"Are There Really Widows Anymore?":

What Widowhood Looks Like in a Hindu Canadian Diaspora Community

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Abstract

Extant scholarship that has been largely focused on *sati* and lived experience in the Indian context presents widowhood for Hindu women as a largely negative state distinct from that of wife. Using data from a series of semi-structured interviews with 14 women in St. John's, Newfoundland, this thesis describes and analyzes these women's perceptions and experiences of widowhood in the Hindu Canadian diaspora. It asserts that while a widowed woman must negotiate the roles, rules, and attributes of "widow," in these contexts they are not fixed or permanent. This thesis examines closely four different components present in Hindu Canadian understandings of widowhood: 1) modifications in diet and clothing that signify the shift from wife to widow; 2) ostracism of widows from the religious and social life of the Hindu community; 3) the positions and relationships of widows in the community, in their family, and; 4) the definitions, classifications and categorization of widows and widowhood among both widowed and non-widowed women. Through each of these frames, the thesis documents how the Canadian Hindu widow both claims and is attributed respect, status, and independence and that the identity, relationships, and practices of widows, though part of continuous process of change, are not set apart from those of wives in any absolute manner.

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Chapter One- Introduction

"Are there really widows anymore?"

When looking at the current research that exists on Hindu traditions, it would appear very clear that, yes, there are such things as "widows." Widowhood in Hindu traditions has been a topic of interest in the last few decades, both in popular media and academia. In 1987 the self-immolation of a young widow in the town of Rajput gathered international media attention.[1] In 2007, the film *Water* (2005), directed by Deepa Mehta, an Indo-Canadian filmmaker, was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards, making it the first Canadian non-French film to be nominated in that category.[2] The subject of the film *Water* was the plight of widows in India in the year

[1] Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 89.
[2] Uma Mahadevan, "Readings, Misreadings and Fundamentalist Readings: Reflections on the Making of Deepa Mehta's *Water*," in *Films, Literature & Culture: Deepa Mehta's Elements Trilogy*, ed. Jasbir Jain (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007), 168-169.

1938. As a Canadian film nominated for an Academy Award, it garnered new attention to the concept of widowhood within a Hindu religious context. These are arguably the two most visible presentations of Hindu widowhood within Canadian media to date. Meanwhile, with growing interest in women in religious traditions over the past 50 years or so, there is often a tendency within academic writing to focus on the obscure or the negative aspects of a religious tradition's practices. The combination of such scholarship and media representations generates largely negative, homogenized depictions of Hindu widowhood within scholarship on Hinduism.

Extant scholarship on widows within Hindu religious tradition demonstrates an overwhelming focus on *sati*, the concept of widow-burning, but also an emphasis on the socio-economic and geographic contexts of Hindu widows. Very little research has been completed on the actual life experiences of widows, compared to historical, traditional, and scriptural examinations, and there is a striking absence of research to date that attends to the experiences of widows within a diaspora setting.

In this thesis, I examine the lives, practices, and experiences of Hindu widows, as well as the understandings of Hindu widowhood, in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Following the completion of 14 semi-structured interviews with women in the St. John's Hindu community, this analysis aims to examine the perceptions and experiences of widowhood in the Hindu Canadian diaspora. I assert, based on the data from these interviews, that while a widowed woman must negotiate the roles, rules, and attributes of "widow," in the Hindu Canadian context these are not fixed or permanent. Martha Alter Chen states that her primary purpose in her thorough investigation of widowhood in rural

India was "to widen the understanding of widowhood in India: both the cultural representation of widowhood as well as the everyday reality of widows' lives," [3] and I echo this objective. In the hope of looking past stereotypes that focus solely on the negative aspects and uniform presentations of deprivation in widowhood within Hindu traditions, and instead studying the practices, social and familial relationships, experiences, and beliefs of and about Hindu widows in the under investigated non-Indian setting, I seek to widen the understanding of widowhood in Hindu traditions.

1.1 Literature Review

The state of scholarship on the topic of widowhood in Hindu traditions is important to examine in order to identify the value of researching understandings and experiences of Hindu widowhood in Newfoundland, and also to show what extant scholarship does and does not establish: what does it overlook and what conclusions does it make. The historical and textual approaches to Hindu widowhood, the social status of widowed women, their living conditions, their relationship with those around them, their practices, and their roles as described within existing scholarship will be examined so as to provide insight into what questions need to be asked about the diaspora context.

Extant scholarship on Hindu widows largely focuses on one of two areas: 1) traditional conceptualizations of widowhood and 2) modern widows, usually examined in

[3] Martha Alter Chen, *Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

the form of case studies about widowhood in Hindu traditions. While the majority of these works indicate a negative social status for widows, there are also suggestions of agency among widows. Research on widowhood generally also reveals similarities regarding the state of widowhood cross-culturally and works looking at diasporic life show the uniqueness of the Hindu communities outside of the South Asian geographical context. What becomes clear by investigating current academic works is that the lives of Hindus outside South Asia, and of widows across the globe, are both strongly influenced by cultural context, as well as by a woman's own individual traits as a widow. It is additionally evident that there are therefore significant gaps in research that exist in scholarship on Hindu widowhood.

At first glance it would appear that there is a great deal of scholarship on widowhood in Hindu traditions, but most works focus more frequently on the possibility of deficiency in the very existence of widows in India. This is because the primary concentration of literature on the topic has been on *sati*, or "becoming *sati*" by burning to death on the funeral pyre of one's husband, and relatively little scholarship exists on the lives of widows.[4] Stephen Jacobs states that the amount of scholarship on *sati* appears to be strongly out of proportion to its actual occurrence.[5] Many books which offer an

[4] Amongst many others, see Jeanette Herman, "Men and Women of Feeling: Conventions of Sensibility and Sentimentality in the Sati Debate and Mainwaring's "The Suttee," *Comparative Literature Studies (Urbana)* 42 (2005):223-263; Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) ; Sakuntala Narasimhan, *Sati: A Study of Widow Burning in India* (New Delhi: Viking, 1990); H.C. Upreti and Nandi Upreti, *The Myth of Sati: Some Dimensions of Widow Burning* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1991).
[5] Stephen Jacobs, *Hinduism Today* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 70.

introduction to Hindu traditions present *sati* as the primary topic relevant to widows.[6] Such introductions to Hindu traditions, as well as scholarship on women in Hindu traditions, often only mention the attire, practices, and low social status of widows as a small postscript. These texts are useful as insight into the view of widowhood in the larger field of scholarship dealing with Hindu religious traditions. They suggest that, within Hindu traditions, the practice of *sati* is consistently upheld, valued and revered as a viable option for widows. From such descriptions of widowhood, one would assume that to become *sati* is and has been pervasive as an ideal and/or practice in all Hindu religious history, and that it is the preferred choice of a Hindu woman who has lost her husband to this day. Yet, the last recorded case of *sati* was in 1987, and the act of *sati* has been banned in India since 1829.[7]

Though there is little documentation, many texts that examine Hindu widowhood, both ones concentrated on *sati* and ones centered on the lives of women after the death of their husbands, make a similar reference to *sati* as a continuing practice,[8] but most list it as a historical and, even in the past, a rarely performed act. Paul B. Courtright's article, "Sati, Sacrifice, and Marriage: The Modernity of Tradition", discusses *sati* as an aspect of "traditional Hinduism", which conflicts with modern ideals.[9] Courtright uses the case

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[6] See Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus*: *An Alternative History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 13-14; Vinay Lal and Borin Van Loon, *Introducing Hinduism* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2005), 116-117; Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 149-153.
[7] Andrea Major, *Sovereignty and social reform in India: British colonialism and the campaign against sati 1830-60* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-4; Weinberger- Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality*, 89.
[8] See Chen, *Perpetual Mourning,* 3; Rekha Pande "Widows of Vrindavan- Feminisation of Old Age in India," *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 10 (March 2015): 216; D. Godarvari Patil, *Hindu Widows: A Study In Deprivation* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2000), 10.
[9] Paul B. Courtright, "Sati, Sacrifice, and Marriage: The Modernity of Tradition," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Lindsey Harlan and Paul B. Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 184.

study of a woman in Bala who was widowed at a young age and declared herself *sati*, but was stopped from performing the self-immolation by her family. Because of this, she became a living *sati*, or *satimata,* and became a revered figure in the area. The author asserts that it was the "pressures of modernity" which prevented this woman from becoming *sati.*[10] He also states that, "in the perfect Hindu moral universe there would be no widows" so the widow who is not *satimata* "exemplifies tension between the ideal version of reality and its manifestation in ordinary life."[11] It is clear here that Courtright identifies *sati* as a traditional virtue in Hinduism, and indicates that widowhood is seen as something to be avoided.

This depiction of *sati* as a traditional path for widows often suggests that it is a more desirable choice than to become a widow. Julia Leslie in her article, "Religion, Gender and Dharma: The Case of the Widow-Ascetic", delineates a dichotomy between *sati*, as an act which is most often freely chosen to self-elevate, and living as a widow in "hardship and poverty."[12] Leslie here says that sometimes women chose to become *sati* because the alternative to this self-immolation would be living as a widow. The implication is that a woman performs *sati* as a response to the "hardship and poverty" of living as a widow, from which she would rather escape through death than face. Leslie is not alone in this suggestion; Ainslie T. Embre's article, "Widows as Cultural Symbols,"

[10] Courtright, "Sati, Sacrifice, and Marriage," 202.
[11] Courtright, "Sati, Sacrifice, and Marriage,"188.
[12]Julia Leslie, "Religion, Gender and Dharma: the Case of the Widow-Ascetic" in *Religion: Empirical Studies: a Collection to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions,* ed. Steven Sutcliffe (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 165.

also proposes that *sati* is a reflection of society's negative treatment of widows and, on a larger scale, of women as a whole.[13]

Several other works observe *sati* as a reflection of Hindu traditions' treatment of both widows and women generally. Scholars looking at modern examples of widowhood have noted *sati* as important despite its infrequency in history and contemporary practice because of the ideological associations that may manifest in the daily status of Hindu women, especially widows. Researchers such as Martha Alter Chen, whose work *Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India* remarks extensively on *sati* (though it also acknowledges the sensationalized image of *sati* as one that is not "evoked" by the many women in her extensive fieldwork in Rural India), discuss the topic as a framework for the extreme understandings of a woman's role in Hindu society. Chen uses the concept of *sati* as part of an examination into the cultural and ideological representation of widowhood according to which "widows represent the greatest threat to the social order; therefore, their lives need to be especially controlled so that they uphold rather than threaten the social order."[14] Rosalia Condorelli, in discussing gender and modernity in India, similarly utilizes the idea of *sati* (that she notes is not commonly practiced modernly) to illustrate that social change is not linear in Hindu traditions as widows are now experiencing a "social death" since the ban of *sati*.[15] Like Leslie and Embre, Shirley Firth's article examining the lived experience of Hindu widowhood also implies that the

[13] Ainslie T. Embre, "Widows as Cultural Symbols," in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: the Burning of Wives in India,* ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 149-158.
[14] Chen, *Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India,* 8.
[15] Rosalia Condorelli, "An Emergentist vs a Linear Approach to Social Change Processes: A Gender Look in Contemporary India between Modernity and Hindu Tradition," *SpringerPlus* 4, no.1 (2015); 14.

hardship of life for a woman after her husband's death was a factor in a widow deciding to become *sati* historically, listing especially the vulnerability of young women in their in-law's households.[16]

This concept that women would perform *sati* to save themselves from the life of a widow is not found to be evident within all discussions of *sati.* There are articles, such as Harlan's "Perfection and Devotion: sati Tradition in Rajasthan," that emphasize a *sati*'s role in between her husband's death and her own immolation, wherein a woman who has declared herself as *sati* must not be thinking of her own fate or desires.[17] This would indicate a view of a woman's decision to become *sati* opposite to that of Leslie and Ainslie; that a woman is thinking only of her husband when she dies, not the possible hardship and poverty associated with the status of a widow. However, these works do not negate those that imply the choice women face is a choice between social plight and burning on their husband's funeral pyre. In the latter texts, there is found the suggestion that a widow's life is so negatively perceived that *sati* is considered an option because it frees a woman from the outcome of life as a widow.

Therefore, by examining sources that speak of *sati,* one can see several important issues within the state of scholarship on the topic of Hindu widows. Firstly, it is clear there is relatively little work on the lives of widows compared to the large body of scholarship that looks at widow-burning in Hindu traditions. Secondly, *sati* is often

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[16] Shirley Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain: Continuity and Change," in *Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Change* eds. Barot, Rohit, Harriet Bradley, and Steve Fenton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 100.
[17] Lindsey Harlan, "Perfection and Devotion: sati Tradition in Rajasthan," in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: the Burning of Wives in India,* ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 83.

presented as a practice belonging to "traditional" Hinduism. Finally, these academic works on *sati* frequently imply that the social status of women following the death of their husbands is so negative that self-immolation is seen as preferable to living as a widow.

In addition to discussion of *sati* as belonging to "traditional" Hindu ideologies, citations from the *Laws of Manu* are often offered in many scholarly examinations of "traditional" roles for widows.[18] For example, Jacobs uses passages from the *Manu* to suggest that widowhood is seen as a failure on the part of a wife to care for her husband.[19] Jacobs references a section of the *Laws of Manu* in his discussion of conceptualizations of women in Hinduism that prescribes a woman "never seek to live independently" but instead remain under the control of her male relations and goes on to prescribe further restrictions for women who are widowed, including ones pertaining to their diets.[20] Many other scholarly sources, both analyses of sacred texts and lived experience, such as Pandey and Gupta, use this same passage to talk about widowhood in Hindu traditions so as to note a widow's status and identity as being defined by her role in her familial and marital relationships.[21] Pandey and Gupta use Manu V. 148, specifically, to illustrate the role of "textually sanctioned Hinduism" in the construction

[18] See, Huma Ahmed- Ghosh, "Widows in India: Issues of Masculinity and Women's Sexuality," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 15, Iss. 1 (2009): 6; Arti Dhand, "The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahabharata: A Tale About Women, Smelly, Ascetics, and God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 1 (March 2004), 39; Jatin Pandey and Manish Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows: Narratives From Vrindavan, India," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11, no.2 (2019:) 97.
[19] Jacobs, *Hinduism Today*, 69-70.
[20] Patrick Olivelle, Suman Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) V. 147-162.
[21] Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows, 97. See also Susan Wadley, "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture,* ed. Lindsey Harlan and Paul B. Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 94.

of negative attitudes towards widows that fosters the "dejected condition" of widows living in contemporary Vrindavan. The film *Water*, too, quotes the *Laws of Manu* in its opening frame, using this same chapter to as a foundation for its story portraying the exclusion, deprivation, and plights of widows in 1938, India.[22]

However, the *Laws of Manu* is not the only source for orthodox Hindu perspectives and moreover, a negative interpretation of widowhood is not the only one suggested by orthodox sources. Julia Leslie uses Tryambakayajvan's *Stridharmapadhaati or Guide to the Dharma of Women* and Vasudevasrama's *Yatidharmaprakasa or Explanation of the Dharma of Ascetics* to compare the path prescribed for a Hindu widow to that of a male renouncer. While, as discussed earlier, Leslie's comparison implies that the two options for a woman after the death of her husband is the path of "suicide" or "survival,"[23] the author also uses this concept of dualities to assert that women, after the death of their husbands, are equal to males performing the renouncer stage. Leslie does this by demonstrating that in accordance with the scriptures that she analyzes, widows perform the reversal of the practices typical of their lives as wives, just as male renouncers perform the negative state of their householder lifestyle. She argues that when widows are instructed by Tryambakayajvan to no longer take care in physical appearance, no longer eat whatever they choose, and to sleep on the floor, they are really performing the same renunciation as male ascetics, by creating a lifestyle that opposes that of the married women.

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[22] *Water*, directed by Deepa Mehta, Mongrel Media, 2005, opening; Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Suman Singh, "Exclusion (and Seclusion): Geographies of Disowned Widows of India," *GeoJournal* 83, no. 4 (2017): 759.
[23] Leslie, "Religion, Gender and Dharma," 168.

However, Leslie states that although the male has three options, to become a renouncer, perform ritual suicide, or do neither, the widow has only the options of *sati* and the lifestyle of the ascetic widow. As already discussed, this article implies that performance of *sati* may occur because its alternative is the hardship of widowhood, but Leslie's argument lends to the widow's endurance of hardship a powerful religious significance: the hardships experienced by a widow are not a cruel imposition but rather a conscious attempt to live as a renouncer, just as males do. Leslie's article illustrates, through its survey of orthodox Hindu texts, that a widow may not see her hardship as a consequence of negative social status, and, therefore, may not see widowhood as a wholly negative period.

Arti Dhand's article, "The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahabharata: A Tale about Women, Smelly Ascetics and God," speaks of widowhood in the *Mahabharata*, a text often perceived as traditional if not orthodox. Dhand's work highlights another "traditional" option for widows, of the practice of *niyoga*, or levirate: a widow can marry her husband's brother but only if this marriage will serve the greater good of carrying on the family lineage.[24] Susan Wadley, looking beyond textual representations and at women's lived experiences, also talks of levirate marriages, as she discusses the prominence of remarriage to another man within the deceased husband's family in rural north India for non-Brahman widows in her article "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India." Wadley states that remarriage for widows in the Indian village of Karimpur is likely for lower caste women and indicates that this is often for

[24] Dhand, "The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahabharata," 38.

inheritance purposes.[25] Wadley, like Dhand in her investigation of the cases in the *Mahabharata,* indicates the desire for sons as another large factor in *niyoga* remarriages. Both Dhand and Wadley reference the practice of this custom in Hindu sacred literature, and both emphasize the practical reasoning for widows to partake in such levirate relationships.[26] However, within Wadley's study, the importance placed on sons is often tied to concerns over property and inheritance.

Wadley's article is one of many scholarly works examining the contemporary lived experiences of widows that discuss remarriage as a major topic. As Wadley remarks on remarriage in north India as primarily levirate in nature, performed for economic reasons, D. Godavari Patil's *Hindu Widow: A Study in Deprivation* notes attitudes towards remarriage that too are centered on practical motivations. Patil finds in Dharwood and surrounding villages in India that the reasons Hindu widows list for wanting to remarry or not remarry are often more pragmatic in concern rather than religious prescriptions or proscriptions.[27] Additionally, as Wadley notes disparities in levels of remarriage amongst different castes, Patil observes variations in experiences and perceptions of remarriage in India between urban and rural areas, with widows in the latter regions viewing remarriage as permittable and occurring more often than those in the urban regions.[28]

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[25] Wadley suggests in her article that there are practical reasons for the occurrence of levirate marriage in three of the five cases of second marriage for non-Brahmin widows who have been widowed in their twenties in Karimpur. Susan Wadley, "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India," 94-11.
[26] Wadley briefly talks about the references to *niyoga* in the *Laws of Manu* in relation to the practice in Karimpur. Wadley, "No Longer a Wife,"94.
[27] Patil, *Hindu Widows,* 136
[28] Patil, *Hindu Widows*¸ 134

Though both Wadley and Patil talk of remarriage for Hindu widows taking place in India, many scholars observe that for most widows in South Asia remarriage is considered not acceptable.[29] Extant scholarship also demonstrates there is a stigma associated with remarriage for many widows in India and that this is part of the deprivation and social exclusion a woman is subject to once widowed.[30] In these scholarly works, remarriage is listed as a factor that contributes to social isolation and maltreatment that Hindu widowed women feel, but it is also shown to be the result of the overall stigmatization of widows as the prohibition of remarriage is often associated with the prescribed, and perceived necessity of, chastity for widows.

Leslie focuses on this ordained chastity in her analysis outlining the ascetic path for widows in Tryambakayajvan's *Stridharmapadhaati*.[31] Understandings of such prescribed chastity engender the view that women, once their husbands are dead, are left with, as Courtney states, "uncontrollable sexual-creative *shakti*."[32] The perceived sexuality of widows in Hindu traditions is observed to be a major source of deprivation and maltreatment of widows, both as a contribution to the social ostracism or "social

[29] See Sheleyah A. Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled *Shakti*: Goddess Identification, Violence and the Limits of Cultural Subversion of Widows in Vārāṇāsī " in *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37:2 (2014): 269; Firth, "Hindu Widow in Britain,"101-103; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan,"217.
[30] V. Mohini Giri, "Widows: The Discriminated Victims" in *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 69; Pande,"Widows of Vrindavan,"209; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows, 98.
[31] Leslie, "Religion, Gender and Dharma," 165-177; Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife*: *the orthodox Hindu woman according to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 299-303.
[32] Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled *Shakti*," 270. See also Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India," 10; Sarah Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood: Perspectives from Rural West Bengal," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no.3 (1999),546; V. Mohini Giri, "Broken Bangles" in *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 64.

death" of a widow, as well as the physical and sexual abuse of widows.[33] Marginalization of a widow because of her sexuality is identified as often taking the form of gossip, including talk of her adherence to prescribed codes of behaviour, attire and diet.[34] Extant scholarship indicates that this because in many Hindu traditions, the uncontrolled sexuality of widows is perceived as something that must be restrained and this is most frequently thought to be accomplished through ascetic-like restrictions.[35]

These ascetic-like changes that scholarly works have noted in the South Asian context have been a central focus in research on the lived experience of Hindu widows. Like Leslie, many scholars describe a very clear change in attire once widowed that is a reversal from the dress of a wife. In extant literature it is not just the duality of wife and widow that contributes to Hindu widows taking on ascetic-like diet and clothing practices but there is additionally the consideration of a widow's uncontrolled sexuality now that she is no longer a wife. Lamb talks extensively of the observances in which widows partake in order to "cool" their bodies of "sexual heat." Lamb states that:

> The most common rationale as to why widows were pressed to eat vegetarian diets and rice only once a day, to fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month, to wear white, and to forsake bodily adornments was that these were defensive measures aimed at controlling a widow's sexuality.[36]

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[33] Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood," in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 64-66; Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled Shakti," 268; Vasantha R. Patri, "Widows in India: A Psycho-social Analysis" in *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 38.
[34] Chen, introduction to *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 25; Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain," 108; Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour," 63-92.
[35] Chen. *Perpetual Mourning*, 2000.
[36] Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender and Body in North India* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 220.

