state of Goa showed a favourable sex ratio for females as per 2001 census. But the projected male/female ratio at present is alarming in 2008 the projected number of males against females are 52 percent to 48 percent, while in 2016 the projected percent is 53.76 percent to 46.24 percent and in 2026 it will be 57 percent to 43 percent these figures are shocking considering that the state has such high social parameters, boasts to be so progressive and is also highly literate. The study elicits that 49.7 percent respondents along with their husbands take joint financial decisions. But 34.9 percent husbands of respondents take financial decisions, which means that patriarchy is still dominant in contemporary times. An effort was made to find out the income from other sources of respondents. It is sad to note that only 3.6 respondents avail of Government schemes.

2. With regards to women experiencing middle age the findings indicate that many women have an optimistic view toward their aging self. Respondents attempted to describe the way they understood their midlife position with each one’s perception of self as multifaceted interpretation. An overwhelming percent of 67.1 percent agreed to their awareness of approaching middle age. Graying of hair and weak eyesight was a common factor of middle aging. Majority agreed that middle age is the prime of life with feelings of well-being at midlife. They feel that life is particularly satisfying when one is in middle age. Of course not everyone experienced the same degree of concern as 14.1 percent did not react to the question. Another significant aspect opined by middle-aged women on both hypothesis and objective of our study regarding worries of middle aged women 46.6 percent of respondents were
worried about their health and 10.3 percent were worried about the menopausal problems. The study elicits that many respondents prefer sharing their emotion with their spouse and children. Hence it is evident that the tendency toward affinity is dominant. The study also revealed that many respondents have been disappointed by their children's expectations and other kin members. Some women enjoy love and affection in their families, but many undergo mental and physical problems. Most women did not agree to relaxation of menopausal leave. An overwhelming percentage of 87.2 percent of respondents agree that growing old is inevitable and Goan women do not reckon age simple terms of chronology. An observation is made in the study is that an overwhelming majority of middle-aged mothers support their children and understand them. This is an indication that even after the years of active parenting are over parents are still parents. Middle-aged parents give their children most support than they get from them as young adults. Some parents find it difficult treating their children as adults and many young adults have difficulty accepting their parent’s continuing concern about them.

3. As middle aged women majority of respondents maintain good relationship with in-laws compared to their earlier days, which reveals that over the years respondents have learnt to adjust to trying situations with their in-laws. In order to provide cohesiveness between family members 56.6 percent have very good relationship with children and enjoy family outings. Both working women and housewives make time for outings with their family only 9.2 percent of respondents never take time off for outings with family. Grandparents of middle age constitute only 13.1 percent and provide care for their grandchildren. Most grandparents experience many of the pleasures and satisfactions of parenthood with little of parental strains and feel that their grandchildren help keep them young. They provide an opportunity for emotional outlet and act as role models, teachers and problem solvers for their grandchildren. Respondents pointed out that their relationship with their spouse had improved at present. The study elicits that overwhelming percent of respondents husbands share with their wives all that happens and so do the respondents. From the observation we may say that during different stages of life cycles spouses come to value one another in different ways. Similarly,
respondents’ relationship with children also is fairly good. This is an adherence to the hypothetical statement that Goan women can cope with family obligations and maintain kin relationship, although respondents have entered the work force. Very few children are out of the control of their parents. The study revealed that with regards to the respondents view on preferred age of marriage of their children, families of different social classes have different ages of entry into different age-status categories. For example, higher the social status, generally, the older age of marriage. The age of marriage in Goa has increased especially among the educated.

4. The study on health reveals that more than 50 percent enjoy good health during middle age. Middle-aged women do suffer from both physical and psychological ailments. Majority of the women avoid checkups and don’t feel it necessary to go for health checkups and visit their family doctors only as and when there is a sickness. Our study reveals that 71.4 percent of respondents feel young though they are aging. While the rest are not ready to accept the fact that they are crossing middle age, which is in adherence to our hypothesis. The most common symptoms of menopause are irritability, fatigue and hot flashes. The reaction to cessation of the monthly menses is a sign of relief giving Goan women a status and freedom of movement from social, cultural and religious taboos. Majority of the women have done away with these taboos. But there were some who expressed regret at the loss of fertility. Many women feel free from the demands of child bearing and maintain better sexual relations with spouse without apprehension.