Lamb explains that these measures were part of cooling the heat widows no longer had a way of dissipating, and these further included restricting "hot foods" such as meat, onions, and garlic. This is compared once again to the diet of an ascetic, though Lamb specifies, these are the restrictions of an ascetic who made the choice to be celibate.[37] The removal of particular foods, clothing items, and jewelry is talked of extensively in many scholarly works that note similar restrictions to the ones Lamb describes including the removal of a bindi, prohibition of *kumkuma* and *haldi,* restricting the colour red, and breaking bangles.[38] From north India, Lamb, and from Nepal, Vaday describe rituals where others remove symbols of marriage immediately following the death of a woman's husband. In these rituals, a woman, by having her bangles broken, removing the vermilion from her head and any other physical symbols of marriage, becomes a widow in a singular ceremonial transition. Her attire change is immediate and signifies that she is now a widow, not a wife.[39] Extant literature has remarked that these restrictions are often forced on widows and that these constraints are markers of the stigma, abuse, deprivation and dehumanizing that Hindu widows experience.[40]

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[37] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 221.
[38] Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India," 10; Patri, "Widows in India,"38; Bhattacharyya and Singh "Exclusion (and Seclusion)," 767.
[39] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes,* 214; Punam Yadav, "White Sari- Transforming Widowhood in Nepal," *Gender, Technology and Development* 20, no.1 (2016): 6.
[40] See Bhattacharyya and Singh, "Exclusion (and Seclusion)," 766; Condorelli, "An emergentist vs a linear approach to social change processes," 14-15; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan,"215-218; Tasasum Nazir, Shafia Nazir, and Bilal Ahmad Bhat, "Problems of Widows and Half-widows in Rural Areas of Kashmir Valley," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 2 (2012): 152; Patri, "Widows in India," 38.

Restrictions following the loss of her husband are demonstrated to be not only limited to attire and diet, but to also include social and religious bans that are new for a woman once widowed. Martha Alter Chen determines these strict social rules to be one of three factors that distinguishes the plight of Hindu widows in India from widows' lives globally.[41] Many scholarly works detail social exclusion and marginalization as the result of understandings of required social and religious changes in the practices of women once widowed.[42] These changes are primarily centered on a woman's participation in social and religious activities once widowed, especially prohibition from auspicious celebrations. The exclusion of widows from these rituals and festivities is shown to be the result of conceptions of widows as inauspicious founded in blaming a widow for the death of her husband. Widows are often considered to be bad luck because a woman is thought to be responsible for the wellbeing of her husband, and as a result his death is thought to be caused by a widow, her misfortunes, and even her *karma*.[43] The restrictions on and exclusion from participation in auspicious occasions is observed to include holy festivals, celebrations and auspicious rituals associated with these occasions that extend as far as to prohibit a widow's participation in her children's wedding ceremonies.[44]

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[41] Chen, *Perpetual Mourning*, 3.
[42] See Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled Shakti,"277; Kathey-Lee Galvin *Forbidden Red: Widowhood in Urban Nepal*, (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 2005) 142; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 95.
[43] See Bhattacharyya and Singh, "Exclusion (and seclusion)," 766; Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled Shakti," 270; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 215-216.
[44] Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India,"10; Lotika Sarkar and Narayan Banerjee, "Widows in a Tribal Setting in West Bengal" in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action,* ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 217-218.

As Chen identifies these social restrictions as being a defining characteristic of Hindu widowhood, Pandey and Gupta too state that the treatment of widows as inauspicious and as the subject of blame for their husband's death is specifically Hindu, as it is rooted in "religious texts, practices, and authorities."[45] Therefore, the inauspiciousness of widows in South Asia is concluded to be a feature of Hinduism rather than Indian culture. Likewise, Shirley Firth, in one of the very few examinations of Hindu widowhood outside of the South Asian context, observed that Hindu communities in Britain also perceived widows as inauspicious, and as a result widowed women participated at a limited and peripheral extent in social events, gatherings and even within relationships themselves.[46] Firth also indicates that it is not only others from the Hindu population who view widows as inauspicious, but that a woman may "internalize beliefs" about bad luck and blame herself.[47] This self-blame is also noted as something present for widows in South Asian contexts as well.[48]

Though Chen, Firth, Pandey and Gupta identify social restrictions resulting from perceptions of inauspiciousness to be unique to Hindu traditions, Giri states that systematic exclusion and discrimination against widows exists across religions in India.[49] Some scholars also note that notions of inauspiciousness, exclusion and maltreatment of widows are decreasing in the South Asian context,[50] though there is evidence that these

[45] Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 95.
[46] Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain," 105.
[47] Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain," 105.
[48] Courtney, "Savirti, the Unshackled Shakti," 273-278; Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Magoes*, 228.
[49] V. Mohini Giri, preface to *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 11.
[50] Condorelli, "An Emergentist vs a Linear Approach to Social Change Processes," 14-15; Bhattacharyya and Singh, "Exclusion (and seclusion)," 758; Patri, "Widows in India," 40; Yadav, "White Sari,"20.

changes are not linear, but rather are varied, and as such discrimination against widows continues. In addition, there are also descriptions of widows who have maintained or become more involved in the religious activities of their community and more spiritual following the death of their husbands, such as one woman Firth talks of (though as an exception) who maintained an important public role in the community that included conducting rituals, and another woman Firth indicates performed more fasts and spent more time reading scriptures in widowhood.[51]

However, the majority of works show the overwhelming deprivation of widows within their community with widowhood in South Asian contexts often being described a 'social death'.[52] The change in relationships that widows experience is not only observed in social relations but also within a woman's familial ties as well. Extant literature notes that following the death of a husband, a widow's relationships with her family can become strained. The collection of articles in *Widows in India* frequently talk of the relationships of widows, their authority in their household and their position in the family.[53] These articles stress the importance of economic resources and property rights,

[51] A. Judith Czerenda, "The Meaning of Widowhood and Health to Older Middle-Class Hindu Widows Living in a South Indian Community," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 21, 4 (2010): 358; Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain," 104-108.
[52] See Chakravarti "Gender, Caste and Labour,"64-66; Giri, "Broken Bangles," 65; Katia Saral Mohindra, Slim Haddad, and Delampady Narayana, "Debt, shame and survival: becoming and living as widows in rural Kerala, India," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 12, 28 (2012): 1; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 215; Patil, *Hindu Widows*, 10; Alka Ranjan, "Determinants of Well-Being among Widows: An Exploratory Study in Vārāṇāsī ," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol.36, No.43 (Oct. 2001): 4088.
[53] See Bela Bhatia, "Widows, Land Rights and Resettlement in the Narmada Valley," in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 257-260; Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 25; Jean Dreze and P.V. Srinivasan,"Widowhood and Poverty in Rural India: Some Inferences from Household Survey Data," in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 325-346; Neelam Gorhe, Chandra Bhandari and Bela Bhatia, "Widows, Family Support and Land Rights: Case Studies from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Gujarat" in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 261-280.

especially in the context of a widowed woman's status in her family, where women are largely not accepted as heads of their household following the death of their husbands and often her right to her deceased husband's property is a point of contention between her and her in-laws. These tensions with her husband's family can be detrimental, as widows can be vulnerable to deprivation, especially if they have unmarried children.

Condorelli, and Pandey and Gupta indicate that widows are often seen as a burden to their families.[54] Being a burden is noted as being particularly a point of contention between widowed women and their in-laws, and widowed mothers and their daughters-in-law.[55] The tensions in families between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are frequently mentioned both in relation to and outside of discussions of burden, though it is often in connection to widowhood that scholars examine this relationship, as well as the joint family system and aging.[56]

Sylvia Vatuk and Lamb both focus extensively on the intergenerational hierarchal relationships that exist in India as family members age.[57] A system of intergenerational hierarchy suggests that as elder folks age they are cared for by younger family members as repayment for the care they offered when these members were younger. It also represents a transfer of debt from a natal family to a marital family at the time of

[54] Condorelli, "An emergentist vs a linear approach to social change processes," 14; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 95.
[55] Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled Shakti," 270; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 95.
[56] See Chen, *Perpetual Mourning*, 225-226; Sheleyah A. Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety: Aging Women in Vārāṇāsī," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 52, No.3 (Winter 2008): 87; Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*,71-74.
[57] Sylvia Vatuk, "To Be a Burden on Others": Dependency Anxiety Among the Elderly in India" in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, ed. Owen M. Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 64-88; Lamb *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 42-69.

marriage for women.[58] This system affects both the relationship a woman has with her husband's family and her children's spouses. For women there is assumed debt to the marital family generated when selected for marriage into that family. This debt can influence the way a woman is treated once her husband has passed away, potentially framing her as a burden to her his family. Her debt also affects where a woman can live after marriage. She is no longer considered to have a place in her natal family and this can mean that if cast out from her marital home, she is abandoned and must relocate to a widow's ashram in a holy city, such as Vrindavan or Varanasi, to survive.[59] The intergenerational system can also mean that a woman is to be cared for by daughters-in-law following the death of their own husband, and that a widow becomes an aged member of a family, with little say in the decisions of the family.

This intergenerational system of reciprocity has also been looked at in the context of the living arrangements and dynamics in a South Asian diaspora setting. In both *Aging and the Indian Diaspora* and "Aging across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora," Lamb speaks to disintegration of intergenerational reciprocity in North America for those living in Indian American multigenerational transnational families in the United States and the tensions that can arise between the younger and older generations over divides in ideas of service and respectful care of elders.[60] Though these

[58] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 47; Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others,""77.
[59] Condorelli, "An emergentist vs linear approach to social change processes," 14; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 216.
[60] Sarah Lamb, *Aging and the Indian diaspora: cosmopolitan families in India and abroad* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 216-217; Sarah Lamb, "Aging across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora," in *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy* ed. Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 132-163.

works focus on intergenerational relationships in South Asian diaspora for both male and female members of older age, not distinguished by marital status, Lamb's examination of this system in the Indian context shows that it impacts a widow's position in the household as "widowhood could speed up the process of relinquishing authority and becoming peripheralized into old age," initiating a transfer of household head to junior family members. [61] Lamb found that in north India widows became precariously dependent on their sons, and daughters-in-law. There is also evident examples of stress on the dynamics of intergenerational ideologies of care and the generational gap that exists in diaspora settings found specifically amongst women, including widows, in the articles of Firth, Murti and Pearson.[62] However, while Pearson notes some informants in her research of Hindu communities in Ontario remark on a generational gap in understandings of "traditional" values such as joint family living arrangements, she also states that second generation Hindu Canadians deem respect for elders to be a core value of Hinduism that is "ingrained by parents" and "passed down" to later generations.[63]

The intergenerational hierarchal system, on which Lamb and Vatuk focus, reflects a prescribed set of roles for women that are defined by a woman's marital status. As briefly mentioned above these roles are outlined in a passage from the *Laws of Manu* that states:

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[61] Lamb, "Aging, gender and widowhood: Perspectives from rural West Bengal," 557.
[62] Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain,"100-109; Anne Mackenzie Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives from First and Second Generation Immigrant Hindu Women," *Religious Studies and Theology* 23,1 (2004): 61; Lata Murti, "At Both Ends of Care: South Indian Hindu Widows Living with Daughters and Daughters-in-Law in Southern California," *Globalizations* 3, no.3 (2006): 363.
[63] Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives," 85; Anne M. Pearson with Preeti Nayak, "Being Hindu in Canada: Experiences of Women," in *Canadian Women Shaping Diasporic Religious Identities,* ed. Becky R. Lee and Terry Tak-ling Woo (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 285.

> As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She must never seek to live independently.[64]

This passage prescribes that a woman's dependence is transferred with transitions in marital status, and that she is defined by these relationships of dependence. Scholars have noted that the lives of Hindu widows reflect this life cycle of roles as defined by marital status outlined in this passage, but these roles are not always defined in terms of a male authority.[65]

As is sometimes observed, an aspect of tension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law can arise from this life cycle system because a woman's authority over other women in a household is structured, similarly, by her marital status. Wadley states in rural north India there exists a "native terminology" based on this verse from the Laws of Manu that speaks to a women's life cycle where it is said that in childhood (*bacpan*) a girl is in her mother's kingdom (*mā kā rāj*), then in marriage in her mother-in-law's kingdom (s*ās kā rāj*), and in widowhood the kingdom of the daughter-in-law (*bahū* k*ā rāj*).[66]

Wadley explains that a woman's authority and status in this life cycle comes from having sons and therefore daughters-in-law to "dominate," but with the death of her husband, she is "unable to retain the power that she had when her husband lived" and is

[64] Olivelle and Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, V.148-149.
[65] See Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India," 1-6; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 97.
[66] Wadley, "No Longer a Wife,"97-99.

transitioned into the rule of her daughter-in-law.[67] Other scholars also provide accounts of understandings of familial ties similar to what Wadley documents in north India, such as a statement Lamb includes from a widowed mother in West Bengal whose identity, Lamb remarks, fades as her children grow up. This widowed woman asks, "All of their own families have happened, and now whose am I?"[68] In these works it is clear that a woman's relationships, and her roles as determined by those relationships, can impact and define widowhood and even define a widow herself, as a person.

Defining a woman by her marital status, especially as widow, in this way is something that is frequently observed in South Asian contexts. Ahmed-Ghosh says that a woman's identity is molded "as an individual through the institution of marriage, the termination of which, if her husband dies before her, redefines the controls over her sexuality by a patriarchy" and that "the primary conjugal relationship through marriage forms the basis of her identity and in turn provides the parameters to enhance and create the man's identity through ritualized masculinity."[69] As discussed above, Condorelli describes social death as replacing the physical death of *sati* for Hindu widows. In order to demonstrate this, she outlines a "systematic process of de-personalization" that includes removing the physical markers of marriage for women (like bangles), saying that not only does this eliminate any signs of sexuality, but further removes her social identity. Condorelli states that women go from "she" to "it" and says, "widows are

[67] Wadley, "No Longer a Wife,"99.
[68] Sarah Lamb, "Being a Widow and Other Life Stories: The Interplay Between Lives and Words," *Anthropology and Humanism,* 26, 1 (2001): 25-26
[69] Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India,"3.

mutilated in their identity, de-sexualized, no longer individuals but things, non-entities."[70] Ahmed-Ghosh and Condorelli in these statements both assert that Hindu women in India are, to some extent, defined by marital status and therefore identified as widows rather than individuals once widowed.

In a seemingly contradictory finding, Sheleyah A. Courtney in "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety: Aging Women in Varanasi" observes that Hindu widows in north India are uniquely identified as individuals within their community. However, Courtney indicates that while widows are related to differently based on an individual identity, this identity is constructed from specific qualities used by widows and those surrounding them to define "who and what any particular older marginal women might be."[71] What becomes evident in Courtney's analysis is that the lives and practices of Hindu widows are not only influenced by the social, familial or geographical environments, but that additionally, each woman's social status is defined by the amount of *kamzori* (weakness), *pagalpan* (madness), *pakka* (strength) and *kathorapan* (strictness, harshness, severity) that she is perceived to possess.[72]

This means that widowhood is a very different experience for each widow in Varanasi as the characteristics she is attributed dictate how she is treated by others, as well as what she is able to do in widowhood. Courtney offers a case study of a widow in Varanasi who, possessed by Kali, is perceived to be strict and strong, and, therefore, was

[70] Condorelli, "An emergentist vs a linear approach to social change processes," 14-15.
[71] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety," 76. While Courtney talks of older marginalized women as a whole, the case studies she presents are all of widowed Hindu women and how they are perceived and treated as a result.
[72] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety," 94.

not taunted or abused as were other widows in the same community. Additionally, she was able to take a lover despite being of the Brahmin caste.[73] This article indicates that it is possible for widows within Hindu traditions to have authority, independence, and freedom within widowhood, if they are perceived as embodying the characteristics of strength and strictness.

Similarly, Sarah Lamb in "Aging, Gender and Widowhood: Perspectives from rural West Bengal," discusses characteristics of individual widows that impact a woman's experience of widowhood. Like Condorelli, Lamb notes the ritual of removing markers of a woman's marriage (such as her bangles and the vermilion in her hair) to remove representations of her previous status and identity, specifically as to "transform her into an asexual being"[74] and like Wadley, Lamb also notes that a woman's value and identity are defined by being a daughter, then wife and daughter-in-law, and then mother, with the last three being in her husband's family.[75] However, Lamb states that while a widow may lose "a clear social identity", widowhood varies greatly for individual widows and examinations of widowhood in India have thus oversimplified women's identities to appear essential and fixed. Lamb illustrates this by describing how widowhood for young mothers is much different than widowhood for older women, for whom becoming a widow is "not nearly as traumatic, difficult and radical a transition."[76] Women who are

[73] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety," 81-86. Courtney states that being of Brahmin caste would generally preclude remarriage, making this affair especially note worthy.
[74] Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood,"543-545.
[75] Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood," 548-549.
[76] Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood," 553.

widowed later in life and have sons, can experience "a kind of unique independence and freedom of activity, rare for women in this region during other phases of their lives."[77]

Both Lamb's "Aging, Gender and Widowhood" and Courtney's "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," reveal that widowed Hindu women in India are not always observed as reduced to a singular identity as simply "widow," but that widowhood is constructed by characteristics of each widow in widowhood and in some cases those traits can make possible freedom, authority, and independence. In demonstrating the different experiences of widowhood that are formed from the individual attributes of each woman, Lamb is ultimately arguing the need to examine the complexities of widowhood, and gender more broadly, in scholarship, which has previously narrowed its focus on young widows, thereby giving a "static" idea of widowhood and creating voids in academic knowledge. Lamb reiterates the void in research into the multidimensionality of widows in "Being a Widow and Other Life Stories," saying, "Widowhood is presented as a shared, overpowering force of identity in a way that masks not only the complexity and ambiguity of particular widows' subjective states but also any variations in what widowhood can mean and entail, even as a generalized category."[78]

Nimi Mastey, too, argues that there has been a tendency in examining widowhood in South Asia to "disregard and homogenize individual experience." Mastey indicates that this contributes to ineffective ashrams that fail to understand the needs of individual women and provide for them, but also presents widowhood in India in a way that makes

[77] Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood," 566.
[78] Lamb, "Being a Widow and Other Life Stories," 23-24.

widows "the Other," locally and globally. Mastey includes the film *Water* as one popular media depiction that provides an image of widows and assigns stagnant characteristics which create an "othering effect." [79] Chen similarly notes that the "plight" of the Indian widow as a popular topic has focused on the three images of widows: as ascetic widow, child widow and as *sati*, and indicates that there is lack of public concern for widows who are not taking one of these sensational forms.[80] Chen also states that there is "more information on widowhood as an institution than on individuals widows."[81] It is evident from these scholars that not only are women identified as individuals in widowhood in a manner that influences their experience of widowhood uniquely, but also in focusing on widowhood as a monolithic uniform identity that replaces an identity as wife, widows are stripped of an identity and "othered" by outsiders.

The extant research outlined above observes an overwhelming hardship for Hindu widows in South Asia. The examination of *sati* and its ideological meaning, as the actual practice is not visibly present in modern Hinduism, demonstrates a negative attitude towards the life of widowhood from its outset, and this is further seen in the statements of certain traditional Hindu texts' restrictions which dehumanize, stigmatize, and deprive widows in widowhood. Widows are frequently excluded, marginalized, and ostracized as a result of being considered inauspicious and sexually threatening. Their perceived uncontrolled sexuality, or *shakti*, can lead to harsh verbal assault from others and even

[79] Nimi Mastey, "Examining Empowerment among Indian Widows: A Qualitative study of the Narratives of Hindu Widows in North Indian Ashrams," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 2 (2009): 191-197.
[80] Chen, *Perpetual Mourning*, 1-4
[81] Chen, *Perpetual Mourning*, 6.

physical and sexual abuse. A widow's family ties can become severely strained, leading to abandonment as well as loss of authority and newfound dependence. Widowhood for Hindu women in South Asia can manifest in a woman losing her identity and becoming only the "it" of a widow.

However, the existing scholarship also points to the importance of individual contexts. Wadley notes that in north India a woman's caste influences her ability to remarry and her authority in her family after her husband's death. Patil's findings show similarly that attitudes towards remarriage are impacted by physical location as rural vs. urban restrictions and practices vary even in very close geographic areas. Lamb also notes geographic impacts on familial structures in the intergenerational hierarchal systems that influence a widow's authority in examining the Indian diaspora in the United States. Additionally, Lamb and Courtney both show that a widow's traits, attributes, and characteristics as an individual, dramatically change her experience of widowhood, sometimes resulting in new autonomy in a woman's actions and practices.

Though varied in focus, methods, and findings, current literature makes clear that while widowhood in Hindu traditions is largely a negative state of existence, there is the possibility of authority, freedom, and independence dependent on contexts and on individual women. This conclusion demonstrates the importance of individual contexts and establishes the need for studies of widows in Hindu traditions and contexts beyond historical and South Asian understandings and experiences. This point is only the first implication arising from extant scholarship that shapes the present study.

1.2 Need for this Study:

In addition to the importance of the contexts and individual attributes of each widow, examination of the literature shows gaps in studying the individual lived experience of Hindu widows in diverse contexts. As noted in the literature review, Lamb, Mastey, and Chen point to the problematic narrow scope of research to date that reinforces a sensationalized monolithic, uniform, and fixed identity for and experience of widowhood. Mastey asserts that the widow is made into "Other" because of a disregard of the complexities of individual experience of widowhood. Much of the existing scholarship notes the lack of research on the lives of Hindu widows. Frequently, this is stated in reference to the disproportionate amount of work on *sati* compared to the modern lived experiences of widows, but there are specific calls for particular inquiries that are needed for understanding the complexities and individual experience of widowhood in different contexts so as to stop "othering" Hindu widows.[82]

In likeness to Mastey, and Lamb, Pande's article "Widows Of Vrindavan-Feminisation Of Old Age In India" concludes by calling for more research on the social and economic status of widows so as to better enable the treatment as widows as human beings, especially in relation to the Women's Movement.[83] Pandey and Gupta, similarly, in addition to remarking on the lack of research not focused on *sati*, call for further examination into the diverse nature of widowhood, but with specifics on the role of

[82] See Mohindra, Haddad, and Narayana, "Debt, shame and survival,"1-2; Patil, *Hindu Widows*, 10.
[83] Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 222.

religion in the lives of Hindu widows.[84] They state that the "interplay of religion, society, and individuals in the lives of the marginalized and socially neglected widows warrants attention from not only social workers but also academicians and scholars."[85] In their work Pandey and Gupta, as well as Bhattacharyya and Singh, assert there is a direct connection between Hinduism and the negative experience of widows in India with the latter saying that religious practices govern the lives of widows more so than Indian law.[86] Though other scholars indicate common plights for widows across religions in India[87], research into the role of Hindu traditions outside of an Indian context is missing to further understand the connection between experiences of widowhood and Hinduism. To date, most studies that examine the lives of Hindu widows are not specific to Hindu traditions, but rather examine widowhood in South Asia generally. The narrow focus of the South Asian geographical context ignores the influence of Hinduism itself, instead equating Indian experiences and understandings with the underexamined Hindu understandings and experiences of widowhood.

Extant research has tended to focus on not only the South Asian geographic area, but in specific regions in that area such as Vrindavan, Varanasi, Nepal, and north India as a whole, though there is research that demonstrates variation in experiences of widowhood for women even within different areas of India. As mentioned in the review

[84] Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 92. Pandey and Gupta also indicate that more research into the feelings of widows who speak English should be considered, 98.
[85] Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 92.
[86] Bhattacharyya and Singh, "Exclusion (and Seclusion)," 765; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 97. Pandey and Gupta here also find that while religion for Hindu widows can negatively impact their lives as widows, it also helps women to cope with their bereavement.
[87] See Giri, preface to *Living Death*, 7.

of the literature, Patil found clear distinctions in attitudes regarding widowhood among rural versus urban respondents. Other scholars point to a difference in the experience of widows in north India compared to south India, indicating that there were less restrictions for widows in south India.[88] Outside of scholarship within the South Asian geographical context, there is very little that looks at the lives of Hindu widows.

Lana Murti is one exception to the overwhelming focus on South Asian Hindu widows, as she examines the caregiving and care-receiving roles and relationships of Hindu immigrant widows and the daughters and daughters-in-law they reside with in Southern California. Similar to Lamb and Vatuk, Murti focuses on ideas of intergeneration flow of care taking in these relationships. Murti examines the living arrangements of widows and their children in South Asian diaspora situations in the United States and compares the roles in these households to those of "other immigrant care workers," finding that roles of Hindu immigrant widows are variable. Her study's scope is limited to these roles and does not provide much information on the lives of widows outside of the family setting, especially in regards to religious impacts of Hindu traditions. In addition to concluding that these living arrangements for Hindu immigrant widows are complex with shifting roles, Murti calls for more research into the lives of elderly immigrant widows generally and their navigation of care-giving roles.[89] Murti notes that "scholarship on Hindu immigrant widows is virtually non-existent" and that more research in the diaspora context is necessary. [90]

[88] Murti, "At Both Ends of Care," 364; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 220; Pandey and Gupta, "Religion in the Lives of Hindu Widows," 91.
[89] Murti, "At Both Ends of Care," 375.
[90] Murti, "At Both Ends of Care,"362.

Another of the extremely limited number of examinations of Hindu widows and widowhood in a diaspora setting is "Hindu Widows in Britain: Continuity and Change" by Shirley Firth. Firth studies widowhood in a Hindu community in England that is distinctly primarily Gujarati (60%) and second to that Panjabi (40%), most of whom had lived in India and then East Africa and then Britain. In looking at the conflict between Western influences and "traditional Hindu views," Firth analyzes who a widow is in India and how that conflicts with who a person is in the UK, finding large changes in family dynamics with a transition into widowhood and adherence to restrictions in dress, diet, and behaviour codes similar to the ones observed in India, as outlined above. She concludes that her own work "suggests that a vigorous process of adaptation is taking place, maintained by a strong umbilical link to India."[91] This further indicates the importance and unique experience of a diaspora context as Firth presents a dynamic and, at points conflicting, experience of widowhood influenced by ties to South Asia and by host community ideologies.

Firth and Murti both note the absence of research outside of the Indian context and point to the distinctiveness of the diaspora settings that should be further researched. With the demonstrated impact of geographic contributions to each widow's experience of widowhood, and the stated need to examine the effect of Hindu traditions as religion apart from Indian culture, it is evident there is much missing from the discussion because of the limited research in the diaspora setting. Extant research also demonstrates the uniqueness of the Canadian South Asian Hindu diaspora, which suggests the strong

[91] Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain," 112.

possibility of understandings and experiences of widowhood in Hindu traditions distinct from even the findings of the small examples of scholarship on Hindu widowhood that exists within diaspora settings.

Anne Pearson, in examinations of the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrant Hindu women in Ontario, demonstrates variety in understandings of religious, cultural, and social identities for women in Hindu communities in Canada. Pearson describes complexity in Canadian women's experiences of Hindu traditions because of a geographic displacement for first generation Hindu immigrant as well as Canada's influence as a host community. In interviewing Hindu women in southern Ontario, Pearson finds that women often become more pious and involved in Hindu traditions, rituals, and religious practices as they find themselves in communities that do not have Hindu holidays and celebrations uniformly participated in by those surrounding them.[92] This is largely because of a conscious decision to practice such activities that is not usually required in communities in India. Second generation women indicated that they felt that they were even more consciously involved in their own spirituality than their parents.[93] Pearson observes there is the presence of an "individualized" or "customized" Hinduism for women in Canada.[94] This is influenced both by the pluralistic Canadian setting and the diverse Hindu community in Ontario. Pearson states:

> Religious identity is an intricate configuration that is often made more complex by the experience of immigration and the transplantation of religious practice in the diaspora. The Canadian environment has

[92] Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives" 59.
[93] Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives," 67.
[94] Pearson with Nayak, "Being Hindu in Canada: Experiences of women," 270, 288.

> undeniably had an impact on the understanding of Hinduism among both first- and second-generation Hindu Canadian women. Having to explain Hinduism to non-Hindus, taking university courses on Hinduism, as well as meeting fellow Hindus from a wide variety of languages and originating homelands and seeing the multiple ways Hinduism is practised have all fostered a consciousness of, if not an appreciation for, Hinduism's internal diversity, and often a new embrace of what are perceived to be key features of Hinduism: adaptability, tolerance, and respectfulness.[95]

In this way, one woman interviewed described herself as "religiously Hindu, culturally Indian and socially Canadian."[96] The Hindu women interviewed indicated a flexibility and negotiation of Hinduism that they felt was more self-aware and open to change than that of earlier generations of Indian Hindus, on which Pearson further elaborates saying these women "reconcile their personal values with those of whatever is understood to be Hinduism to form a religious identity that works for them."[97] Pearson's research clearly illustrates a unique context existing in the Canadian diaspora. Given the demonstrated distinctness of Canada as a setting for Hindu religiosity and the emphasis on the importance of a widow's individual context in existing scholarship on the experiences of Hindu widowhood, the absence of research on the Hindu widow in the Canadian diaspora is a gap that needs to be filled to provide better understandings of the full range of experiences of widowhood for Hindu women. In this thesis, as Mastey proposes should be done, I seek to assist in deconstructing the "Othering effect" that portrays widows as

[95] Pearson with Nayak, "Being Hindu in Canada: Experiences of women," 294.
[96] Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives," 76.
[97] Pearson with Nayak, "Being Hindu in Canada: Experiences of women," 275.

one uniform, homogenized identity, and examine instead the specific experiences of widowhood in the distinct contexts of the Canadian diaspora.

1.3 Methodology:

With the aim of examining understandings and experiences of widowhood in the Hindu Canadian diaspora, my research sought to focus on the voices of women in the Hindu community in St. John's, Newfoundland, through ethnographic work in the form of a series of semi-structured interviews. With the intention to study the practices, roles, relationships, and social status of Hindu widows within the community of St. John's, I endeavoured to investigate the living situations of widows, their role in the household and community, their relationships, their perception of themselves, and their perception of life as compared to that of a wife, as well as investigate the perception of widows and widowhood amongst other women within the community. To attempt this, I interviewed 14 women from the St. John's Hindu community between August 2013 and December 2013.

The location of this research, St. John's, Newfoundland, is a unique diaspora setting as the Hindu population is relatively small compared to other Canadian cities. Halifax, Nova Scotia, another Atlantic Canadian city, for instance, had a population of 1540 (800 male and 740 female) individuals identifying as Hindu, with an overall population of 384,540 in the metropolitan area according to the 2011 National Household

Survey (NHS). In the same survey the Toronto metropolitan area had more respondents identifying as Hindu than the total population of the city of St. John's, at 325,420, with 162,510 males and 162,910 females. The St. John's metropolitan area, by contrast, had a total population of 196,953 in 2011 (205,955 in 2016), with only 540 people identifying as Hindu in the 2011 NHS. According to that survey, which is the most recent data collected on religious identification by the Canadian federal government, only 255 of those respondents were female.[98]

Though St. John's is the largest metropolitan centre on the island of Newfoundland, being a small religious group in a small Canadian city, there is only one Hindu temple, which was consecrated in 1995.[99] The Hindu Temple-St. John's, as noted on their website, "serves the religious, cultural and spiritual needs of the community" and is "primarily a place of worship for the Hindu community [but] it is open to people of all faiths." Events such as the yearly Multi-Faith Symposium, demonstrate the community's outreach to non-Hindus in the city of St. John's.

With a small religious minority made up of highly diverse backgrounds in a city with a single temple, the temple hosts a variety of activities, festivals, and rituals of different linguistic, social, and regional traditions, participated in by the larger Hindu community.[100] It was stated a few times by women during interviews that St. John's was

[98] Data from Statistics Canada 2016 Census of Canada and 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Though interviews took place in 2013, the 2011 NHS is the most recent data collected on religious characteristic by the Canadian federal government. Perhaps also worth noting is that the Hindu population of the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador was recorded as 635 in the 2011 NHS.
[99] "About our Temple," Hindu Temple St. John's, accessed March 5, 2021 https://hindutemplesj.wixsite.com/hindutemplestjohns/about-us.
[100] "About our Temple," Hindu Temple St. John's, accessed March 5, 2021 https://hindutemplesj.wixsite.com/hindutemplestjohns/about-us.

distinct from larger Canadian cities, in part because in centres such as Vancouver or Toronto there were more Hindus who were holding on to ideas and practices considered orthodox due to a larger Hindu population, allowing for individuals to separate into factions that shared the same backgrounds and beliefs. It is therefore important to note that while this research examines the Hindu Canadian diaspora, it is only one sample of a much larger and diverse experience of Hindu traditions in the Canadian context.

My methodology was largely modeled after Kate Davidson's discussion of her own research in her article "Late Life Widowhood, Selfishness and New Partnership Choices". While this article deals with the lives of widows and widowers in the United Kingdom, who are all of European descent, and does not look at religious belief or practice, it does explore the topic of later life widowhood and the emotions of those experiencing it.[101] As scholars such as Stephen Jacobs and George Chryssides' statements on examining a diaspora context have noted the need to take account of the host community and the possible paths of accommodating to, rejecting, or accepting views similar to those of the host community, Davidson's research methods were followed in part because of this project's Western setting.[102] Davidson's research was thought to potentially be an indication of what Hindu widows in the diaspora context might adopt themselves and additionally, Davidson's ability to draw conclusions about widows'

[101] Kate Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood, Selfishness and New Partnership Choices: a Gendered Perspective," *Ageing and Society* 21, no.3 (May 2001): 297-317.
[102] George Chryssides, "Britain's Changing Faiths: Adaptation in a New Environment" in *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain From 1945- Volume II- Issues*, ed. Gerald Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59; Jacobs, *Hinduism Today*, *106.* Chryssides notes "three possible outcomes for an immigrant religion in an alien environment"; apostasy, accommodation, or renewed vigour and Jacobs, advises that, when examining a diaspora context one must take into account three communities, the host community, the sending community, and the community of people who are actually relocating.

perception of widowhood was also thought to be useful as a framework for investigating widowhood cross-culturally, as a sensitive topic in both contexts.

Davidson details in "Late Life Widowhood," that she conducted a series of interviews wherein she qualified the age of interviewees and only interviewed those who had been widowed for at least two years. This was useful, as Davidson states the period of mourning is thought to have decreased by the second year of widowhood.[103] In my own research, I attempted to also only interview widows who had been widowed for at least two years, so as to be able to more easily obtain information from the participants within an area of such sensitivity. Davidson required that participants be living independently, but, for my own research, the household situation of widows within the Hindu diaspora was one area I hoped to examine and, therefore, did not select or restrict participants based on living arrangements.

Davidson furthermore conducted interviews with widowers, while I interviewed non-widowed women within the same community, but for similar ends as Davidson: to identify any differences between the widowed and non-widowed women and to receive the perspectives of each on widows and widowhood. Courtney's emphasis on the perception of an individual widowed woman's attributes in establishing her social status pointed to the importance of hearing about the perceptions of widows from non-widowed women.[104] Courtney's article further observed that non-widowed women participated in taunting widows in distinct ways based on marital status and age. Courtney asserts that

[103] Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood," 302.
[104] While male understandings, perceptions, and experiences of widows in Hindu traditions are also important to examine further, to limit the scope of this study only women were to be interviewed.

this taunting is partially pride on the part of the young woman who is taunting, as well as a fear of her possible future mother-in-law. Any further taunting from women, Courtney states, is a way of acting out frustrations and aggressions, and specifically frustrations and aggressions against one's mother-in-law.[105] Therefore, women who are not widowed, based on Courtney's findings, were determined to have a perception of widowhood of particular research value.

Kate Davidson conducted four pilot interviews, two with widows, and two with widowers which were unstructured, and, as the topic of remarriage, she says, was a major theme in all four interviews, this became the focus of the subsequent interviews. Because of the sensitivity regarding the topic of widowhood, especially as academic publications and mass media have tended to focus on the obscure or negative aspects of widowhood in the past, as discussed in the literature review, I, too, performed similar pilot interviews, wherein I discussed with four women from the Hindu community my proposed area of study, and received their insights into the interview process. The aim of these initial discussions of widowhood with women of the Hindu diaspora community in Newfoundland was to provide, as it did Kate Davidson, insight into major themes, but also potential initial data regarding what women in the Hindu community see as important issues, and what they perceive as sensitive matters in the area of widowhood. This was thought to be useful both as data itself and in the formulation of the subsequent interviews so as to refrain from lightly entering a topic that required sensitivity. Following these pilot interviews, I intended to shape more structured but still semi-

[105] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety," 87.

informal interview questions based on the first four discussions, as well as major topics in extant literature.

I aimed to conduct interviews with 10-15 women in the community in St. John's, including pilot interviews, with as much equality between widowed and non-widowed subjects interviewed as possible. The method of sampling also followed Davidson in her description of her own research as the primary recruitment was to be mostly word of mouth between informants and members of the Hindu community in St. John's. [106] Both of these aspects of this research methodology proved somewhat difficult.

Following the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research's (ICHER) approval of this project in August 2013, myself and my supervisor began to approach potential participants at the events where individuals from the Hindu population of St. John's were thought to be present. These events included the Sunday puja at the Hindu temple, special events and festivals at the temple, as well as events at the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland. The first four women who agreed to meet with me became the tier one participants. Though, as stated above, I had intended to have as much equality as possible in the number of widowed and non-widowed participants, including in the pilot interviews, all four tier one interviews were with women who had not been widowed.

Within these tier-one interviews several themes emerged as primary focuses of the participants, and these were all to some extent related to, or were subjects of,

[106] "The sample was collected from a variety of sources including health and welfare professionals, friends, colleagues and through the widowed people themselves," Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood, Selfishness and New Partnership Choices," 302.

discussion in the existing scholarship. However, the topics that were emphasized as being of importance or repeatedly discussed became the central basis for the second-tier questions, which was helpful in concentrating on things significant to women in the Hindu community. This meant while the second tier questions included more demographic specific queries, including asking a woman's age and length of time lived in Canada, these questions also excluded focuses that, though observed to be important in the South Asian research to date, were not raised by the women interviewed. Admittedly, in forming second-tier questions in this way, certain demographic questions that might have been useful in contextualizing this analysis, such as work status for non-widowed women, each woman's educational background, or the living arrangements of women not widowed outside of any history of sharing a living space with widows, were not directly asked; however, the absence of some of this information is useful in reinforcing what women felt was central to their experience. A major example of one such factor which I did not ask women about was any association they had with a particular caste, as this was not present in first tier interviews and thus was deemed as not especially relevant to perceptions and experiences of widowhood for women in the Hindu community in St. John's. While mention of caste did arise in subsequent second tier interviews, it was used to place a practice or belief that women thought might exist in a context not familiar to her.[107]

[107] It may surprise readers that caste was not at the forefront for a group of women from Hindu traditions, especially given findings in the review of the literature, but apart from general statements from women (such as, "maybe that happens in other castes?"), caste was not mentioned by the participants. This type of statement is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, as it illustrates how these women's conceptions of widowhood and a "typical widow" differ from the women's characterizations of those whom they personally know as widows (149).

Following the tier-one interviews and the creation, and approval, from ICEHR, of a more structured set of questions to ask women in second tier interviews, recruiting for these interviews took place. As noted above, my intention had been to use word of mouth, or the "snowball" method of recruitment, for these interviews. However, while this method of asking women to speak to friends and family members who might be interested in participating was used, it was not the primary method of recruitment as I had anticipated, with only four of the ten second-tier interview participants being recruited using this "snowball" method. As will be discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, I believe this was in part due to identification of widowhood and widows in the Hindu community. Several women I spoke with indicated they would be interested in meeting with me but did not have any experience with widowhood, though as will be further examined in the chapter on the definitions, classifications and categorizations of widowhood, throughout the course of the interview they realized they did have experiences that they had not previously recognized.

This is also contributed to a final inequity in the number of interview participants. In total 14 women were interviewed, 11 non-widowed women and 3 widowed women. As women did not appear to readily recognize experience with widows, widows were not immediately recognized for the purpose of recruitment, and so as to not stress a distinction of certain women as widows within the community if one was not present otherwise, participation of women of any marital status continued to be encouraged beyond the first seven non-widowed women.

The majority of interviews took place privately in the homes of participants, with the exception of a few interviews taking place in reserved private rooms on Memorial University's St. John's campus, or in a private room at the place of employment of the participant. Women were assured of and provided anonymity and confidentiality as outlined in the informed consent approved by ICEHR, though no woman voiced any concern over their statements remaining anonymous. This stands in contrast to Firth's experience in the British diaspora where she had difficulty obtaining information from widows because they feared a lack of anonymity, especially that their husband's family may find her statements and attribute them to her, or she may upset her son or daughter-in-law.[108]

While the second tier interviews did encompass a more structured and detailed set of questions, they were still very much a dialogue that the participants steered as much as I did. Some women exclusively followed the interview questions provided, and some women focused instead on what they felt were the most important things to discuss. One woman rejected my questions entirely. She stated that she felt the initial questions I had asked based on the tier one interviews (Can you describe any experiences you've had with widows? Can you describe what widowhood is to me?) were not relevant to Hinduism. When I asked her what she felt were relevant things we should discuss she explained that there was nothing about widowhood that was part of "true Hinduism" because she was not aware of any scriptures on widowhood. She felt widowhood was

[108] Firth, "Hindu Widows in Britain,"104.

entirely cultural, not religious.[109] Though a discussion on widowhood continued, we did not use most of the questions I prepared, and the offered experiences and perceptions of widowhood were framed as cultural, not religious. The semi-structured format allowed for this change in conversation so as to allow this participant to continue to provide data useful for this project, but in a way that she felt represented her beliefs, opinions and perspectives, thereby not excluding information from this project's findings because of limitations in the questions I constructed.

Reducing the limitations in this way, by trying to listen and let women lead their own interview conversation, was especially important given my outsider relationship to the Hindu community. As a white, non-Hindu, single woman, an extensive awareness of the literature to date examined above was crucial to ground myself, so as to not enter the sensitive subject matter lightly, but it was also appropriate for me, in this research, to leave the maximum amount of space for women to talk about what they felt was important rather than frame the results based on previous research findings, such as through a feminist, or potentially an unintentional neo-orientalist, approach that dismissed what women in the community themselves were focused on.

As mentioned above, this meant excluding certain demographic questions such as caste, though it also meant not asking questions that presumed a woman's religious authority. For example, a topic of frequent attention in extant scholarship, the *Laws of Manu*, was not inquired about because of tier-one interviews, as women did not bring

[109] It should be noted that while this participant perceived there to be a clear separation between cultural practices and the Hindu religion, as many other women did to varying degrees, no woman entirely agreed on these divides and as such the cultural, political, and historical influences on Hindu religious traditions cannot be seen as distinct from a "true Hinduism."

forth the text despite its focus within both academia and mass media. Though, in Chapter Five I examine a variation on the passage in the *Laws of Manu* V.148-149 being used by women in St. John's, women did not cite it as being from this text.[110] Women instead listed the Vedas, the Mahabharata, and people in their lives as sources of religious and moral authority.

While I attempted to minimize any skewing of findings as an outsider to the religion by trying to remove questions that were not evidenced to be important for women in the Hindu community, my presence as the interviewer should not be ignored. Pearson discusses the impact that having to defend Hinduism to other Canadians has on religiosity for Hindu women in Canada, and this may too have had an impact on the results of my study. Pearson states:

> The self-consciousness of being Hindu emerges for immigrants most starkly when they are confronted by stereotypes blatantly at odds with their own self-understanding and experience. The attempt to address misconceptions forces Hindus in Canada (as it did educated Hindus in nineteenth century India confronting derogatory or essentializing frameworks of European bureaucrats, missionaries and "Orientalists") to identify and articulate what it means to be "Hindu" as distinct from some other religion and from Indian "cultural" practices (including diet, dress, and myriad customs and beliefs including so called "superstitions).[111]

This may be especially true given the topic is one of a sensitive nature that has been a subject of public interest and outsider criticism, in addition to research taking place in a small Canadian city where the participants are a religious and ethnic minority.

[110] Chapter Five of thesis, 146-148. This is similar to what Wadley observes in Karimpur which is discussed in the literature review above, 22.
[111]Pearson, "Being Hindu in Canada: Personal Narratives," 81-82.

However, as Wendy Doniger discusses, there is merit to research performed by both Hindus and non-Hindus in scholarship on Hindu traditions, as she says, "Different sorts of valuable insights may come to individuals both inside and outside the tradition and need not threaten one another."[112] Doniger goes on to say that a non-Hindu's goal in studying Hinduism should be to see both insider and outsider perspectives.[113] With this in mind, both in the research and in the analysis of the data, there was an attempt for the experiences, perspectives and beliefs of the women of the Hindu community in St. John's to lead the discussion.

In keeping with this attempt to allow the perspectives on widowhood from the women of the St. John's Hindu community themselves to direct my examination of widowhood in this religious community, the themes and areas of discussion of the chapters that follow were constructed primarily by analyzing the themes most frequently brought forward and emphasized as significant by the widowed and non-widowed women interviewed. Second to this were the topics of focus in existing scholarship where relevant to what participants discussed in their interviews. The themes that emerged in this way have been separated into: 1) modifications in diet and clothing that signify the shift from wife to widow; 2) ostracism of widows from the religious and social life of the Hindu community; 3) the positions and relationships of widows in the community, in their family and; 4) the definitions, classifications and categorization of widows and widowhood among both widowed and non-widowed women. In examining these, the

[112] Doniger, *The Hindus*: *An Alternative History*, 13.
[113] Doniger, *The Hindus*: *An Alternative History*, 14.

perceptions and experiences of Hindu widowhood, a topic much talked of globally but not locally in scholarship to date, are demonstrated to be varied in way that indicates the Canadian Hindu widow both claims and is attributed respect, status, and independence and that the identity, relationships, and practices of widows, though part of continuous process of change, are not set apart from those of wives in any absolute manner.