5. The study reveals that women are aware of the myriad physical changes during middle years and that there is substantial individual differences in aging. Majority of the women never think of other aspects as natural factors of aging. A considerable percentage of 50.0 agree that middle years may be the best in women’s life and lends support to our hypothesis. 59.9 percent respondents reveal that their marital relationship during middle age has improved and it is a fact that middle age adults engage in frequent patterns of sexual activity. Their conception about middle age revealed that they agree that middle age is a time for freedom and time for self. Women of Goa are becoming more expressive; people close to retirement want to expand the
minds and skills to make more productive and interesting use of leisure. They showed an increased desire to understand their own needs, sense of humanity that leads to greater tolerance and wisdom. The study revealed that there are substantial individual differences in aging. They have characterized the noticeable changes in the way the body looks and functions of which they are aware. Most respondents are too tied up in care taking and care giving and lack time to care for themselves. Most of them feel that their regular house work compensates for the exercise. The study also highlights midlife women’s capacities, outlooks, interest and conception of self. Most women showed a desire to fulfill their unfulfilled hobbies. Those women who are homemakers particularly are unhappy about their midlife. An overwhelming percentage of women remained faithful to their husbands.

Respondents who don not have daughters did not show much signs of regret while and overwhelming percent of 78.3 percent did not respond. Similarly regarding adoption of an uxorilocal son-in-law, only 25.3 percent women who have no sons but only daughters said that only if their son-in-laws and daughters were willing they would adopt a son-in-law and 39.5 percent did not respond.

Respondents gave wonderful suggestions to make midlife interesting and meaningful – positive perception of life, good familial relations, social service, pursue constructive hobbies, spiritual growth, maintaining physical fitness…. etc.

To the hypothetical question as to when middle age begins, no respondent was able to give an exact social marking and there were degrees of variation in their responses, still leaving the definition of middle age as ambiguity in defining middle age.

Regarding factors affecting well-being at middle age, there was an overwhelming response of 69.0 percent who maintain positive relations with others while some others accepted self and personal growth.

The researcher is aware of the fact that writing a thesis on such a subtle topic is rather an irksome task but may not be feasible to achieve the goal or eradicate the problems that middle age women experience, though it may be reduced to some degree. Hence, this study makes room to better the lives of women rather than make
it bitter. The study may be used as reference work for further research. However, it would be worthy to make certain constructive suggestions to enhance women's middle age problems.

1. Health promotion and disease prevention for maximizing successful aging:
   a) Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Make it a part of your daily routine.
   b) Stay active cognitively, keep an optimistic outlook and maintain your interest in things.
   c) Maintain a social network and stay engaged with others.
   d) Maintain good economic habits to avoid financial dependency.

   These simple habits are difficult to practice, of course. Nevertheless, they will help maximize the chances of aging successfully. Setting up this favourable outcome is important. Because of the demographic shift in the population, health care costs in a developing country like India are expected to skyrocket during the first half of this 21st century. Minimizing this increase is the key.

2. The Government should allocate support programs aimed at improving the health of middle age women which will reduce the risk of ill health as women age into old age on health risk assessments and screenings, nutrition screening and education, physical fitness, counseling regarding social services and follow-up health services. A broad spectrum of topics from exercise to nutrition counseling should be included in the program. It reflects a realization that health promotion and disease prevention programs can and must include adults of all ages.

3. Middle-aged women whose menopausal period is traumatic should be given relaxation or they must entitled for menopausal leave prescribed by Doctors.

4. To ensure graceful aging, there is a need to encourage and promote comprehensive, diversified and specialized research on aging in all countries, particularly in developing countries.

5. Bearing in mind lifestyle factors: Goa being a land of 'eat drink and make merry', we need to tackle a handful of behaviour that have tremendous pay off, such as keeping fit and eating well. These help to identify conditions such
as hypertensions, high cholesterol levels, and elevated blood sugar levels, which if left untreated can cause heart disease, strokes, diabetes mellitus and other serious conditions. These programs draw attention to smoking cessation, drug and alcohol abuse. Is sum, eating the right diet and regular moderate exercise can help you stay healthy longer.

6. Completion of developmental task of each stage would serve as a strong foundation for the next developmental stage and contribute to well-being of a person. In India our revered rishis, keeping in view the real goal of human life designed a way of life for all people based on their nature, age and work. These four stages were supposed to be stages of acquisition, utilization, preparation and realization, so that at each stage a person has meaningful goals and aims in life.

7. Cultivate new leisure activities or reactivate old ones:

Suggestions for further research:

1) The paucity of research and information suggests a need for further research into midlife women’s health-related issues which can be made available not only to the academic community but also to ordinary women. Topics to investigate could include the following:

   Conflict and confusion associated with role changes and physical changes, vulnerability and ambivalence in the face of middle ageism and sexism, middle life women’s critical reflections and questions about their midlife experiences, and changes in self definition. As one woman said “what’s important is getting women’s experiences – not necessarily just statistical information, but just hearing what other women’s experiences are and hearing the variety”. In particular there is a need for further interdisciplinary research of women’s midlife developmental issues to provide a broader, more comprehensive and balanced understanding of this important time of transition in women’s lives. For example the use of sociological research and theory for the study of midlife women’s development would help broaden our findings that women’s experiences of their midlife are, in part socially produced by illuminating the effects of social interaction of midlife experience.
2) Social scientists and health researchers could use focus groups to investigate the collective developmental issues and concerns of groups of individuals that represent different developmental stages in their life course. The potential for using focus groups to generate shared experiences and collective action among participants is a valuable tool that could be used to help create social change.