Chapter Two

"I will come the day you change your sari": Clothing and Diet Restrictions for Widows

In extant scholarship, the roles and practices of widows within Hindu traditions have generally been presented as distinct and uniquely separate from that of wife. Yet, very little is prescribed for widows within those texts typically perceived as orthodox scriptures. Outside of orthodox Hindu texts, many scholarly works focus on the roles and practices for Hindu widows in and out of household. Extant case studies that examine Hindu widowhood often discuss the attire and dietary observances of widows[114] and I follow the lead of such scholarship in this chapter because these two areas of

[114] See Huma Ahmed- Ghosh, "Widows in India: Issues of Masculinity and Women's Sexuality," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 15, Iss. 1 (2009): 10; Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Suman Singh, "Exclusion (and Seclusion): Geographies of Disowned Widows of India," *GeoJournal* 83, no. 4 (2017): 7; Sarah Lamb *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*: Aging, Gender and Body in North India (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 213-238; Vasantha R. Patri, "Widows in India: A Psycho-social Analysis" in *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 38.

practice emerged as prominent concerns in my interviews. This chapter will therefore discuss changes, adherence to believed prescribed and proscribed practices, and general perceptions and experiences of clothing and diet choices for widowed women found in the Hindu Canadian diaspora.

2.1 Restrictions in Hindu Texts

Aside from remarriage practices, the practices of a widow in and out of the household are not often stated explicitly within the majority of Hindu texts. For example, *The Laws of Manu* on the roles and practices of a widow says:

> A good woman, desiring to go to the same world as her husband, should never do anything displeasing to the man who took her hand, whether he is alive or dead. After her husband is dead, she may voluntarily emaciate her body by eating pure flowers, roots, and fruits; but she must never mention even the name of another man. Aspiring to that unsurpassed Law of women devoted to a single husband, she should remain patient, controlled, and celibate until her death.[115]

The Laws of Manu also states that "For women, there is no independent sacrifice, vow, or fast; a woman will be exalted in heaven by the mere fact that she has obediently served her husband."[116] The *Baudhayana Dharamasutra* states that "When her husband dies, a wife should abstain from honey, meat, liquor, and salt and sleep on the floor for one year; for six months according to Maudgalya"[117]. While the *Vasistha Dharmasutras*

[115] Patrick Olivelle, Suman Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law : A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) V. 156-158.
[116] Olivelle and Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, V.155.
[117] Patrick Olivelle, *Dharamasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasiṣṭha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) Baudhāyana Dharamasūtras 2:4.7.

state that "The wife of a deceased man should sleep on the floor for six months, observing her vow and eating food without salt or seasonings. After the completion of the six months, she should bathe and make a funeral offering to her husband.[118]"

In addition to these brief statements on roles and practices for widows within these three orthodox Hindu texts, Tryambakayajvan offers designated duties and rules for widows within his *Stridharmapaddhati*. According to Julia Leslie, who translated and analyzed Tyambakayajvan's work, Tryambakayajvan suggests roles and practices for the woman who has experienced the death of her husband, and had not performed *sati*, that are almost identical to that of the male ascetic.[119] Leslie asserts that the prescribed practices of the female widow closely resemble those practices described for male ascetics in Vasudevasrama's *Yatidharmaprakasa or Explanation of the Dharma of Ascetics*. She suggests that when widows are instructed by Tryambakayajvan to no longer take care in physical appearance, no longer eat whatever they choose, and to sleep on the floor, they are really performing the same renunciation as male ascetics, by creating a lifestyle that opposes that of the married woman. However, Leslie notes that although the male has three options, to become a renouncer, perform ritual suicide, or do neither, the widow has only the options of *sati* and the lifestyle of the ascetic widow. Leslie argues that widows perform the reversal of the practices typical of their lives as wives, just as male ascetics perform the negative state of their householder lifestyle.

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[118] Olivelle, *Vasiṣṭha Dharamasūtras* 17.55-56.
[119] Julia Leslie, "Religion, Gender and Dharma: the Case of the Widow-Ascetic" in *Religion: Empirical Studies: a Collection to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions,* ed. Steven Sutcliffe (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 165-177.

2.2 Attire Choices, Changes and Restrictions

Attire practices were a topic that was addressed frequently during interviews with women in the Hindu community in St. John's, Newfoundland. Indeed, this subject was one of the major themes that arose during first tier interviews. All four women interviewed in first tier interviews brought up the topic of widow's dress changes at least once, and as such, women interviewed in second tier interviews were asked directly about any such attire changes they had witnessed or performed themselves. However, many times during interviews women spoke of attire changes taking place, or not taking place, before they were directly asked, often when describing what experiences with widowhood they had.

The topic of attire change was discussed in various ways. While each woman listed at least one attire transformation they had heard was, or was seen as, associated with widowhood, often these were changes they suggested they had not witnessed personally or did not see as taking place within the modern or Canadian context. These changes included: wearing only white, no longer wearing red, removing all jewelry, removing necklaces, removing bangles, removing only glass bangles, removing specifically red glass bangles, removing the *bindi*, removing the *sindoor*, removing the red vermillion powder in the hair parting, and no longer wearing perfume or flowers. When explaining why certain changes were made a few women advised that the items that women removed were symbols of marriage. One woman, Padma, stated that while traditionally the reason pieces of attire were removed by a woman once widowed was

because they were symbols of marital status, she viewed a shift in meaning for those items in current times:

> I don't know, like for example, and that was so many years ago, like my father died, so it was at that point that my mother did follow some traditions to the extent that she wouldn't wear brightly coloured clothes, or she didn't wear red bangles, especially glass bangles, because red glass bangles and red mark on the forehead were considered signs of being married, you know?... There is one mark, red powder that is put in the parting in the hair, that is called *sindoor* and the first time that is put is when one is married. So that people would not put when they were widows. But the other mark, which is called the *bindi*, that just like lipstick. And so, these days people continue to put it on.

Similarly, many other women used changes in attire as an example of a shift in the practices of widows that they perceived was taking place. A few women described a shift within their own families with such attire changes. They suggested that the attire changes they perceive as practiced by an older generation within their family were different than the attire changes that younger generations within their family had or were practicing. One woman, Chandi, explained that she felt there had been a shift in the clothing restrictions that a widow should take part in and reinforced this idea to her aunt:

> [In India] red is the colour of married happiness, passion. Whereas white there is the sign of quietness, sign of blankness, you know? So you have to wear white. You cannot attract anybody. You're not supposed to attract anybody anymore. So all these things changed. I told my great aunt, who I love very much—often she'll ask me 'When are you coming to India again? When we'll see you, it's been five years now'- so one day, I think I remember I told her, 'I'm not coming to see you in that white sari, I will come the day you change your sari and you change your living.' And she changed it. I'm like 'Good, you can wear white clothes, but I'm saying, not because of this.' You know?

Others gave accounts similar to Chandi's wherein relatives of widows, especially younger relatives, attempted to convince widows not to partake in attire changes. One woman, Ratna, said that when her father had passed away, her brother encouraged their mother to continue to wear jewelry by buying her jewelry as gifts. A woman who had lost her husband, Tavishi, explained it was in part her son, though he was only a child at the time, who persuaded her to return to the attire she had worn while her husband was alive. Tavishi stated that her son questioned why she did not wear the flowers he brought her and why in general she did not dress in the same way she used to, expressing that he liked her old clothes better. She further spoke of a friend who also questioned why she did not dress the same way she did before widowhood since, prior to the passing of her husband, they had discussed together how they viewed any clothing restrictions as "all the more way to torture" someone who had already experienced the "punishment" of such a "big loss." Tavishi expressed that her son and friend's questioning of her clothing changes made her consider returning to the attire she had worn as a married woman.

Women often indicated that some widows may have felt pressured by others to change their clothing but no woman who participated stated that this was the case with any Hindu widow in Canada she knew. Often words such as "personal choice" were used to describe women that they were aware had taken on clothing restrictions. The majority of participants suggested that the restrictions on attire they were aware of were not practiced within their own family and several women indicated that they felt this was a result of an absence of any enforcement from other relatives. One woman said about her mother who was a widow, "For dresses, she was… mind it depends on your family. You

know? What kind of family you live in. Thank god for that because my grandparents were pretty liberal. I mean they were liberal, not as much as you would like but they were liberal compared to other people in Bangladesh." This sentiment was echoed by many women when describing widows from older generations within their families. Some women said it was "good" that widows did not adopt any dress restrictions and were supported in this choice by other family members. Women viewed this lack of enforcement of restrictions positively and indicated that this was a positive part of a movement towards the better treatment of widows.

Just as some women had the view that restrictions on attire were enforced only in others' families and not their own, a few women advised that clothing restrictions were only practiced within other castes however, no participant expressed that they saw themselves as belonging to a caste where they felt these codes for dress were important or necessary. Additionally, many women separated themselves geographically from these clothing changes as well, asserting that these practices when they do take place are most frequently in villages in India. When women were asked if the changes in attire for Hindu widows they had described being aware of were performed in Canada, the most common response was laughter. One woman, Sushmita, laughed at this question and then said, "No, but we don't put [on] any of these things! I don't put [on] any of those things. So here I don't think it matters." Sushmita was not alone in suggesting this idea that any attire restrictions thought to be observed in certain parts of India could not take place in Canada because the attire was different within Canada to begin with.

A few women did indicate that they felt a change that might take place as a result

of becoming a widow would be was dressing more simply or subtly. One woman, after suggesting that a woman who is a widow might make shift towards the "more subdued", explained, "They don't wear bright make-up, and bright clothes, but whatever they wear is well groomed, well ironed, very neat and clean, very pleasing to the eye all the same." However, the majority of women who mentioned that a woman's movement towards dress that was more subtle or simple suggested that this could be a shift caused by aging rather than exclusively a direct result of losing one's husband. Padma was one woman who argued this, and stated that a widow's clothing might "not be as bright as they would be for a very young person but then I think with age people change anyway." This concept of changing attire due to age is something that Sarah Lamb discusses at length within her book, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*.[120]

One woman, Jiya, after explaining that her sister who is a widow does not wear much red, said, "as you grow older, you wear like kind of like a light colour, and more graceful you know, that type." Jiya went on to say that she believed this was true of everyone, not just widows, but that she herself did not plan on stopping wearing red as she grows older, regardless of her marital status: "But, you know, here, I would. I would. I love red. I wear red, every time."

Of the women who had experienced the death of their husbands, only one woman made changes to her attire as a result of becoming a widow. This woman, Tavishi, as discussed above, expressed that before she was widowed, she was opposed to widows

[120]Within her examination of a women's transformation into widowhood she describes most older widowed women in Mangaldihi, a village in north India, as wearing "white or 'cool' colors" and describes a connection between not only widowhood but age and such colours. Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 126.

restricting their clothing, but once widowed she felt pressure to make changes to her attire. She described her mother being upset that she felt people were talking poorly of them because of the way Tavishi continued to dress after the death of her husband so to please her mother she began restricting the clothes she wore. As noted earlier, also in part because of the influence of her friend and her son, Tavishi returned to the attire she wore while married. Tavishi described this as a choice to ignore what she felt others thought she should do and instead do as she herself desired. She asserted that she began to dress for herself though she was questioned for it: "some people ask me also, "why are you dressing like that?" It is my wish. I dress up. I like, I dress up. Not to attract anybody or anything it is my own."

Tavishi's account of her own attempt to decide whether to make attire changes illustrates that she made a series of choices rather than a singular definitive ceremonial transformation into a distinct prescribed attire for her new marital status.[121] Further, Tavishi went on to describe how when she was first widowed she removed her bindi, and was going to remove her bangles but was stopped by her brothers. She stated that she began to wear her bindi on and off until she decided to wear it again permanently many years later. The changes in attire that Tavishi performed demonstrate that practicing perceived prescribed clothing restrictions that oppose that of a wife is not defined by a set standard within the Hindu community or defined as a set choice by a widow herself.

[121] Lamb, describes a ritual taking place within north India wherein a woman is transformed into a widow almost immediately after her husband has passed in part by removing attire that is thought to be that of a wife. Punam Yadav notes this type of ceremony takes place in Nepal as well. Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 214; Punam Yadav, "White Sari- Transforming Widowhood in Nepal," *Gender, Technology and Development* 20, no.1 (2016): 6.

Of her current attire choices, Tavishi said, "I got nice dress, I wear. I got nice jewelry; I wear. Not to attract anybody or anything, it is for my own satisfaction, I wear." While Tavishi indicated that gossip is often an issue for widowed women when considering clothing restrictions and changes, it is important to note that she also suggested this was predominantly within the Indian context. She said that, as an older immigrant, she didn't have much experience within the Canadian context to compare to the Indian context, especially within the workplace where she indicated she felt the most talked about for her attire. Tavishi did suggest she suspected that for a younger widow in Canada, there would be less pressure to restrict one's attire because gossip about that attire was less likely.

While Tavishi was the only widowed participant to make attire changes as a result of being widowed, there was one widowed participant who wore only white. This woman, Lavani, indicated that while she did only wear white, she had done so prior to her change in marital status. Lavani stated that her transformation into all white attire, which she stated signified "purity," was the result of taking spiritual teachings. Despite Lavani's assertion that her decision to wear only white was one made before the passing of her husband, a few women interviewed listed Lavani as an example of a woman who had changed her attire as a result of being widowed. While Tavishi's description of her own attire demonstrates that an individual's change in dress can have private, personal motivation, descriptions of Lavani's attire from others illustrates that even the significance of attire choice is not always clear to or even accurately known by others.

Discussions with women in the Hindu community in St. John's establishes overall varied perceptions and experiences of attire changes and restrictions for widowed women. No two participants had identical responses as to what changes they viewed as being practiced, currently or in past times, in Canada or in India. While many of the respondents suggested they perceived a shift in the attire restrictions widows were making, there was no consensus as to what exact changes women perceived as continuing or what changes were perceived to be discontinued.

2.3 Diet Choices, Changes and Restrictions

Similarly, with diet restrictions and changes, many women used changes in eating habits as an example of a change they viewed as taking place less frequently within the practices of Hindu widows. Often it was suggested that, again, resistance or refusal to change a woman's diet in widowhood corresponds with women's perceptions of change across generations within their family.

One woman, Sushmita, suggested that it was difficult to say whether any modern examples of women making changes existed because most Hindus "eat veg" already. This question of others knowing what another practiced, in general, was discussed by multiple women. Many women suggested that community knowledge of an individual's activities was distinctly different in the Canadian setting as opposed to the Indian setting. That is, in the Canadian setting, there is greater privacy for the individual. One woman, Chandi, described how this was both good and bad because while one was likely freer to act without the pressure of others' knowing one's activities, it was more difficult to

readily find support. In expressing this she stated that as opposed to Asian countries, in Canada, "People won't care. Independent life. Again, I'm doing good for the society, I'm rewarded. I'm doing bad for the society, I'm being punished. So, here, society is more open, more, as I said, accepting." In noting the benefits of the Indian setting for an individual she stated: "But if I need help, I might have to ask it, ask for it, I might get it. I may not get it. But then, that's that. The good part is, independent life, you're accepted your dignity is high above, that's all everybody needs, isn't that?" Chandi used an example of trying to move a piece of furniture of few days earlier saying, "for God's sake the other day to move that china cabinet I was looking for people and over there you don't even have to ask. They would just come and help you. Ten people would come help, "There you go.""

Jiya, a non-widowed participant, also spoke to the idea that a change in generation as well as this change in community setting could create different perceptions of what practices widows should participate in and which ones widows actually participated in. She explained that she had witnessed her mother make dietary changes once widowed in India. She indicated that her mother stopped consuming what Lamb has observed in north India are called "hot" foods and are removed from a woman's diet once she becomes a widow. Lamb notes that in north India, these foods, which widows are to avoid, include meat, fish, eggs, onions, garlic and some additional spices.[122] These 'hot' foods were to be restricted with the belief that eating a diet of only 'cool' foods "counteracts a widow's

[122] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 216.

pent-up sexual heat to help keep her free from illicit sexual liaisons."[123] The changes Jiya saw her mother make were quite similarly, the removal of meat, garlic and onions in her diet. When asked why she thought her mother restricted herself from eating these items, Jiya said that she had heard, that meats "can give you more sexual." When asked why garlic and onion were then also removed from a widow's diet, Jiya suggested that she thought it was perhaps because these were items that were often used to cook meat and that they were therefore avoided so that others did not smell such items on widowed women, and subsequently assume they were consuming meat.

This suggestion that diet restrictions may be motivated by possible judgment from others is one Lamb observes is present within the north Indian context. Chandi also indicated that she perceived this to be present for previous generations within an Indian context:

> I have seen my grandma, when her husband died, when my grandfather died, all her life she was a vegetarian, she wouldn't eat meat, fish, egg or onion, anything that is made of that. Vegan, total vegan. And, if she would have then it would have been judged by society.

This idea that certain foods were perceived to be removed from a widows diet on the basis that others might see, smell, gossip and judge in a Canadian context, where community knowledge of an individual's habits are believed to be lower than in the Indian setting, suggests that restrictions in a Hindu widows' diet within Canadian settings might not be evident to others in the community.

[123] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 221.

Jiya, and Chandi, however, both suggested that a perceived diminishment of dietary restrictions was something they viewed as an example of how widowhood for Hindu women both in Canada and India was changing in a positive way. Chandi said, "I do see things changing and things need to be changed more and more. So the past and the present—people are coming at it more. Now, I have seen my aunt, my great-aunt, who is a widow, she doesn't live a life like my grandma did. She eats everything."

Jiya described that she saw a similar difference between her mother's actions and her sister's actions. She said that her sister, who had experienced the death of her husband and resided in India, did not adopt the same dietary restrictions as her mother because "we wouldn't take it any other way" indicating that she discouraged her sister from these same changes out of concern for her sister's health. Jiya described warning her sister of problems that might result from limiting her diet this way and said, "So we scared her, by telling her that stuff." Again, as with women's experiences of clothing changes, it is evident that women indicate an ability and a desire to influence the restrictions of those widows they know, even from women in Canada to women in India. However, unlike the descriptions of previous generations' tendency to enforce what were seen as traditional restrictions, non-widowed women describe the presence of supportive influence on widows' choice to not change their attire or eating practices.

The only woman who had experienced the death of her husband who indicated a change in her diet associated with the change in marital status from wife to widow was Neepa. However, Neepa described her change in eating habits as a consequence of cooking only for herself:

> Yeah, I don't care what I eat. I mean, it has to be proteins and all the food groups I eat, you know? I do that, but it's just that I don't have to be cooking every day. One day I cook, it stays for four days. You know? So that has changed. Cooking for one. Shopping for one. It's just you don't need much stuff for one person.

Neepa's statement acknowledges a change in her diet but does not suggest that Neepa's eating habits have changed in a way that follows traditions of prescribed food restrictions for widows. Two other participants who had been widowed, Tavishi and Lavani, stated that they had not made any changes in diet as a direct result of the death of their husbands. Both indicated however that they restricted their food periodically to perform *vrats*. Lavani expressed that because of a decline in health she performed such *vrats* less frequently than she had in previous years.

Tavishi, however, stated that she performed such *vrats* more frequently, but specified that the way in which she performed them had changed. When she was in her early twenties she used to perform fasts, and she received comments about this from her in-laws as well as neighbours. People told her that she was too young to be doing fasts, or that fasting was not necessary for her. Her husband, however, told her that if she wasn't eating, he would not eat either to support her in her fasts. She suggested that her in-laws did not like Tavishi influencing her husband in such a manner. Tavishi's husband was vegetarian; he did not eat "non-veg" and so, Tavishi said, she has, in recent years though many years after his death, stopped eating meat to support his eating habits the way that he supported hers. She said that her adoption of a vegetarian diet had changed the way that she now performs *vrats*. Because, over the years, she had removed so many items

from her diet, it became more difficult to find things to restrict for a fast. Now, one day a week, she will not eat salt, and one day a week she will only eat rice. Tavishi told me that she performed these *vrats* for her child and her child's spouse, to help bridge any gap in their own personal vows.

Tavishi expressed that she felt performing *vrats* had helped her accept the loss of her husband and the resulting loss of independence she indicated she felt as she aged without him:

> Fastings are going to show how to control over own's mind. That is why we, our Indian community, do fasting. So fasting means, "see today we should no[t] eat." Means even if so much of tempting food is there, we will not eat. Control of heart or mind that is the main thing. Sacrificing something for God. That has given me the power now to accept. Whatever problem, whatever this thing, dislikes and life when I face, I'm able to face it, easier. That's the first thing. If not I will become depressed, I will become so much these things. I'm able to accept the life as it is coming. So I feel that it is something that what I did then was helping me now."

While Tavishi voiced that she did not feel she restricted or changed her diet as a result of her change in marital status, it is clear that she views restricting her diet as relevant to being widowed as a way to honour her husband's choices in his wake, and as a device to cope with loss and disappointment.

As Jiya described persuading her sister to maintain the diet she practiced prior to being widowed, Neepa indicated that the absence of others in the household impacts her decisions about what food to prepare and how, and Tavishi states that she began to practice the diet of her husband to honour the support she received from him when performing *vrats*: it is clear from the women interviewed that diet changes and

restrictions for those Hindu women who have been widowed are influenced by others, but in varied and personal ways. While Martha Alter Chen observes that enforced diet codes are a way in which Indian widows experience social isolation,[124] Hindu Canadian women suggest that food practices are less publicly known within the community in St. John's. Neepa's decisions around diet, while difficult to interpret, might be seen as a result of perceiving more options for cooking, shopping and eating because such decisions are now made solely by and for her. Tavishi described restricting her diet in part out of appreciation to her husband for supporting her food choices earlier in life. Arguably, these two widowed women demonstrate dietary changes might be performed out of increased choice, rather than the lack of choice Chen describes. Tavishi further suggests that not only does she perceive her own dietary restrictions as not limiting, but rather as having the ability to assist her.

Additionally, the majority of women stressed that they saw diet changes and restrictions as an aspect of widowhood they perceive as being less frequently practiced in the Indian setting as well. Many women indicated that diet changes were not something that they experienced in their own families. Finally, it is important to note that two women stated that diet and clothing changes for widows did not exist within Hinduism at all.

These understandings of dietary and clothing restrictions of widows in Newfoundland present an awareness of traditions of adopting changes to one's daily

[124] Martha Alter Chen, introduction to *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Dehli: Sage Publications, 1998) 25.

practices once widowed but do not make evident a consistent adherence to any practices women undertake as a result of widowhood. While women recognize restrictions associated with widowhood that extant literature describes, no woman interviewed indicated that she prescribed such practices for herself or other women in the community. Many women saw regulations they identified as part of Hindu widowhood but felt that these were found only in the South Asian context, not amongst the widowed women they knew in Newfoundland. It was also noted by women interviewed that because of the perceived "individualistic" private culture in Canada, the diets of widowed women should they be performing such restrictions would not be known to others.

It is evident that the customary changes that signify a transition into widowhood for Hindu women documented in existing scholarship, are not seen in St. John's by women in the Hindu community. However, it is not clear that if such modifications are being adopted by widows, they would be known to or recognized by other women in the community. The framework of the relevant scholarly works suggests a universal set of regulations and practices that apply to and are largely adopted by widows in a clearly defined transition from wife to widow. In contrast, in Newfoundland individual widowed Hindu women do list some changes in their dress and diet that were affect by the death of their husband but these shifts are unique to each woman and did not occur in a singular permanent transition when "entering" widowhood. Such understandings and experiences of traditionally prescribed roles for and practices of widowhood extend into the social and religious life of a widow and inform her relationships in the Hindu community. I will

explore the relationship of a widow to the Hindu community of St. John's in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

"Why I should be changed by the talk of people?": Exclusion, Participation and Social Relationships of Widows in the Hindu Community

Martha Alter Chen, in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, lists "social isolation" as one of several "essential factors that account for high levels of deprivation among widows in India."[125] She observes that many widows experience social isolation after the death of their husbands, and that this social isolation takes several forms, including "social ostracizm" wherein "a widow is often excluded from the

[125] Martha Alter Chen, introduction to *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 20.

religious and social life of the community, due to her perceived inauspiciousness."[126] That Hindu widows experience social marginalization and exclusion from the community, is also demonstrated by Uma Chakravarti in "Gender, Caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood." Chakravarti concludes that "widowhood in India among upper castes is a state of social death."[127] She states "the continued existence of the widow after the death of her husband was to convert what was most valuable to the husband in his lifetime into an awesome threat to his community."[128]

These articles show that Hindu widows in India often experience a change in social relationships, marginalization, and are excluded from the community following the death of their husbands. Though both Chen and Chakravarti indicate there are exceptions, both conclude that a woman, once widowed, is often looked upon as inauspicious and, like Lamb asserts of widows within a familial context,[129] is forced into a peripheral position in the communities in which she was previously central. Indeed, both scholars describe this as a "social death."[130] As relationships of widows to a community's religious and social life is a topic that has been discussed within extant scholarly works,

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[126] Chen, introduction to *Widows in India* 24-25.

[127]Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood" in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action,* ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998) 63-64. While Chakravarti focuses on upper castes she indicates that not adhering to the practices of such upper castes further differentiates and lowers those not within such castes.

[128] Chakravarti "Gender, Caste and Labour,"65-66.

[129] Sarah Lamb *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 45. Lamb's findings on central and peripheral family positions is examine in more depth in Chapter Four of this thesis.

[130]Chen and Chakravarti are not alone in using the term "social death" to describe the experience of widows in India, see Rekha Pande "Widows of Vrindavan- Feminisation of Old Age in India," *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 10 (March 2015): 215; Vasantha R. Patri, "Widows in India: A Psycho-social Analysis" in *Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India* ed. V. Mohini Giri (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 38; Rosalia Condorelli, "An Emergentist vs a Linear Approach to Social Change Processes: A Gender Look in Contemporary India between Modernity and Hindu Tradition," *SpringerPlus* 4, no.1 (2015); 14.

the isolation and marginalization of widows from the Hindu community in St. John's is examined in this chapter.

3.1 Inauspiciousness and Participation in the Auspicious

Existing scholarship often observes that a Hindu widow's role within the community is commonly affected by notions of inauspiciousness. Gavin Flood asserts that, within Hinduism, the distinction between auspicious and inauspicious is one of two distinctions that "have been important in the history of Hindu society."[131] Chakravarti speaks to that distinction with specific relevance to widowhood in Hinduism, stating of Brahmanical society: "It is not, however, the rules of purity and pollution, but those of inauspiciousness which are the means of maintaining social distance in case of the widow."[132] Chakravarti notes not only the presence of this conceptualization of widows as inauspicious but further concludes that a widow's perceived inauspiciousness reinforces the social isolation and marginalization of widows. In *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, Lamb says, "Across caste lines in Mangaldhi, as throughout north India, widows were considered to be inauspicious."[133] Such accounts of Hindu widows being viewed inauspiciously are numerous within scholarly works.[134]

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[131] Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66-67.
[132] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour," 81.
[133]Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 217.
[134] See Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Suman Singh, "Exclusion (and Seclusion): Geographies of Disowned Widows of India," *GeoJournal* 83, no. 4 (2017): 766; Bela Bhatia, "Social Action with Rural Widows in Gujarat" in *Widows in India Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 424; Lotika Sarkar and Narayan Banerjee, "Widows in a Tribal Setting in West Bengal" in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, ed. Martha Alter Chen (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998) 217-218; Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan," 215-216.

Indeed, extant scholarship overwhelmingly presents a view of widows as inauspicious in Hindu traditions in South Asian contexts. According to this view, perceiving a widow as inauspicious can be evident in a widow's inability to participate in auspicious occasions, to prepare food for auspicious occasions, and even within daily social interactions between a widow and her surrounding community. Chakravarti states, "The sight of the widow itself is inauspicious, so inauspicious that if sighted at the beginning of an auspicious venture, the venture must be postponed; even dreaming of a widow augurs ill."[135] These examinations of widowhood in Hindu traditions denote a clear connection between the perception of a widow as inauspicious and a widow's relationship to her community, asserting that Hindu widows are often thought to be, and treated as, inauspicious, resulting in exclusion from social and religious activities.[136]

In my interviews, many women discussed the inauspiciousness of widows. One widowed woman, Tavishi, described seeing others in India act in a way similar to what Chakravarti describes, prior to being widowed herself:

> They will treat [a widow] as very unfortunate, misfortune. That she's unlucky. So when people go out of the house, if any widow comes in front of them, when they're going out, when they see a widow coming—they face the widow, they think it is bad omen and they go back home.

[135] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour," 81.
[136] Huma Ahmed- Ghosh, "Widows in India: Issues of Masculinity and Women's Sexuality," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 15, Iss. 1 (2009): 10; Bhatia, "Social Action with Rural Widows", 424; Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste and Labour," 64-66; Lamb, White Saris and Sweet Mangoes, 217; Sarkar and Banerjee, "Widows in a Tribal Setting," 217-218.

In addition to Tavishi, a number of other women interviewed gave examples of widows being seen as inauspicious. Padma too, for instance, talked of hearing that widows were to be avoided because of their perceived bad fortune. For Padma, like Tavishi, this was something she had witnessed in India, being told this as a child. While other women provided similar accounts of widows being seen as inauspicious, most women stated that they viewed any such traditions of seeing, perceiving, or treating widows as inauspicious negatively. Ratna, for example, suggested that considering widows to be inauspicious, to her, was not a true part of Hinduism, but was rather a cultural practice that she felt was wrong, saying, "it's not faith—it's the superstition."

Experiences of widows being perceived as inauspicious were also, largely, accounts of incidents that took place in South Asia. When asked if widows were perceived as inauspicious in Canada, most responded that they were not. Kamal, one of the youngest respondents, stated of Hindu widows in Canada, "Like here, if a stigma does exist, it's not that apparent. Either people don't show it or it just doesn't exist, but from my experience it just doesn't exist."

However, Brinda, unlike the majority of the women interviewed, did indicate that she felt that Hindus in Canada do consider widows to be inauspicious. Additionally, according to Brinda, this association with inauspiciousness is what differentiated widowhood for a Hindu woman from other Canadians widows. Brinda was the only woman who expressed directly that she saw widows being treated as inauspicious within the Hindu community in St. John's. She remarked that this was especially present in festivals or celebrations, stating that women who were widows would themselves keep

away from these auspicious occasions and others would not ask them to participate. She said that while no one spoke outwardly about it, or told women who had been widowed they could not attend or participate fully, "everyone knows the subtle language."

The events that Brinda specified widowed women were not invited to, or not invited to participate to the full extent, included blessing a married couple. This, Brinda explained, was different than when a woman was married, because widowed women were usually seniors and therefore, depending on the number of children she had, a woman of the same age would have been called upon first to bless the married couple prior to the death of her husband. Brinda stated:

> Ok it hurts right? Though you are aged and senior, experienced, and you raised children and grandchildren but still because you are a widow you are not considered auspicious to bless the bride and groom or birthday child—whatever the situation might be. That hurts her a lot. It's not her fault. If a widow is from Christian or Jewish [faiths] they are all looked at [as] equal, whether you have husband or not, but in Hinduism once you are widow you are very unauspicious. It hurts. It really, really hurts.

When asked if widows being perceived as inauspicious was common in current times, Brinda responded that it was "very common but in a very subtle way." She went on to state that she felt, "if I become a widow, other ladies will treat me just like they treat any widow in India." Brinda's comments show that for Brinda, a married woman in her sixties, perception of widows as inauspicious was something that was present in the current St. John's Hindu community, though it was not something she saw approvingly; it was hurtful to the women she observed experiencing it and it was a threat to her own social status should her husband pass away.

Brinda stated that marking widows as inauspiciousness was "a sentiment" that "nobody [could] erase," but she also indicated that there were ways that widows could avoid being looked at in this way: by building skills including, leadership, economic and financial skills. She stated:

> All this will make you strong, powerful, rich, and endowed, irrespective of widowhood or married. You see what I mean? It doesn't matter which religion you are, if you have this economic and academic skills, you'll be accepted anywhere. Hell with it if they don't want me to be there to invite me to bless somebody, I don't have to be in the function there. I can always excuse myself that I have a headache. I can't come. Nobody will question it. 'Cause you are leader, they want you to be there. In fact, your presence will enrich the function, am I right? It's like having a prime minister at your wedding. K? So, we have to make ourselves strong. Strong and reliable and be an essential person in any community, any function.

In these remarks, Brinda showed that while she believed that the general sentiment that widows are inauspicious could not itself be "erased" from Hindu communities, she also believed it to be an obstacle one could overcome, as opposed to a fixed state of marginalization for every individual widow. To Brinda, this was possible only if that widow gained respect from the community by possessing skills, rather than value through age, familial, and marital status. Being needed because of one's skills would negate any exclusion, and the strength that one gained from skills could make a woman respected enough for others to want her to participate regardless of widowhood. Brinda went on to describe her mother-in-law as an example of a woman who she had seen as having a leadership role that overcame the perceived inauspiciousness of widowhood. Her mother-in-law had been appointed to a leadership role in the kitchens of

her community: she was the one to add the final spices to the dishes being prepared for special large events. She said of the relationship between this contribution and her presence as a widow during auspicious occasions, "They need her, though she is a widow. So, her cooking skill is useful." Brinda's mother-in-law's role is especially noteworthy because Lamb describes not being able to "cook or serve food" as a way in which widows being seen as inauspicious was manifested in north India.[137] While Lamb describes serving food as way in which the stigma of widowhood excludes women, Brinda believed her mother-in-law's ability to cook was what allowed her to remain included at functions and indeed, the example indicates that culinary skill can supersede the inauspiciousness of widowhood.

Though Brinda asserted that Hindu women are seen as inauspicious once they become widows, if a woman is seen, individually, as essential to the community that inauspiciousness is something that can be overcome and is therefore not a permanent or definitive state for all widows in Hindu communities. Brinda's statements indicate therefore, that while widows are seen as inauspicious this can be overcome by a widow's individual assets. This implies too that without strong and reliable skills a widow might not be invited to participate in certain events or parts of festivals or celebrations.

As noted above, Flood states that the distinction between "inauspiciousness" and "auspiciousness" is one of two distinctions important to Hindu society (along with "pollution" and "purity"), and Chakravarti asserts that it is this distinction that supports social distancing from widows. Flood states that the distinction of inauspiciousness "is a

[137] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 217.

scale of the degree to which events, times and relationships are conductive to the well-being of the society or individual" and that the degree of auspiciousness is "concerned with power."[138] Brinda's statements on social stigma for widows and their perceived inauspiciousness suggest that while the distinction of "auspicious" and "inauspicious," does exist in the Hindu communities that Brinda discussed having been a part of, including St. John's, there is also a distinction of essential or excludable present that can supersede any perceived associated bad fortune. Like Flood's assertion of the degree of auspiciousness, Brinda too described this dichotomy as being concerned with power, as well as richness, strength, and endowment. Through skills a widow could become essential, rather than an inauspicious figure who would not be invited. What is evident from Brinda's accounts is that marginalization due to inauspiciousness is not an absolute for all widows but instead was unique to perceptions of each individual widow.

Chandi also spoke to the inclusion of widows at auspicious occasions. She described being aware of traditions of inauspiciousness hindering a woman from attending certain celebrations and said that while her own family had not excluded widows from these celebrations, she had witnessed widows in India not being invited to children's birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and "first rice eating" ceremonies. She stated, "That's a stigma again. Stigma—that's the superstition, superstitiousness—that her fortune should not come to our door, you know that kind of thing? That kind of non-sense."

[138] Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 67.

This remark is strikingly similar to that of Ratna's above, asserting that regarding widows as inauspicious was superstition, not Hinduism. Like Ratna, Chandi's comments on widows being excluded because of perceived bad fortune, as "superstition" and "non-sense," clearly indicate that while Chandi recognized some occurrences of widows not being invited to auspicious celebrations because of this perceived bad fortune, she herself condemned such stigmatization and did not attribute any validity to the belief. Chandi, who was in her 30's, in contrast to Brinda, went on to suggest that she thought Hindu widows in Canada were more likely to be invited to celebrations because "society is more open, society is more accepting."

This view that Hindu widows were considered too inauspicious for continued participation in celebrations in South Asia, but not as obviously considered so in the St. John's context, was one that Jiya shared. Though she indicated she had not known a widow to not be invited to an occasion because of her marital status, Jiya described hearing in Bangladesh that there were certain things a woman should not touch while participating in certain festivals once widowed. Jiya went on to say that she had never seen this exclusion from touching particular objects in Canadian contexts, or even South Asian contexts herself, but she had seen it in movies that took place in north India. Further, when asked if she had witnessed widows being left out in such a way she commented, "Now again, I told you, I'm out of the country almost 40 years so I don't know." This elaboration suggests that while she was aware of inauspiciousness being associated with Hindu widows, for Jiya, the presence of such a stigma in Canada was not even considered; it was a concept exclusive to South Asia.

Sankar and Banerjee describe the inauspiciousness of a widow's touch for objects used in marriage and other religious ceremonies of which Jiya speaks, as something that is present in all communities in West Bengal and specifically state that this prohibition included not allowing a widow into a ritual to welcoming her daughter-in-law.[139] Ratna, like Jiya, mentioned the perceived inauspiciousness of a widow's touch when she talked about her own family's choice to include her widowed mother in all parts of their own wedding ceremonies:

> Five women need to touch one auspicious thing for the girl to put on [her] forehead, like all kinds of a blessing things. So [at] that time, all five women need[ed] to be married women, but in our wedding time—in our sister's wedding, our brother's wedding time—I remember, at that time I was young, and my brother said my mom would be the first person to touch that auspicious lamp and things, to touch on my forehead with the other women.[He said] "I don't care [if she] is a widow or not. She is my mom."

Ratna went on to say, "So that revolution we did in our family and there were lots of people [who were] not very happy that time." Ratna explained that this "revolution" had taken place in the past in India, she applauded her brother's actions and suggested that he had been able to do this because they were "blessed with [their] mother's spirit," adding that after the death of their father, their mother had been a "leader." She stated that this "spirit" was what allowed both her and her siblings to "not listen to any wrong beliefs," implying that the inauspiciousness of a widow was included in these "wrong beliefs." While Ratna's experience of restrictions based on the widow's inauspicious touch was

[139] Ahmed-Ghosh also cites this as an extreme example of the exclusion of widows in India. Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India,"10; Sarkar and Banerjee, "Widows in a Tribal Setting," 217-218.

not in the Canadian context itself, Ratna's description of this event as a now Canadian Hindu woman in St. John's is worth noting. Her commentary on the incident reflects her present understanding of Hindu widows being treated as inauspicious as a "wrong belief" that she felt she was only able to recognize as such because of the leadership of her widowed mother.

This recounting also reinforces an idea that Hindu widows can overcome a perceived inability to participate because of their marital status with specific resources, such as familial encouragement. Ratna's experience demonstrates again that the inauspiciousness of a Hindu widow is not a fixed predetermined state but rather, as with Brinda's assessment that a widow can make herself essential so as not to be excluded, a widow's perceived inauspiciousness can be overturned. In Ratna's view this was accomplished by what she called a revolution, where other family members continued to invite the participation of a woman after she had become a widow despite the disapproval of others.

As with Ratna's assessment of her mother's partaking in auspicious occasions as a revolution, Sushmita too spoke of the progression of a Hindu widow's ability and invitation to participate in India. Sushmita indicated that she believed that while widows were invited to all festivals and celebrations in India, there were certain ceremonies that were only done by married women, though that exclusion was also less prevalent in current times. She stated:

> Society has changed, certain things have been accepted, so now it's okay. Earlier a widow could not participate in many things. It's changing

> in India. But here? It doesn't matter here. There are no distinctions. You are the one who has to do whatever needs to be done.

Sushmita too described a family wedding in India where an older cousin voiced that the groom's widowed mother should participate in parts of his wedding previously reserved exclusively for married women in the family. She ended that account saying, "Yes, there are certain things that the widows aren't allowed to do, but they're doing them now. It's all regional, family dependent, how open the family is to these things, and how sensitive people are." When asked if she had seen widows in Canada not participating in anything because of the change in marital status she said "No. 'Cause this friend of mine, her daughter got married, she did everything. Here it's you."

Sushmita's statements, like those of Ratna, point to an emphasis on the familial context of a Hindu widow's ability to participate in South Asian settings and reinforce that perceived inauspiciousness for widows is dependent on the resources, like familial support, of each widow. Furthermore, Sushmita not only viewed participation as increasing in India, she stated that a distinction to separate a Hindu widow from partaking in celebrations was not being made at all in Canada. Sushmita asserted that it was not the society, as was the case in changing India, or her family that determined a widow's ability to be involved in auspicious acts during celebrations in Canada because there was no concern or distinction being made by others. It was for a widow herself to decide what needed to be done for a ceremony she was planning and her level of involvement in those or any other celebrations.

The notion that a widow's own level of involvement was her decision was echoed

by the three women interviewed who had been widowed. Lavani, Tavishi, and Neepa all expressed that they felt the celebrations and rituals they themselves took part in remained the same as when they were married, and indicated they saw any restrictions on a widow's ability to participate in auspicious activities or occasions as something a widow placed upon herself. Lavani stated that it was the choice of each widowed woman herself whether she participated in all rituals and ceremonies saying, "if you do not restrict yourself, then nobody can."

Tavishi, too, viewed not partaking in certain rituals as the choice of an individual widow herself rather than the result of stigmatization from others. Tavishi gave an example of a friend who was also a widow refusing *kumkum* that was offered to her, she said, "Whatever. Hypocritical. [Widows] become like that. They themselves, they reduce themself. So they themself, make themself low. That is because our custom was like that. So they're not educated."

Tavishi's remarks on her widowed friend refusing *kumkum* makes evident that Tavishi believed it is widows themselves who lower their own social status by choosing not to participate in the same auspicious practices as married women. Further, for Tavishi, widows not taking part demonstrates a lack of education and an adherence to past customs. It is also worth noting that, additionally, Tavishi indicated this had been witnessed in St. John's where this friend had recently moved from India and that Tavishi went on to attribute her friend's reluctance to accept the offer of *kumkum* to an adherence to Indian culture. Tavishi's account of this experience makes clear she felt it was not Hindu rules, or marginalization by other Hindu Canadians, that excluded Hindu widows

from full participation in auspicious activities in the St. John's Hindu community. Rather, it was up to each individual woman herself to not hinder her own involvement by retaining what Tavishi believed to be uneducated and outdated Indian customs.

Neepa perceived a link between a widow's full participation in rituals and a woman's education and adherence to past Indian customs as well, stating, "there are people who come here and still stick to the original culture, and stick to the rules they were brought up with, you know?" Neepa and Tavishi's emphasis that the inability of widows to participate in spiritual activities as an uneducated notion rooted to India culture, rather than a religious belief, indicate that while both widows have seen other Hindu widows not partaking in rituals in Canada because of marital status, they feel this is not something Canadian Hindu widows, including themselves, are forced into by others in Canadian Hindu communities.

What the accounts of these three widowed women demonstrate is that while they each participated in the same rituals and celebrations they did prior to the death of their husbands, they felt that this was because of a decision they had made themselves to reject restrictions they felt were based on a lack of education and on Indian cultural practices rather than Hinduism. They believed an individual widow may not maintain the same level of participation as when she was married only if she herself, chose to adhere to such limitations. To Tavishi, Lavani and Neepa, constraints on participation were not predetermined or fixed for Hindu widows in Canadian contexts, and further, were something a widow activity picked for herself. These widowed women asserted that in the St. John's Hindu community, exclusion was not something that required subverting

for widows, as some previously discussed statements from non-widowed women suggested, but rather marginalization was something a widow herself chose. Though there are no set exclusions evident, these statements also illustrate that while not all widows are restricted, or restrict themselves as Tavishi, Lavani and Neepa state, from participation in auspicious activities, there is still a level of involvement that is negotiated amidst perceived exclusions. Widows may choose if they will participate and may not be restricted by others from participating, but that there is a choice to be made demonstrates that there are limitations and restrictions present for widowed women to accept or reject in a way not necessary for married women.

3.2 Social Relationships

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Martha Alter Chen in *Widows in India,* indicates that one form of social isolation that takes place for Hindu widows is that of "social ostracism." Chen observes that, in addition to religious life, Hindu widows are frequently excluded from the social life of the surrounding community as well.[140] Chen lists the factor discussed in the previous section, perceived inauspiciousness, as a cause of this exclusion and its subsequent ostracism and isolation. Additionally, Chen supports Chakravarti's assertion that a Hindu widow's threat is as a woman who is removed from reproduction and sexuality, resulting in a lack of identity as an individual apart from a

[140] Martha Alter Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 25.

spouse, which also contributes to a "social death."[141] In *Forbidden Red*, Kathey-Lee Galvin examines the lives of Hindu widows in Nepal and states, "Outside of the family too, being without a husband has social effect. Widowed women must observe new codes of behavior with kin and non-kin alike, while being held to rules different from those of a wife."[142] Galvin describes a woman who experienced friendships ending completely because of her change in marital status to widow. Chen, Chakravarti and Galvin all report changes in the social existence of Hindu widows that are not limited to religious settings, which they attribute to shifts in defining a woman as widow, replacing her previous identity as wife. Several women interviewed spoke to this idea of the social relations of a woman once widowed. Therefore, it is worth examining here the social relationships of Hindu widows in St. John's outside the scope of participation in festivals and auspicious ceremonies as an additional area of potential marginalization and isolation for Hindu widowed women.