3) Scholars need to address explicitly the circumstances promoting continuities and discontinuities over the lifespan roles, health and resources by gender.

4) Encourage studies on examining the role of NGOs in alleviating problems of the middle-aged women.

5) Research and impact of HIV/AIDS on middle-aged women needs to be initiated and encouraged.

6) Encourage a closer examination of feminization of aging.

7) Motivating middle-aged people to participate in their own empowerment is likely to be a real challenge. It may prove to be a difficult task also.

8) Cultivate an attitude of curiosity and interest about your fears, and desires. Watch yourself alternately playing roles of strength and weakness.

Projection:

In an emerging society like Goa, there is this changing role of women. Those who are beginning to enter the world of work beyond the family are far more satisfied with themselves and their modes of life than those who stay at home. This helps women to come in par with men and help reduce the old custom of patriarchy/male dominance, thus empowering women and giving them a sense of independence rather than dependence on their male counterparts working women report more satisfaction with their lives than those not working.

There is correspondingly strong sense of familial and community solidarity. Attitudes towards grandparents reflect the importance of preserving ethnic uniqueness and solidarity.

Both women in their late forties and those in their fifties have become more concerned about health. Women are not apprehensive about the ‘empty nest’. They
have a mind set that regardless of their sons and daughters they have prepared themselves to stay without their children and allow them to embark in a world for better prospects rather than think of their own selfish motives.

Most respondents like to believe that sometimes we become mature in the sense that most of our potential has ripened and become reality. Such insights help us realize our potential for growth and maturity, by all the settings we have lived in.

While many people are happy at middle age others are very dissatisfied. It is difficult to identify a particular physical, psychological or cultural event that marks the beginning or end of middle age. What exactly is middle age? The boundaries are somewhat arbitrary.

Women in unorganized sector and house wives:

How will their middle age and aging be? Special attention must be given to women in unorganized sector. A study reveal that 6.6 percent work in unorganized sector and 39.8 percent are house wives, 7.9 percent are retired, while others do petty jobs. Special attention must be given to such women. To makes their life meaningful and successful. It is said that nothing succeeds better than the power of self-help. It is an effective method for solving problems and developing one’s potentials. People of middle age must come together to share and solve their problems. The principle that one can get help by helping others should be their motto. They must come together to grapple with the issues such as unemployment, ethnic minority rights, problems associated with physical and mental illness specially during menopause, reforming addictive behaviours, coping with crises of transitions, relatives of persons with problems and several others. They should be democratic in their outlook and find a de-stigmatized way of getting help. An attempt should be made to deal with their problems or social situations through mutual sharing, support and cooperation. Middle-aged women can come together and exchange extremely personal experiences and provide empathy and social support. This will not only economically empower women but also build leadership qualities in them. They must be able to provide and seek opportunities to be both helpers as well as receivers of help. They must try to maintain a reciprocal relationship with family members and friends which does not put ‘one down’ but on the contrary enhance the situation. They should provide hope to the other and see that the problems they face are solvable. This will help reduce the
apprehension of the women. It must reduce social isolation that women in middle age often face.

Women of unorganized sector must come together and represent their demands more powerfully. They must avail all the facilities put forth by the Government and charitable organizations by fulfilling all the formalities and use them constructively to enhance their lives. They should be in touch with friends, look at Government as facilitator and not as a money donor. Women should accept the fact that a daughter-centered society may be better than son-centered society. Women should involve themselves in social service. The best way to find happiness is to make others happy. It is also important to maintain an optimistic attitude till the end of one’s life.

Women in unorganized sectors should not just envy other women who work in organized sectors but must themselves perceiver to facilitate the use of their own skills and talents. They should know their potentials and capabilities and use them to the maximum not for selfish motives but also to train others with these skills and talents. Issues about health care, Panchayat schemes, legal concerns, counseling and guidance should be accelerated. Besides regular activities they should also indulge in activities aimed at improving the life of others like civic activities such as matters related to sanitation, transport facilities, law and order, improvement of environment etc. Group discussions must be held occasionally to examine the issues thoroughly and intensely.

Women must chalk out the focus of intervention methods of achieving goals and priorities they feel that can be set. They must conduct workshops on starting Self-Help Groups and also to work with existing groups in order to get some hands-on experience. Women can thus form their own Self-Help Groups with the help of the youth, retired people, good politician, village leaders and parish councils, schools, and other institutions.

This will help not only such women to be empowered and build self confidence but will also help to overcome all pains, plights and pleas.

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