3.2.1 Social Invitations and Friendships

Discussing the social relationships of widows, two women, Padma and Sushmita, stated that they believed a widow might receive fewer invitations after the death of her husband, not because she would be viewed as inauspicious by others in her community, but because her social circle had probably been centered on couples. Sushmita considered it to be customary that in Canada one "invited a husband and wife together," and that this practice would impede the amount of invitations a widow, on her own, would receive.

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[141] Martha Alter Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 25-26; Chakravarti "Gender, Caste and Labour,"64-66.
[142] Kathey-Lee Galvin *Forbidden Red: Widowhood in Urban Nepal,* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 2005) 142.

She stated, "Because of society she may be invite[d] to less parties now that she is alone but that's again a societal way of thinking. You're always invited with the partner." According to Sushmita's expectation of a woman's change in social activities following the death of her husband, like Galvin notes of the experience of widow in Nepal, there is a social effect in being without a husband for Hindu widows in St. John's too. As with Chakravarti's assertion, Sushmita recognized the possibility of an exclusion of widows that emerged from redefining a woman's role socially now that she was without a spouse, though for Sushmita this was not part of belief founded in Hindu traditions or South Asian cultural conventions, but rather the influence of Canadian societal norms.

Gargi expressed that while she did not see a change in the amount of social activities that widows participated in, she did see a shift in what those activities were. She stated, "The change has been in terms of, socially, what entertainment they will do at home is probably not happening as much. Not that they don't invite people home, but now they are not as enthusiastic of having somebody come to a single home." Gargi viewed widows as experiencing no loss of friendship, or relationships, but did see a difference in the relationships within those friendships. While Gargi contended there was no decrease in the sum of social participation for a Hindu Canadian woman who had been widowed, her statement, like Sushmita's, illustrates that there is a shift in what activities are available for a widow's inclusion. Again, to Gargi as to Sushmita, this shift is not the result of any perceived inauspicious of widows, but instead the effect of no longer being part of a couple. Sushmita also asserted that she felt a widow would retain the friends she had in marriage, despite fewer invitations to certain events. She used her friendship with

Neepa, a widow, as an example of continued friendship. Sushmita stated, "if they are friends with you, they are friends with you. They probably take care of you more if you're a widow, but I don't see any distinction being made." Unlike what Galvin found to be evident in Nepal, Sushmita felt that despite fewer invitations to the events a woman had once attended while still married, friendships themselves endured the change in marital status from wife to widow. The only other change she considered a possibility for a friendship following this transition was the amount of care being offered to the widowed individual. For Sushmita, the friendship was not altered or refined but the relationship could manifest differently: the amount of involvement or level of support could increase and the setting where time was spent together might be different as a result of a woman being alone in her new singlehood.

Another woman, Jiya, expressed that while she saw the social relations of a woman being maintained after the death of a husband, she felt the connections one had after the death of one's spouse were a major difference between the experience of widows and widowers. She asserted that she believed women had an easier experience of widowhood than men because women had a greater social life before and, therefore, after the passing of their partner saying, "we can do things, we can talk about it if we feel bad." Jiya perceived women who are widowed to have more social activity and relationships than men who are widowed, and that meant being better able to cope with loss. What is evident, therefore, is that while some Hindu women in St. John's viewed the change from wife to widow as directly linked to social relations, none suggested that a Hindu widow’s social life clearly diminished, though a widow’s participation in her social circle could be

shifted because she was no longer a part of a marriage. Though Sushmita, Padma and Gargi perceive a possible shift in the way relationships manifest once a Hindu woman is apart from a spouse in her social life, no participant submitted that she felt this results in marginalization or social isolation. In fact, Sushmita indicated that this shift may be towards a more involved relationship with those around a widow, though now possibly excluded from the couple-centered socializing that Sushmita attributed to Canadian culture instead of any newly assumed rules for widowhood based in Hindu traditions. No woman who spoke of the possibility of a change to a woman's social life in widowhood attributed this to a widow being considered inauspicious or perceived as a threat in her uncontrolled sexuality as scholars like Chen and Chakravarti have demonstrated is prevalent in Indian contexts. [143]

3.2.2 Widow Blaming

In addition to perceived bad luck as cause for the social isolation of a Hindu widow in India that Chen observes, Sarah Lamb in *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes* asserts that a widow's "destructive potential was the primary reason that widows were considered to be so exceedingly inauspicious."[144] Lamb describes this perceived destructive potential in north India:

> If a virtuous, devoted wife possesses the power to nurture and sustain her husband, then something must have been wrong or deficient (local-

[143] Though Sushmita's statements show that she does not believe any exclusions from social activities are based on a perceived sexual threat of widows, Sushmita's conscious view of exclusion does not consider the larger possibility that mature single women are excluded in Canada largely because of potential sexual threat. An exploration of what is at the basis of couples not continuing to socialize with formerly married individuals is beyond the scope of this thesis but should be considered when reading Sushmita's remarks.
[144] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes,* 228.

> reasoning went) in the nurturance provided by any woman whose husband died."[145]

Lamb makes evident that widows in north India are often the recipients of blame, due to the very act of being widowed. This is something that Martha Alter Chen similarly notes, saying that widows in India are "often accused of being 'responsible' for the deaths of their husband."[146]

Several women mentioned an awareness of such traditions of blaming widows for the death of their husbands. One woman, Kamal, indicated that growing up in India she had heard that Hindu widows were to be blamed:

> I know back home being a widow is a curse. I haven't been taught that but I have observed that and I have learned that being a widow means you have done something wrong. You may have done something wrong in your past life. As a woman, if you become a widow, you've done something wrong.

Kamal's statement demonstrates that, while she recognized the presence of widow blaming in her own background, she emphasized her disagreement with such views. She also located the belief that widows are "curses" in an Indian setting rather than a Canadian one, implying that this is not something she has witnessed in Newfoundland Hindu communities.

Chandi too stated she had an awareness of widow blaming, but she strongly desired to see such practices end, saying, "Especially [with regards to] Hindu widows I

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[145] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 228.
[146] Martha Alter Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 24-25.

really want us to know—people should know, people should talk about, or think about or learn about—it's not [the] woman's fault. It's not her fault." This declaration, in which she denounced faulting widows, shows that while familiar with this concept, she does not believe it to be a valid assessment of widows or their responsibility for their own widowhood. Chandi also indicated that she felt the amount of widow blaming was decreasing in recent history globally because of a rise in education.

Tavishi, a widow, also acknowledged witnessing widow blaming, but felt it was not acceptable:

> It is not their mistake. Man is born and it is his own. As for the Hindu—as for our Vedas, our scriptures—every human being born in the world, they come with just like a[n] entry date and expiry date. It's all predetermined. Not because of one person or because of [an]other person, it is—according to us—our Hindu *dharma*. When we come to the world itself, our date of departure is decided. But [in] Hindu culture-certain people—I should say, who [do] not completely know the scriptures—they just put the blame on [the] wife if husband dies.

Like Chandi, Tavishi noted traditions of blaming widows for the death of their spouse and indicated that she felt such traditions were unequivocally wrong. Tavishi, like Chandi, attributed this belief to a lack of education, but specified a lack of true knowledge of the Hindu scriptures as the cause of widow blaming. Tavishi's statements point to an understanding that faulting a widow for the death of her spouse is part of Hindu culture only because of people who do not comprehend Hindu scriptures, and is not Hindu ideology, as this is in fact against Vedic teachings. She asserted that the thought that a woman is responsible for her husband’s death goes not only against Hindu scriptures, but *dharma* itself.

Several women noted the act of blaming within the Hindu community in St. John's, though not directed at widows, but instead at women who were single otherwise. Women discussed the impact of choice when speaking of a difference between single life as a widow versus single life otherwise. One woman, Dipti, contended that the distinction between widowhood and being divorced was in deciding on that change. She asserted:

> When you're getting a divorce you're clearly thinking, *I don't want this, I want something else and I can get something else after. I don't want to be with this person, I want to live my life a different way.* But when you're widowed you don't have any control over the person dying.

In this statement Dipti indicated that while she felt women who are divorced have choice regarding their change in marital status, widows, by contrast, do not. This sentiment was also mentioned by Padma, who was herself a divorcee. Dipti and Padma's statements here stand in stark contrast to the blame accorded to women for the death of their husbands, documented by Lamb among widows in north India.[147] And Dipti and Padma were not the only ones to say that a widow's husband's death was beyond her control. Padma stated, "If I was widowed it would be easier because at least it's not something that I've done. Divorce is something that you've chosen to do." One woman indicated she believed that the same was true for women who had never been married, expressing that, within the Hindu community, there would be more sympathy for a widow than a single woman.

[147] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 228. Lamb observed that often, in addition to others around them, widows themselves felt they were to blame for the death of their own husband.

This understanding of the singleness of a woman who has never married or who has been divorced as a choice, in contrast to widowhood which was conversely unavoidable or even preordained, reinforces the belief of women in the St. John's Hindu community that widows are not responsible for their husband's death. It is also this perceived lack of control over a widow's marital status, which negates the kind of blame that has been seen in Indian contexts directed at widows, but that instead supports and places a similar fault on divorced women.

No woman opined that she herself believed that widows were to blame for the death of their husband and no widow said she felt at fault for the death of her husband. What the accounts provided on blame make evident is that while some women recognize traditions of faulting widows for their husbands death, the blaming of widows is not only not apparent in the Hindu community in St. John's, it is a pervasive belief amongst women within the Hindu community that faulting a widow for the death of her husband is wrong and should be decried as such. However, some women did see divorcees, in contrast to widows, in a similar capacity to the widows Lamb observes being the subject of blame in India, in that they are believed to have had control over their change in marital status and therefore are at least partially at fault.

3.2.3 Slander's Influence

Though not evidenced in St. John's, this widow blaming that women are often subject to in India, as Lamb observes, is listed by Martha Alter Chen in her introduction to *Widows in India*, as part of the larger issue of "rumours and accusations," one of the

four forms in which Chen found social marginalization most often took shape.[148] Lamb also speaks to this idea within north India, stating, "Probably the second most common reason I was given as to why widows felt compelled to observe the widow's regulations was their wish to avoid slander and to protect the honor or "name" (*nām*) of themselves and their families."[149]

This notion that widowed women practiced certain restrictions out of fear of slander was discussed by women in St. John's as well. One woman in her 30's discussed how she felt that while she and others her age would never only wear white once widowed, she felt the generation before her own hesitated to wear clothing that was coloured out of fear of what others might say. Another woman also mentioned gossip in relation to clothing choices, stating that if a widowed woman in India dressed up, she may be talked about, but indicated she felt that this would not be the case in Canada.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, Tavishi talked about how slander impacted her attire choices once widowed. She explained how her choice to practice certain clothing restrictions was influenced by her mother's wish to avoid gossip:

> Sometimes, because some people used to talk, [they would] say, "Oh she's a widow dressing like that!" and all those things. So sometimes my mother use to feel sad, [and] use to say, "see people are talking like that!" and all those things. Then sometimes I restricted, I would say, "Ok people!" Then afterwards I thought *why I should be changed by the talk of people?* It's our own issue, ok? Especially when we go to Temple, they give us flowers so we take as god's thing, so we use to keep it. Sometimes, yeah, when people talk we feel bad. We feel bad. Sometimes we restrict that is true. We cannot be with full happiness—we cannot do [it] because we feel that people likes talking like that. That is [in] mind—

[148] Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 20-25.
[149] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes,* 222.

> [it] will be for some time. —Then afterwards it is my own wish, I thought *why should I care for people? If I wish I'm doing, that's all.*

Tavishi's remarks show that not only her concern, but her mother's concern as well, over others gossiping about her clothing choices influenced her to change the way she dressed. While this was not a permanent change in attire, and she eventually returned to her previous manner of dress during her marriage, the above statement indicates that she felt that she had to actively disregard likely slander from others to dress the way she wanted. Further, Tavishi expressed that like her adherence to a particular clothing choice, the ability to ignore gossip was not constant and caused sufficient unhappiness to decide to return to clothing restrictions she thought would generate less criticism. Tavishi went on to say that sometimes women were forced to "control" what they wore because "people are vermins."

Tavishi's experiences, and her reflections on those experiences in very severe terms, demonstrate that a widow's clothing choices can be directly affected by fear of slander, as is the case for the women Lamb describes. However, Tavishi's assertions also show that as a widowed woman now in Canada she defends deciding to please herself and clearly condemns gossip as a factor for implementing restrictions.

Though these statements from Tavishi make evident the impact of slander on widows' attire choices within Hindu communities, many women discussed how they felt gossip was not as prevalent within Canadian contexts as within South Asian contexts. Chandi described how she saw society in Asia as "collective" and society in North America as "individual":

> North America's more individualistic. So what you do for yourself—good, bad—that's your responsibility. But it's not the same [in South Asia]. It's more, again, [that] society is very collective. Very, very like "my business is not only my mom and dad's business, my business is my aunt [and] uncle's business. My business is my next-door neighbour's business. My business is my colleague's business."

For Chandi also, there was a clear distinction between a North American system of independence and a shared involvement in one another's lives in South Asia, though Chandi added that this was not an all-together positive difference. Anwita echoed Chandi's remarks, while asserting that though it happened occasionally in St. John's, gossiping about a Hindu widow's choices was less likely to occur because in Canada "we are not that much social with our neighbourhood or we don't know that many people [and] that makes a big difference. " Kamal similarly indicated she perceived differences between Canadian and Indian levels of involvement in the personal interests and actions of other individuals impacting one's decision making for fear of others' opinions:

> Because in India the community is very judgmental. People live a lot of the time because of what community's expectations are. People here in Canada, yes community has expectations, but they don't have expectations on the personal level. They just have expectations that you're going to be respectful.

Sushmita, too, voiced this perspective, saying that in Canada "nobody points fingers." Kamal, Chandi, Anwita and Sushmita's views all show perceived involvement in the behaviours of others within communities, including the Hindu community, in St. John's to be minimal.

3.2.4 Sexuality and Remarriage

In addition to her experiences with gossip informing clothing, Tavishi also spoke of gossip affecting her work life in India when she was younger and first widowed. She stated that she felt men were unwilling to aid her in the workplace because men feared others insinuating that he had a sexual interest in her. As noted above at the beginning of this chapter, and again in the context of friendships, extant scholarship attributes social isolation for widows as part of a perception of a woman's uncontrolled sexuality. Chen states, for example, that the social marginalization of widows is established in part through the "rumours and accusations" about widows "as sexually threatening."[150]

With specifics to gossip to do with the sexuality of a widow, women interviewed focused on the choice to date or marry again and how that would be considered and discussed within the community. Again, women felt that just as with gossip in a more general sense, talk amongst others in the Hindu community about a widow's romantic life was less likely to occur in St. John's than in South Asia. Jiya stated that she thought widowed Hindu women would be less gossiped about in St. John's than in India should they, for instance, go for coffee with a man, saying that she felt people in Newfoundland would "be happy to see them." In contrast, she felt in India they would be talked of negatively in the community for this outing. Ratna similarly asserted that she believed the actions of individuals were less likely to be discussed amongst others in Canada, and as a result the remarriage of Hindu widows could be more practiced in Canada than in South

[150] Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 25.

Asia, saying, "because in Canadian society no one will look at you. Who, what you are doing, and [all] this, is your personal life."

The acceptability of remarriage for widows was a topic that arose repeatedly in interviews. The *Laws of Manu* states of widows:

> Aspiring to that unsurpassed Law of women devoted to a single husband, she should remain patient, controlled, and celibate until her death. Untold thousands of Brahmins who have remained celibate from their youth have gone to heaven without producing offspring to continue their family line. Just like these celibates, a good woman, though she be sonless, will go to heaven when she steadfastly adheres to the celibate life after her husband's death. [151]

Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra states, "Union with a woman of lower caste and a twice married woman is neither desirable nor forbidden."[152] Additionally, the Kautilīya Arthaśāstras suggest that a widow may remarry with the permission of her deceased husband's father[153] and both the *Laws of Manu*[154] and the Dharmasūtras prescribe levirate remarriage, or *niyoga*, practice in certain circumstances for widows.[155] According to Hindu women in St. John's, much like within these sacred texts, there was no clear answer about the ability of Hindu widows to remarry.

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[151]Patrick Olivelle, Suman Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) V. 158-160.
[152] Usha M. Apte *The Sacrement of Marriage in Hindu Society* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1978), 156.
[153] R. P. Kangle, trans., *Kautilīya Arthaśāstras* 2nd ed. Vol. No. 1-2.(Bombay: University of Bombay Press, 1969) 3.2.23.
[154] Olivelle and Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, IX 58-70. Though allowed, levirate is only prescribed for exceptional situations.
[155] Patrick Olivelle trans., *Dharamasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasiṣṭha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003) Gautama Dharamasūtras 28.22-23, Baudhāyana Dharamasūtras 2:4.9-10.

Hindu sacred texts, as well as some existing scholarly works, provide varying portrayals and perceptions of the control of the sexuality of Hindu widows. The *Laws of Manu* state that, apart from the practice of *niyoga* for a single son, a widow is to remain chaste. Olivelle, in *Cultural, Historical and Textual Studies of South Asian Religions,* likens the prescribed life of a Hindu widow to those of the world renouncer and the vedic student, in part, because all three are "forbidden to have sexual relations."[156] Julia Leslie explores an analogous framework to that of Olivelle, identifying the ideal lifestyle of a widow to be akin to that of the celibate student according to Tryambakayajvan.[157] Leslie, additionally, in a separate work uses Tryambakayajvan's *Stridharmapadhaati or Guide to the Dharma of Women* and Vasudevasrama's *Yatidharmaprakasa or Explanation of the Dharama of Ascetics* to compare the path prescribed in these texts for a Hindu widow to that of a male renouncer. Celibacy, once again, characterizes both.[158]

Looking outside the sexuality of widows proscribed in sacred texts to modern lived experience, Lamb observes that in north India food and clothing restrictions were practiced as a "measure of controlling a widow's sexuality" because they had "no acceptable way of dissipating the heat of their pent-up sexual desire."[159] Sheleyah A.

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[156] Patrick Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion,* Cultural, Historical and Textual Studies of Religions (London: Anthem Press, 2011) 333.
[157] Julia Leslie and Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Strīdharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan*, Oxford University South Asian Studies Series (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) 88.
[158] Julia Leslie, "Religion, Gender and Dharma: the Case of the Widow-Ascetic" in *Religion: Empirical Studies: a Collection to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions* ed. Steven Sutcliffe (Aldershot, Hants, England : Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 165-177.
[159] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes,* 220. See also, Sheleyah A. Courtney, "Savitri, the Unshackled *Shakti*: Goddess Identification, Violence and the Limits of Cultural Subversion of Widows in Vārāṇāsī," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 37: no.2 (2014): 270. See also Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India," 10; Sarah Lamb, "Aging, Gender and Widowhood: Perspectives from Rural West Bengal," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no.3 (1999), 546.

Courtney also notes that there are "cultural prescriptions for managing the sexuality of widows" in Vārāṇāsī.[160] Chakravarti focuses on the sexuality of widows extensively in "Gender Caste and Labour" concluding, "The widow's institutionalized marginality, a liminal state between being physically alive and being socially dead was the ultimate cultural outcome of the deprivation of the widow of her sexuality as well as her personhood."[161] These works demonstrate the perceived sexuality of widows in Hindu communities greatly impacts the position of the Hindu widow within her community.

Two women spoke directly to the sexuality of widows, both within the context of food. Anwita recounted her understanding of the relationship between food and sexuality for a widow:

> We have two kinds of food; *sattvic—sattvic* means the pure food which make[s] you calm, and quiet and you know, and *tamasic* like meat and all these drinks and this and it can stimulate you. So you can go on wrong path.

She went on to indicate that widows who eliminate such *tamasic* food from their diets were doing so prevent "these desires." [162] Anwita's relating "stimulation" and "desires" to the "wrong path" for widows indicates that, in her understanding, *tamasic* foods are

[160] Sheleyah A. Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety: Aging Women in Vārāṇāsī," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology,* 52, No.3 (Winter 2008): 78.
[161] Chakravarti "Gender, Caste and Labour,"64-66.
[162] Though Anwita lists only *tamasic* and *sattvic,* a third state of being(*guna*), *rajasic,* is listed along with these two terms in *The Bhagavad Gita*. It describes the qualities of each state in one verse: "From sattva knowledge is born, And from rajas desire; Negligence and delusion arise From tamas, and ignorance too." It is interesting therefore to note that Anwita associates *tamasic* foods with desire, Winthrop Sargeant, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2009) XIV 17.

removed to help widows to avoid these impulses for their own benefit, implying that widowed women should control sexual impulses.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, the other woman to talk about the sexuality of a Hindu widow, Jiya, similarly expressed that she was aware of understandings that protein increased "sexual airs." She explained that widowed women in her family had stopped eating meat because of this, stating, "they are not suppose to be sexually active." Jiya also indicated, like Tavishi's experience with clothing choices, she perceived some of the changes her widowed female family members made were due, in part, to worrying about judgment from others in the community. However, when asked whether Hindu women would give up eating meat in Newfoundland for the same reasons, Jiya responded, "In here? I don't think they would stop anything!" Jiya's remark identifies that while she noted a tradition of restricting a woman's diet to control sexual desires, she viewed this as a practice not found within the context of her own geographic surroundings.

The majority of women interviewed did indicate that they were aware of notions that within Hindu traditions, either in Canada or in South Asia, in present or past times, widow remarriage had not been acceptable. One woman, Madu, stated, "For example, when it comes to widowhood, the first thing that people would say—and not generalizing because I have heard it—widows are said not to be able to marry again." Madu stressed that that she felt inability to remarry was such a seemingly defining characteristic of Hindu widowhood for others that it was top of mind for most when talking about widows in Hindu traditions. Madu went on to state that she understood the perceived restrictions

on remarrying to be partially caused by societal blame of the widow for the death of her husband, and therefore it was thought that a second marriage would once again end with the death of her husband, due to her inauspiciousness. As noted above of the participants generally, Madu argued that she felt this view of widows, though a prevalent perception of widowhood for Hindu women, was not one she shared, and additionally was pleased to see it changing around the world.

Jiya also spoke to an acceptance of remarriage. She voiced her desire to see her sister with "some company" but stated her sister felt "you only marry once and that's it." Jiya stated that she saw this as a "boundary" that many widows, in places such as her home village in Bangladesh, did not want to cross because of how much was expected of individuals to restrict themselves to the prescribed practices of "that society," so they accepted the limitations on marriage for widows. Like Chandi, Kamal, and Anwita, Jiya saw Canada as having fewer expectations on, and accountability of, an individual and therefore her widowed sister in South Asia abided by restrictions with which Jiya disagreed. While Jiya noted constraints on a widow's ability marry again, she specified she saw adherence to the restrictions on remarriage as a problematic result of the culture of villages in South Asia, and she herself viewed remarriage for widows positively.

Another woman, Padma, when asked how she felt other Hindus thought of widows responded:

> I think it boils down to your basic education and your upbringing, and I think most educated Hindus, in this day and time, you know, in fact they sometimes encourage widows to remarry, though it doesn't happen that often, especially that way it's easier for a widower, a man to remarry than for a woman to remarry.

Padma's response demonstrates that while she perceived the acceptance of remarriage for widows to be directly corresponded to a Hindu individual's possession of a basic education, she believed remarriage for widowed women remained infrequent.

Further, Padma voiced that she felt it was easier for a man who had been widowed to marry again than for a woman to do the same. Padma provided the search done by her now ex-husband, who was a widower with children, when looking for a wife in India, as an example. She stated that she learned, only after marrying him, that when he was looking to remarry, as a widower, he specifically sought for a wife a woman who had not been married before and should that not be possible, only a woman who had no children from the previous union. Padma stated, "I was dumbfounded. I said, "had I known this before, I never would have married because you got double standards!""

Padma's account of her ex-husband's search parameters for finding a second wife makes evident that women who are widowed are commonly seen as less desirable for marriage based on a stigma of widowhood and even less desirable if they are mother to another man's child. Padma indicated she felt these restrictions for one's marriageability were "double standards," and she viewed them negatively enough to suggest that their marriage would not have taken place had she known her husband set such search guidelines. Other non-widowed women interviewed also spoke to a notable gendered inequality in remarriage constraints. Madu, in addition to identifying consideration of remarriage to be prohibited for widows as a recurring focus for any discussions on Hindu experiences of widowhood, also referred to the imbalance for widowers and widows she

believed to be present in association with any such restrictions on remarriage. She felt that it was often thought in Hindu communities that a man could remarry but a woman could not, and stated, "I just, personally, I would just say it's not fair. It's not fair. It should be equal, be it a man or a woman, like everything. But then one person's thought cannot change the society, so that's where it plays." For Madu, this inequality was something she saw as rooted so deeply in society that she could not deny its existence but that she felt was plainly unfair.

While the *Laws of Manu* prescribes that widows are not allowed to remarry,[163] it proclaims of men marrying again, "After he has given his sacred fires to his predeceased wife at her funeral, he should marry a wife again and establish anew his sacred fires."[164] Therefore, according to this sacred text, widowers, in contrast to widows, are free from any restrictions to remarry.

Overwhelmingly, women viewed the remarriage of widowers as a more frequent occurrence, saying that they observed, unlike widows, it was unusual for men not to remarry. Several women attributed this disparity not to an adherence to Hindu beliefs found in any sacred texts like *the Laws of Manu*, but to the amount of gossip that would accompany a widow remarrying, but not a widower remarrying. As observed earlier with regard to women's clothing choices and food restrictions, the prohibited remarriage of a widow too is seen as potentially leading to social isolation by means of the rumours and accusations, as Chen also documents.[165] Madu noted, "People don't talk much about guys

[163] Olivelle and Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, V.158-160, IX 64-68. Though, as noted above, in rare cases, *niyoga* is allowable.
[164] Olivelle and Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, V.168.
[165] Chen, introduction to *Widows in India*, 25.

remarrying" and suggested that women, by contrast, are talked of poorly and extensively when they remarry. Jiya stated:

> For a widower, you know, if they're really young they can go out and get married. If they have any children, they can take care of the children. But then again, if woman has two kids or one kid, and she goes out and marr[ies] again, it's like, you know, talk of the town!

Jiya's remark not only reinforces a perceived absence of any gossip should a widower marry again, and the acute presence of gossip if a widow were to marry again, but also that the gossip aimed at a widow is intensified if she has children at the time of remarriage.

Looking outside the Hindu, Canadian, or Indian contexts, Kate Davidson, in "Late Life Widowhood, Selfishness and New Partnership Choices: a Gendered Perspective" examines remarriage of widowers and widows in the UK. Davidson found in this UK study that late life widowers were more likely to consider marrying again than widows.[166] She states that widowers' consideration of remarriage was "more likely to be predicated on age and health status, whereas the widows were more likely to rule out a new relationship because they valued their independence, regardless of age or health status."[167] This indicates that for later life widowhood broadly within Western countries, widows are less likely than widowers to consider remarriage a possibility because of a perceived greater independence within widowhood over marriage. This would imply that

[166] Kate Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood, Selfishness and New Partnership Choices: a Gendered Perspective", *Ageing and Society 21, no.3,* (May 2001), 298.
[167] Kate Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood," 314.

widowers more generally, in a Western diaspora setting, are more likely to remarry than widows regardless of perceived religious acceptance.

Davidson observes that men's primary reasoning for not wanting to remarry stems from perceived age and health restrictions rather than the desire to retain any advantages from widowhood such as freedom in living alone. Davidson's article further establishes that widows have differing motivations for not remarrying, and that, in contrast to widowers, these rationales do not focus on age and health restrictions.

Though Davidson observed this as predominantly a motivation for not remarrying amongst widowers in the UK, one Hindu widow in St. John's did offer age restrictions as the primary reason she no longer considered the possibility of remarriage. Tavishi talked of how, when she was first widowed, she had received an offer of marriage that her family agreed to but she refused. She stated this was because she felt she would never find anyone as affectionate and caring as her deceased husband. Tavishi expressed that she now found it lonely to not be married but felt that "the age passes where men are willing to marry you." She indicated that when she sees a widow she offers the advice "Don't spend your time 'cause in the future you may hav[e] a problem." Get remarried that is best thing."

Davidson's study identifies that in contemporary Western society, inclination towards remarrying is less impacted by "the sanctification of a dead spouse" than by "gendered experience of the institution of marriage," [168] resulting in a desire to marry again for men and a desire to retain independence for women, however Tavishi's

[168] Kate Davidson, "Late Life Widowhood," 299.

experience differs from the women Davidson observes, as her refusal of remarriage initially was based on such a sanctification. Unlike the widows in the UK that Davidson discusses, Tavishi indicated a desire for remarriage and, like the widowers in Davidson's study, suggested that age was the constraint on which her current inclination to not remarry was based. Such recommendations from Tavishi as the one she relayed, telling younger widows to remarry rather than regret being alone as they age, exemplifies that for Tavishi it is not remarriage that is unacceptable or not beneficial for widows, but, instead, it was the difficulty to remarry after a certain age that Tavishi viewed as preventing her from getting married again. This indicates that it is not discernably a clear singular religious or societal restriction that stops Hindu widows in St. John's from remarrying, as it may also be perceived age limitations or, as with Davidson's observations, a desire to maintain the independence of widowhood that was not previously found for that widow in marriage. It is therefore not evident that prescribed celibacy or prohibition of remarriage found in Hinduism, is the sole basis for the disparities between rates of widow and widower remarriage.

Many other women interviewed provided similar causes and rationales for Hindu widows not remarrying that were outside of acknowledged religious rules against remarriage, in that they were not recognized as such by either the women offering these reasons or by the scriptures and scholarly works cited earlier. Anwita provided multiple possibilities for a widow not participating in remarriage that did not cite remarriage for widows being prohibited. First, she stated that, historically, women had outnumbered men, especially following any periods of war. Secondly, she contended that within Hindu

communities, even in Canadian locations, the same Western dating system did not exist, so women could not date easily after being widowed.

Finally, Anwita argued that women chose not to remarry because of family, "If they have children most of the time they don't remarry because of children's sake. Because they don't want [to] bring more problem[s] in their life." Anwita went on to reason that it was not only due to this concern for her children that a widow did not remarry, but out of respect for her in-laws because they would not want a stepfather for their grandchildren. Anwita also indicated that she viewed not remarrying after widowhood as a sign that a widow was supported by her family. The reasons for a widow not remarrying that Anwita lists suggest that she perceived an absence in remarriage for widows that was, at least in part, due to widows choosing to not remarry rather than being prohibited from the practice. Anwita's statements indicate that she did not view widow remarriage as unacceptable within Hinduism, but argued it was a practice which had not commonly taken place for various reasons other than any restrictions within Hindu traditions.

Anwita's defense against restrictions on remarriage being part of Hinduism is echoed by Ratna, who indicated that she knew of no scripture or law against remarriage, "So in the religion, as I said in the beginning, nothing [is] written, as [is] my understanding, that you can marry or you cannot marry. It's not there. It's the society. It's the priest. It's the family. So context is there." The arguments of Anwita and Ratna against remarriage being part of Hindu religion show not only that they did not view restrictions on remarriage, or the association of Hindu traditions with those constraints

favourably, but also that they did recognize infrequency in rates of remarriage for widows within Hindu contexts for which they felt they needed to account in defense of the Hindu religion.

In line with Ratna and Anwita's assertions that remarriage restrictions were contextual and not true of Hinduism itself, statements from other participants regarding remarriage largely conveyed a sense that the practice of remarriage was thought to be much more openly accepted in Newfoundland than it was felt to be South Asia. Jiya indicated that she believed that the possibility of marrying again was more "open" in Canada than in Bangladesh and that she would like to see Hindu culture in the village where she grew up make a shift towards that perceived approval. A few women besides Jiya also used the term "open" to describe the perceived difference in remarriage practices in Canada from South Asia.

Ratna not only believed that remarriage for Hindu widows was likelier to be practiced in Canada, she said she felt in North America that remarriage for Hindu women would be the same as for non-Hindus. She asserted, like Padma, that more education was a factor for one's society accepting remarriage. Ratna further stated that she believed remarriage was more prevalent in Newfoundland because "in a Canadian society no one will look at you, who, what you are doing and this is your personal life." Ratna's assessment reinforces the statements discussed previously in this chapter of Chandi, Jiya and Kamal that noted they felt that restrictions, such as clothing and diet guidelines, were not as adhered to in Canada as strictly because a primary motivation for participating in changes associated with a shift from wife to widow was that of gossip, and the perceived

limited involvement from others in one's community removed the threat of social ostracism in that form.

What is evident is that while Hindu women in St. John's noted a tradition of limited remarriage, dating and sexual relations, the acceptability of remarriage itself in St. John's is not an obviously approved or prohibited practice. The ability to remarry with approval of the community as a part of a stigmatization and marginalization of widows through gossip, as observed by Chen's framework, is not immediately discernable. While recognized by the women in the Hindu community in St. John's as something related to Hindu cultures, inability to remarry, along with restrictions on clothing and diet choices being informed by the fear of gossip and slander was often talked of in terms of past or present Indian culture rather than current Hindu Canadian lived experiences.

As is seen by examining the activities and relationships of widows in their religious and social life, exclusion is not defined or absolute. Some women stated that they did not see exclusion due to the death of a spouse as existing in Canada at all, some saw it to varying degrees that could be overcome by differing means, such as family support and skills, and widows themselves understood exclusion to be a decision that was made by a widow herself. Social isolation and ostracism for widows as decided by gossip, blame, sexual threat, and inauspiciousness and the prescriptions associated with each, in combination or alone, are not distinguishable in the perceptions and experiences of widowhood in the Hindu community in St. John's. Limitations on, and restrictions from, activities and relationships are not clearly acknowledged or explicit for widowed women, but statements from widows and non-widows indicating responsibility and

choice from widows to participate illustrate that a widowed woman must find her own way to engage in her new singlehood as she is presented with decisions for exclusion and inclusion that a married woman is not. Therefore, the relationship of a widow to the religious and social life of the Hindu community is not definitive, clear, or absolute, but rather continuously conflicting and changing personal experience that is unique to each woman in her contexts.

The relationship of widows to the religious or social life of the Hindu community in St. John's is not a definite or absolute one that clearly manifests in social isolation or ostracism. Though exclusion of and restrictions for widows are seen to varying degrees by other Hindu women, widows' circumstances are not comparable to those often observed in India; that is, by a predominant collective understanding of significant marginalization within her community. As the centrality or marginalization of widows is not fixed within the broader religious and social life of the St. John's Hindu community, the widow's position within her familial relationships in the Newfoundland context will be analyzed in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Four

"Taking care": Familial Relationships of Widows

Given the experiences detailed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis that illustrate the effect family members can have on a woman's clothing, diet, and participation in auspicious activities, as well as the emphasis on an individual widows' familial context examined in the review of extant scholarship, it is important to examine familial relationships of widows in the Hindu Canadian diaspora. Familial relationships were also frequently a focal point for women during interviews, including in describing examples of respected widowed woman in their lives, and as part of a discussion on the issues women face that are particular to widowhood. As such, a widow's relationships, position and role within her family and household as effected by systems of hierarchy, economic independence, living situations, and generational differences with immigration will be discussed in this chapter.

In *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender and Body in North India*, Sarah Lamb suggests a model for understanding north Indian familial relationships which she calls "long-term (deferred) reciprocity."[169] She describes this as a system wherein adult children feel the need and are expected to repay elderly parents for the gifts and care they received as children. She concludes that within this system there are central and periphery positions within the family; those who are not providing or giving goods or services within a family are peripheral and those who are providing are considered central. Additionally, she observes that the family consists of a hierarchy where "seniors, the "increased" and "grown" folk, give out blessings and guidance to, and receive services and respect from, juniors and little ones."[170] Lamb also states that this system in which "adult children (especially sons and non-working daughters-in-law) care for their aging parents out of love, a general respect for elders, and a deep sense that they are obligated to attempt to repay the effort, expense, and affection their parents expended to produce them, has long been a key part of "Indian" identity."[171]

However, Lamb and others often assert that this hierarchy is patriarchal, and while elders are respected and sought after for advice, and blessings, centrality for women is dependent on whether or not they are married. This model of long-term (deferred) reciprocity, and similar models proposed by other scholars analyzing joint

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[169] Sarah Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 45.
[170] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes,* 45.
[171] Sarah Lamb, "Aging across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora," in *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy, ed.* Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) 133-134.

family households in India, argue that women, once widowed, are no longer at the top of familial hierarchies, but rather are replaced by eldest sons and daughters-in-laws.[172]

Wadley uses the terms "mother's kingdom," "mother-in-law's kingdom," and "the kingdom of the daughter-in-law" to describe the changing realms in a woman's life cycle in rural contexts of north India.[173] This model suggests not only that women are subordinate to others depending on marital status, but also that a woman's living arrangements are changed with a change in marital status, if not physically from home to home, then in arrangements and dynamics in her familial relationships.

When speaking of family members who had been widowed, many participants described relationships positively. Several women gave examples of widows in their own family whom they viewed as occupying a matriarchal position; giving advice to both male and female younger members of the family, occupying a leadership position in household activities, and providing a voice of approval or disapproval. When speaking about relatives who had been widowed, participants often discussed 'respect' as a key aspect of the relationship. Sushmita, described her mother-in-law's relationship to the family as follows:

> As it is, she was running the house, she was the main person in the house, she brought up the kids, so the respect for her as a mother was there. And it continued ‘cause she was a strong lady, and had the money of her own. And she controlled the house very much. You could not do

[172] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 72; Phoebe Liebig and P.V. Ramamurti, "Living Arrangements and Social Support for Older Adults in India," in *Handbook of Asian Aging*, ed. Hyunsook Yoon and Jon Hendricks (Amityville: Baywood Publishing, 2006), 243; Rekha Pande, "Widows of Vrindavan-Feminisation of Old Age in India," *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 10 (March 2015): 213.
[173] Susan Wadley, "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Lindsey Harlan, and Paul B. Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93.

> anything in the house without her noticing it. Even when we are living here [in St. John's], we'd call her and consult.

Sushmita provided not only an account of her mother-in-law's leadership role within her husband's family household, which was in India, but described a role as head of the family that extends to guidance over her own and her husband's decision making in Canada. She spoke of a respect from her mother-in-law's children that Sushmita suggested was present before her mother in-law became a widow. She described this respect as the result of her mother-in-law's fulfillment of her duties as a mother, as well as her mother-in-law's leadership within the household prior to the death of her husband and as a respect that has endured into her widowhood.

Additionally, Sushmita also described how she perceives her own mother and her grandmother's relationships with her natal family:

> But the kind of thing that my mother-in-law commanded, my mother didn't. But she was happy with it. She didn't want to get into that. She just did half the time there [in India] and half here and enjoyed the grandkids and she was happy. My nans lived for one year shy of 100 years and she also had independent money of her own, she lived with her son and she had no problems. But she didn't control anything, she was by herself, more religious, she used to read books, holy scriptures and all.

While talking about both her mother and her mother-in-law, Sushmita indicated that in addition to respect for widows because of their familial roles, a strong factor in the continued respect for widows is financial independence. While other non-widowed women stated the importance of financial independence for women, especially once widowed, Sushmita spoke directly to the link of respect and monetary self-sufficiency:

"So I felt economically if they are independent then they are fine. If they are not then they are a burden on the family, and the family thinks of various ways of getting rid of them. And the respect is not there." Sushmita contrasted this idea of being a burden on one's family because of financial dependence to her family's relationship with her mother-in-law, "My mother-in-law was an economically independent, very strong lady, everybody respected her, she just died a couple of months back at the age of 82, very strong lady. We all respected her, she was the head of the family. We'd call her for advice, and never thought 'she's a widow.'"

Sushmita described her relationship with her mother-in-law as a very respectful one, but suggested that her economic independence, as well as her perceived strength, are partially what contributed to her not being thought of or treated any differently following the death of her husband. While Sushmita did not describe her natal mother or grandmother as leaders, she again stressed that they were financially independent.

However, Sushmita located this emphasis on the impact of financial independence on respectful relationships with widows in the Indian context. When speaking about Hindu widows in Canadian contexts she suggested that while families will see their widowed relatives as burdens if they are not financially independent, she perceived most Hindu women in Canada to be financial independent:

> There are widows that they are seniors, but they are respected by their kids so much. You see a love there and they've taken care of their mothers. And of course, living in Canada you get Canada seniors pension or whatever, so they have independent money. Here being a burden is not a problem because you are not a burden. Everybody is wealthy enough to take care of their family. Parents come here to help with the kids when the kids are young, so they respect the amount of

> effort mothers are putting in. So I don't see any problems here. One of the seniors that now I see is handicapped, but the daughter takes care of her so well and loves her so much and she teaches scripture classes and all her students take care of her.

Sushmita here suggested that financial independence is less of a factor in the relationship between a widow and her children and grandchildren in a Canadian context. Though she attributed this, in part, to a perception that Hindu families in Canada are wealthier overall than families in India, she also attributed it to the amount of effort that senior women put into the family when immigrating. Here she indicated that she perceived a direct link within Canada to the roles taken on in a diaspora context and the respect children have for senior widowed parents. Sushmita's statements suggest a reciprocity similar to Lamb's model of long-term reciprocity, where child debt is increased when parents have immigrated or helped children immigrate to Canada.

Additionally, Sushmita here has indicated that she viewed families in Canada to have loving relationships with their widowed parents not only because of the levels respect she perceives but also because these widowed women are 'taken care of.' Several other women interviewed used this phrase to describe family members' relationships with widowed relatives. Sylvia Vatuk, who like Lamb, writes about a system of intergenerational long-term reciprocity, discusses the idea of *seva*, or service, from children to aging parents. *Seva* is comprised of, "an atmosphere of harmony within the household and a regular display of respect, deference and loving concern for the older person" that "is crucial to attaining the fortunate state of one who is carefree (*befikr*),

without any worry (*cintā*)."[174] While women interviewed did not use the word *seva* when discussing those they know, their descriptions of extended family members who were "taken care of" were very similar to Vatuk's definition of *seva.*[175] Many participants used this phrase as Sushmita did to suggest a positive family situation for widows. Ratna, for example, echoes the language of *seva* as she contrasts the condition of widows who are well cared for with those who are deprived of good care:

> Some widow will get very good importance and taking care by their children and their life is extremely good. And they will be happy to talk to you and will share in their story, but some, here even, North American widow, who lives with their family but not getting enough importance or help or deprived, they may not be comfortable to talk to you.

This dichotomy between being "taken care of" or being "deprived," wherein being "taken care of" by family is considered a direct factor in one's happiness or quality of life, was mentioned by many participants. Vatuk similarly says, "Rhetorically, happiness and contentment in old age is typically conveyed by reciting the various kinds of *seva* received from younger family members."[176]

While the statements of Ratna and Sushmita resemble what Vatuk says of *seva* and the contentment at receiving care from younger family members in age, Jiya relayed

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[174] Sylvia Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others": Dependency Anxiety Among the Elderly in India," in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, ed. Owen M. Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 72.
[175] Though Murti does not discuss the use of the phrase, it is interesting to note that South Indian Hindu women living in Southern California are quoted in her article using this phrase to talk about children, medical workers, and senior centres positively. Lata Murti, "At Both Ends of Care: South Indian Hindu Widows Living with Daughters and Daughters-in-Law in Southern California," *Globalizations* 3, no.3 (2006): 361-376.
[176] Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others,"" 72.

a variation in the receipt of happiness found in loving care for a family member. Jiya quoted her mother who had been widowed to suggest that one's ability to "take care" of others was also seen as affecting one's quality of life. She stated, "Now, I don't know if she was angry or, you know, when she got angry with something, or she'd be sad or with something, or anything like that, she said, "once you are [old], once you don't have anybody to take care of, you got nobody. You got no one."" Here, Jiya indicates that one's relationship with family is centered on one "taking care" of another, and if both children and parent are self-sufficient then it is as if the relationship does not exist at all. Similarly, Ratna described a conversation with her own widowed mother, saying:

> At a certain point at one time when I visited my mom, and she was talking like, "this is such a lonely life, when you lost your husband and you are busy with taking care of your children, and everything and at a certain point of your age, all, leave—all left you and you are all by yourself, and when in the middle of the night, you are to share something to someone, in my bed I am all by myself."

Both Jiya and Ratna described conversations with their widowed mothers where they speak to a change in both quality of life and quality of relationships that does not happen with the change in marital status from wife to widow, but rather with their children's adulthood because they can no longer "take care" of them. These statements also suggest that it is not because of a lack of care from children, and a resulting shame as Lamb describes in north India, that quality of life is lowered, but rather a loneliness from no longer physically being with and taking care of one's children. Padma also spoke to this idea saying, "And there has to be an urge, so I think the woman have to find… like if

they were living just to look after the spouse, or the house, or the family, or the children, then once that is gone, then what you living for?"

Like Jiya and Ratna, Padma argued that a widowed mother's quality of life can be directly affected by the diminishing needs of children, but Padma suggested that this was partially because widowed women were not transferring this attention to themselves, "if [your children are] all gone then you have to look after, first and foremost, you have to look after yourself." Unlike within Lamb and Vatuk's long-term intergenerational reciprocity, wherein as children become adults, parents begin to be cared for by children, Padma suggested that once parents are no longer caring for children, they should begin to care for themselves.

Padma, Jiya and Ratna all suggested that without children or a husband to "take care" of a woman may experience a loss of sense of purpose and an increased loneliness. While Padma spoke of this generally, referring to widowed women both here and in India, both Jiya and Ratna referred to their mothers' experiences in India and suggested that this lack of parental caretaker role was, at least in part, related to their mothers' children living geographically afar. While Padma argued for living independently and learning to transfer one's attention from child to self, Ratna and Jiya's descriptions of their mothers' experience suggests that they perceive the physical closeness of a widow and her children to affect that individual widow's quality of life and therefore imply negative consequences for a woman who is a widow living independently or separate from family.

Ratna indicated that she saw a significant difference between a woman widowed living in India and one in Canada stating, "in our culture, in Indian family situation, you

are like supported and comforted by your family members there. But here, not many family… the children go away for their job, sometime these widow just live on their own at home alone, so that is a real terrible situation." Ratna's statement indicates that she viewed a widow living alone as a negative situation that is more likely in a Canadian context.

Many participants spoke to this difference in familial living arrangements between Canada and India, often discussing the idea of joint family households. Sarah Lamb observes that "Large, multi-generation families are commonly associated with morality, fellow-feeling, tradition, a time when kinship was more important than material success, warm rambling households, a connection to village lands, spirituality, patriarchy and again "Indianness.""[177] While women interviewed in St. John's spoke both positively and negatively about joint family living situations, all suggested that they perceived the joint family system to be less prevalent amongst Hindu families in Canada than in India and less present in St. John's than in larger Canadian cities such as Toronto.

One woman said that this was a positive change for widows because she perceived widows within a joint family to be forced to perform a lot of chores. Another similarly indicated that she perceived widows were more likely to be resented if they lived in a joint family household. However, like Ratna, some women spoke to perceived benefits of adults, especially seniors, living with adult children. Often women spoke positively of situations they had seen or experienced wherein a widowed mother lived with children. Frequently this was compared to the alternative, "Western" practice, of

[177] Lamb, "Aging across Worlds," 134.

widows entering a nursing home once they were no longer able to live alone. Brinda stated:

> Because in a senior citizen's home they are not looked very well, I know that. They won't get proper food, food that they are used to, number one. They don't feel comfortable either being washed and cleaned and change diapers and whatever else, right? Giving bath or men coming and changing, you know? So they prefer to be home until their last breath, the widows. And children, whether they like it or not, they have to grind their teeth and be able to look after them. Most of Indians are in love really, they hire extra help, course they have services or whatever in Canada to get some nurse in there to get to come and help you right?

Brinda's remarks echo what Lamb suggests, that adult children whether they would like to care for their parents or not are expected to, and must care for their parents, including widowed mothers. Brinda's statement also shows that she perceived children that are "in love" with their parents are those who get in-home nurses, but also specifies that most Indians in Canada are in this category, though she indicated she felt this is because it is easier to obtain these services within Canada. Madu echoes this perceived dichotomy between the well-being of widows living with children in old age and the deprivation faced by those in nursing homes saying:

> These days, most tend to either have nurse who comes to the house, and spend time with the older generation or older citizen, I would say, or they tend to send them to the old age home. Which is very unfortunate because … think of … think about you taking care of your baby, making him or her the person they are, and then suddenly they sending you home—to the old age home. I know the same thing, like Canadians don't even like that, but then, they don't have an option. Because rather than being a burden on your son, or your daughter, it's—they choose to go …. there's no other option basically, like … my heart breaks when I see.

Madu's remarks suggest that not only did she see nursing homes as a negative and "Western" concept, but that she viewed them as negative because they represent a failure of reciprocity of what has been given by parents in early life. This comment, that mirrors the models of Vatuk and Lamb, also suggests that Madu perceived that most Canadians choose to enter old age homes rather than be a burden to their children, in contrast to the Hindu Canadians whom Madu implied want to live with their children.

Many participants spoke to this perceived difference in living arrangements not only for women who had been widowed but for parents of adult children in general. Women said that without the joint family system that was present in India, within the Canadian context, adult children were more likely to live separately from their parents, as well as further away from the family home. Because of this, women indicated that Hindu widows were not necessarily living with sons as they understood was most often the case in India. Several women stated that within Canada there was no expectation of a change in living arrangement with the change of marital status into widowhood, and that in later years of life women were equally likely to be living with children of either sex, by themselves, or in a nursing home. However, many women commented on the idea of living with a son in old age as the "traditional" custom. This role of the son is something both Lamb and Vatuk also emphasize, indicating that within the Indian system of long-term intergenerational reciprocity a daughter's debts are forgiven at marriage (though she

becomes indebted to her new family),[178] and a son and daughter-in-law's duty is to repay his natal parents as they age, therefore parents are to live with their sons in older age.[179]

Several women hinted at the possibility of conflict within and across generations about where a woman who is widowed might live. Sushmita did this when describing where she herself would go in her older age if she were to become a widow:

> That's what I tell my son, who's getting married, I say, "Look, I carried you when you were a child, now you get ready to carry me around. When I grow old because I'm going become like a child." And he'd laugh off, but in our culture, the responsibility falls on the son to take care of the parents. Though, my daughter keeps saying, "Mom, don't worry, you come and live with me."

Sushmita suggested that she herself is conflicted about the future possibility of living with her son, which she described in terms of a long-term deferred reciprocity, as well as the apparent choice, because her daughter, unlike her son, is proposing Sushmita joins her. What is evident is not only that Sushmita believed it is her son's obligation, because of her past care, to take her into his household, but that her children do not see this as obvious. This suggests conflict not only internally for Sushmita, but also conflict between Sushmita and her children.

Madu, who was in her 20's and had been living in Canada for less than 3 years, stated that while she wanted her parents to live with her later in life, she felt her father, who continued to live in India, would not want this. Madu said that her father had told her that he would build an old age home for himself; "he wants to build an old age home

[178] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 56.
[179] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 57; Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others,"" 72.

so that in his old age, he and mom can go and live there. I'm like, "What the Hell?" And he's like, "I don't have a son." And I'm like, "So? You have two daughters.""

The conflict here between Madu's father's plan to live in an "old age home" and Madu's plan that she or her sister would obviously care for their parents, suggests that while Madu, who lives in Canada, may feel that a daughter can acceptably take in her parents, the older generations or those relatives who remain in India, may not feel similarly.

Madu's response showed not only her frustration that her father would not consider her a viable option because she is not his son, but also her aversion to the concept of her parents living in a nursing home. Like Sushmita, when discussing her own future living arrangements, it is clear that women living within Canada still feel the presence of the concept that it is a son's responsibility to take in aging parents, and daughters can find themselves in conflict with older generations because of this persisting notion.

Of the women interviewed who had been widowed, one lived alone, one lived with her daughter, and one lived with her son. Neepa, who was in her 70's, had been living with her husband when he passed away and continued to live in the same house by herself. She described her relationship with her children as "great" and said that there had been no change in their relationships since the passing of her husband. She described a very close relationship with her children, though they lived in different provinces, saying they spoke several times a day over the phone. Neepa indicated that the only decision

making her children did with regards to her household was if she wanted a second opinion in which case, she would ask both her children and her friends.

Neepa's living arrangement and relationship with her family stands in contrast to Vatuk and Lamb's "modes of transacting"; centrality and peripherality, long term reciprocity and hierarchy.[180] Neepa was not peripheral within her household, as she is the central and only member of that household, neither did she indicate any negative ideas about her children not taking care of her. While Neepa did state that she is in command of her household, she also suggested that she seeks the opinions of her friends and children, thereby suggesting that the familial hierarchy is not as set as Lamb observe s in north India. Lamb says, "seniors, the "increased" and "grown" folk, give out blessings and guidance to, and receive services and respect from, juniors and little ones."[181] Neepa's experience demonstrates a less distinct flow of guidance because, while Neepa made the majority of household decisions alone, she would seek the second opinion of younger members of her family.

The widowed women interviewed who lived with their children also stated they had very good relationships with their children. Lavani was the only widow interviewed who had moved in with her child as a result of becoming a widow, moving to Canada to be with her daughter after the passing of her husband. When discussing her daughter, she described her relationship with her daughter as "very nice." She stated that she felt any change in their relationship was not with the passing of her husband but rather with her

[180] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 45.
[181] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 45.

own decline in health because her daughter had to tend to her. She stated, "she is very good and cares for all my details." While Lavani suggested a change in the relationship between her and her daughter, she perceived this change to be the result of her health status rather than her marital status. Like Lamb's discussion of *seva*, Lavani did speak positively and pridefully of her adult child taking care of her own physical needs and details. Lavani described this increase in her daughter's attendance to her as a positive occurrence. Lavani also described a change in her own role in the household as result of moving to Canada to live with her daughter and her daughter's family and indicated that she did not feel this change affected her relationship with her daughter. Unlike Vatuk's observation that aging parents "recognize that the other side of the coin of *seva* is a willingness to withdraw gracefully from interference in the daily running of the household,"[182] both Lavani and her daughter, who was also interviewed, indicated that Lavani was actively involved in the running of the household but that her role changed as the merging of the two homes required less housework for each member.

Like Lavani, Tavishi lives with her child in Canada. However, unlike Lavani, Tavishi was widowed when her only child was young, and both were living in India. Following the death of her husband, she and her son returned to live with her parents and she eventually decided she and her son should live alone. Tavishi said that her family was angry when she first decided this. She stated that after leaving her parents' home, she alone financially supported herself and her son and because of this, her son is "good" to her: "until now, my son is very very affectionate and [in] love with me. He loves me so

[182] Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others,"" 73.

many ways and he knows that Mom has sacrificed her life for myself and he understands that."

Tavishi's statements suggest that following the death of her husband her efforts in taking on the duties of both parents, including financial responsibilities, have strengthened her bond with her child because her son can see that she has had to make sacrifices of her own and he feels an appreciation and need to return this sacrifice with his own care and affection. This sentiment demonstrates that Tavishi, like Sushmita, viewed her relationship with her son in terms of a long-term intergenerational reciprocity, however she suggested within these statements that the level of affection her son returns is heightened because of her own heightened efforts as a single parent. Tavishi went on to say that this is despite his wife's influence.

While Tavishi does not describe a change in relationship with her son immediately following the death of her husband she, like Lavani, described a change in relationship later in life, and for Tavishi this occurred when she moved from India to live with her son, her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren in Newfoundland. Unlike Lavani, Tavishi attributed this shift as directly corresponding to her marital status as widow. Tavishi described this change as a negative one. She suggested with the change in living arrangements she felt her daughter-in-law saw her as a burden and interfered with her son's attachment to her. Tavishi argued that her daughter-in-law's perceived lack of respect was, at least in part, a result of Tavishi being a widow. She compared her own position as a widow to that of her daughter-in-law's parents when they had stayed for prolonged visits in Canada:

> Whatever my daughter-in-law's mother wanted she will get it easy from her husband. She did not depend on her daughter or her son-in-law. Example, for shampoo, say, she wants some nice kind of shampoo but she is not dependent up on them. But see, I am. Though I have money and this—everything in India. I don't earn anything. And I cannot go for shopping to buy myself because I cannot drive. So I'm still dependent, isn't it? … Whatever they give me, I have to take it. See and my son, he cannot understand lady's … this thing. I say, I cannot convince because he's a man. I'm a lady. So whatever, I cannot be so free and get my things with him. He may think, "What is it? I'm giving you everything. You Mommy, I'm giving you everything." He will not understand full over this. So whatever my daughter-in-law gives, I have to take.

While Tavishi described a very affectionate relationship with her son, she noted problems as a result of being a woman widowed living with her son in Canada. She suggested that while her son attempted to please her, her dependency on her son and daughter-in-law prevented him from doing so. She compared this to both her life in India, where she was able to access the things she desired as she wanted, and to the circumstances of her daughter-in-law's mother. This comparison to her daughter-in-law's mother illustrates that she feels her dependency on her children is very closely tied to her not having a husband; her daughter-in-law's mother can command her husband rather than be dependent on her child and their spouse.

Tavishi's perceived dependence on her daughter-in-law to "take what she gives" is something that is discussed at length in Lamb's *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes* and Vatuk's "To be a Burden on Others." Both Lamb and Vatuk indicate that once a woman is married, any debt owed to her parents for their earlier care and affection is forgiven, but a

debt begins to her new in-laws.[183] Lamb states that it is expected that a daughter-in-law "provides much of the labor of serving her husband's parents while they are alive." This debt is thought to arise from parents selecting the daughter-in-law for their son. One woman, Brinda, did mention this idea of indebtedness to a mother-in-law for the marriage selection and mentioned that the possibility of being a desirable candidate for immigration to Canada was a factor in this process. She stated:

> Yeah, it is a tradition that your children are suppose to look after you since you look after them when they are small. That is built in the institution of the family in India. And if you had a daughter-in-law who is kind enough, who can accept even the disabled mother-in-law, they do take them. Ok. Because, remember, these girls selected by her son. Right? These girl—she didn't select the man, the man selected the girl. So he has always upper skills, upper hand. And his mother must play a role to select the girl. When my husband select—the 50 girls, out of 50 me. My mother-in-law was with him all along the time, seeing that this girl is no good, she can't work in Canada, all that they were saying. So jointly, parents and the son made the decision, so now clearly, I am chosen by whole family so that I will look after his parents, am I right? It's a courtesy. So that I have to look after his mother with respect.

Brinda's statements indicate that women are indebted to mothers-in-law because they are selected by them, but mentions immigration as a factor in this selection process, suggesting that part of the selection process, and therefore debt, considers whether a woman could or could not immigrate to Canada. This suggests the possibility of a higher debt for daughters-in-law who have immigrated to Canada. Brinda echoes Lamb's description of daughter-in-law's debt saying that she feels within this system of joint

[183] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 47; Vatuk, ""To Be a Burden on Others,"" 77.

selection, daughters-in-law must "look after" "with respect" as a "courtesy" for being selected.

Lamb additionally discusses conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Lamb states that the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is "the family relationship perhaps most fraught with tension and contrary pulls"[184] and says that when mothers-in-law become dependent on daughters-in-law for well-being it is the daughters-in-law more than anyone else whom "mothers-in-law blame for their unhappy, neglected old age."[185]

Tavishi further discussed conflict between herself and her daughter-in-law concerning Tavishi's grandchildren. "I don't know what my daughter-in-law talks to my [grand]children, 'cause whatever it is, she's a daughter-in-law isn't it? And sometimes what we tell them they may not like, see?" Tavishi's statements here suggest not only that there was a discord between Tavishi and her daughter-in-law because of her daughter-in-law's interception of Tavishi's relationship with her grandchildren, but also suggests that Tavishi viewed discord as inherent within the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Tavishi indicated that she felt that not only did her relationship with her grandchildren affect her relationship with her daughter-in-law because her daughter-in-law would sometimes disagree with Tavishi's grandparenting, but also that her relationship with her grandchildren was affected by her relationship with her daughter-in-

[184] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 71.
[185] Lamb, *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes*, 74.

law. Tavishi recounted an incident where her daughter-in-law was telling a mutual friend that her child had asked why Tavishi lived in their home. Tavishi was upset because she felt that her daughter-in-law should teach her children that in their culture this was the practice:

> So I told them, "should explain, son, it is our custom and our grandmother doesn't have anybody, she is alone. So she has to live with us. In Canada she cannot live alone." That she should explain them. Whatever, but I don't know what she explains now. So, children, actually they're whatever my mother says that here isn't it? So, they're kind of a little bit their mother sometimes, she makes them do according to her taste, it's there in every house, that is there, you know?

Tavishi perceived her grandchildren's lack of understanding of joint family living arrangements, which she believed to be part of their culture, to be the result her daughter-in-law's failure to inform. She also expressed that she felt her daughter-in-law's personality and actions were themselves informing Tavishi's grandchildren which further created conflict between Tavishi and her family. What is additionally evident is that Tavishi saw conflict between herself and her daughter-in-law in the household and saw this as a part of their roles as mother and daughter-in-law.

In "Aging Across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora," Sarah Lamb observes that:

> Perceived cultural divides between two generations can also obstruct intimate intergenerational ties with Indian American families. What those in India tend to label a "generation gap"—differences between persons born of different years due to social change over time— those in

> the United States tend to explain more in terms of a cultural divide between India and America and thus between seniors and juniors.[186]

Tavishi suggested that she felt such a cultural divide between herself and her grandchildren. She stated she perceived all children in Canada were being raised 'selfishly.' She stated, "They are never thinking of "I should take care of my grand-mother" or "I should respect my elders.""

Tavishi indicated that she thought that this was the case for her own grandchildren and that their mother was partially to blame for not teaching them differently. While many of the non-widowed women interviewed, such as Sushmita, had used the word 'respect' to describe the relationship of widows with their family members in a positive way, Tavishi, a widow herself, felt that part of her Canadian experience was the lack of respect she perceived from children, including her own relations, compared to the level of respect she perceived to be receiving in her home in India.

Tavishi's feelings towards her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren echo Lamb's model of long-term deferred relationships in north India. Tavishi felt as though she is dependent on those members of her household who are working and felt that as an older member of her family who had cared for her son, especially as a single mother, she should live with her son's family and they should give her respect. She suggested this is part of "Indian culture." However, it is additionally suggested by Tavishi that she does not feel she is receiving the respect that she is due as part of this system. Tavishi views this as directly related to her family's being in Canada. Not only because, being a recent

[186] Lamb, "Aging across Worlds," 142.

immigrant to Canada, she does not have her own income and is therefore dependent on her younger family, but because she believes that by being in Canada her grandchildren do not see other joint family households and are not taught this "Indian culture."

In "Aging Across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora," Lamb observes that within diaspora contexts, "the system of life-long intergenerational reciprocity within the family disintegrates, and the old person left in an old age home or across oceans separating India and America becomes a sign of the new age."[187] While Tavishi's statements demonstrate that she viewed relationships in terms of long-term intergenerational reciprocity, she felt that her grandchildren are not participating in the level of respect that she feels she should receive as an older member of their family, as well as someone who has cared for her son. Her discontent with being dependent on younger family members, however, suggests that she, herself, does not want to fully participate in a system of deferred reciprocity.

Neepa's experience similarly demonstrates that widowed women within St. John's were not fully participating in a system of hierarchal, central-peripheral, long-term intergenerational reciprocity as she remained at the top of her household hierarchy but sought occasional guidance from younger generations as she felt necessary and continued to live on her own while maintaining positive relationships with her children.

Lavani similarly did not fit into Lamb and Vatuk's models of relationships as she lived with her daughter in her older age and, according to both Lavani and her daughter,

[187] Lamb, "Aging across Worlds," 134.

maintained authority within the household despite being what Lamb's model identifies is a peripheral member of the family.

Jiya and Ratna's suggestion of the negative quality of life of widowed mothers living alone and Sushmita and Madu's discussions of their own future indicate they saw the presence of a system of long-term intergenerational reciprocity in their own lives. However, Sushmita and Madu also see the potential for future conflict with this system, especially with the possibility of widowed mothers living with daughters.

What is evident is that while some women perceive the disintegration that Lamb speaks of to be the case, this system of hierarchal, central-peripheral, long-term intergenerational reciprocity is present for some in the Canadian diaspora, albeit to varying degrees. While Lamb speaks of a very clear separation between the traditional "Indian" and "American" society, such a distinction is not so clearly drawn for the Hindu Canadian diaspora. Though women are living alone, and with children of both sexes, elements of the intergenerational deferred reciprocity system remain present in Canadian contexts. A system of understanding of what a widow's position and role are within the household or family once widowed, is not uniform and perceptions of a widow's standing in those contexts may cause conflict as concepts of structured identities and duties differ from family member to family member. These accounts of familial relationships reflect both an ever-changing definition of what a widow is to her family and also that a woman's identity to her family may not change as a consequence of widowhood. This dichotomy of unchanged and everchanging identity form the basis for my final chapter's investigation of the question, "Who is the widow?"

Chapter Five

"An Invisible Thing": The Definitions, Classifications and Categorization of Widows and Widowhood

Following the discussions of the diet changes, removal of signifiers in attire, positions and relationships of widows in their religious, social and familial life in the previous chapters that present perceptions and experiences of widowhood that do not distinguish, in any absolute terms, widowhood from the married state, it is worth examining how widows themselves are defined and identified widowhood. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine what the identity of a Hindu widow is in the St. John's Hindu community, including how it is defined by widowed and non-widowed women, and how that definition is manifested within the Hindu community.

5.1 An Identity Shaping Widowhood

Sheleyah A. Courtney, in her article "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety: Aging Women in Vārāṇāsī," observes that aging women in Vārāṇāsī are ascribed various values or qualities by others in their community, and that these characteristics, specifically *pakkd* (strength), *kathorapan* (strictness), *kamzori* (weakness) and *pagalpan* (madness), strong, weak, mad, or strict,[188] inform a woman's relationship with those surrounding her. Courtney states, "Exemplified by various combinations of these four specified qualities, these attitudes are directed toward identifying and constructing who or what any particular older marginal woman might be." While Courtney's analysis pertains to understandings of aging of Hindu women broadly within Vārāṇāsī, this is done by examining the cultural identifications and designating of three widows in the community. In three detailed case studies, Courtney demonstrates that the attribution of various combinations of these four terms not only describes how widows are seen by others in Vārāṇāsī, but defines what women become within that community, thereby contributing to the quality of her daily existence.

An example of a characterization identifying who and what a woman is to be in a community is seen as Courtney reviews the experience of a widow whose perceived strength and strictness allowed her to have a lover without overt reproach from the community.[189] In addition to others describing her using this quality, Courtney documents that the widow also spoke of herself as possessing strength. By contrast, Courtney observes widows who are ascribed the terms weak and mad are teased or tormented for

[188] Sheleyah A. Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement, and Anxiety: Aging Women in Vārāṇāsī," *Social Analysis* 52, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 76.
[189] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 81-82.

fun.[190] Courtney states that these four terms that are used to designate a woman's concentrated strength, "are the primary characteristics by which a Hindu woman continues to be measured socially, most markedly in older age. Hence, her self-apprehension or the perception of others that she possesses any, all, or none of these conditions contributes, in turn, to the quality of her particular life circumstances."[191] Though these classifications can have great impact on a widow's status and quality of life, Courtney also emphasizes that these are non-static identities that undergo continuous transformations.

While discussing widowhood with Hindu women in St. John's, one of the terms that Courtney lists as a quality ascribed to women in Vārāṇāsī, that of "strong" or "strength," was used multiple times to describe widows in the Newfoundland Hindu community. One woman, Dipti, who was in her late teens, said that she saw widows in the Hindu community as "strong-willed". She applied this term in this response to being asked if she felt that a woman's independence remained the same in widowhood as it had been in marriage, stating:

> I would guess, yeah, 'cause, I mean, obviously the majority of these women had to move their whole families and come to Canada, and it was very hard for them, so they obviously are very strong-willed women. And they sort of like know what they want, and they're going to get it. And yeah, they must be, obviously, very strong people in general, 'cause they lost their spouse and that's very traumatic for someone. Yeah. I think they would have been the same way during marriage.

[190] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 87.
[191] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 80.

This response demonstrates multiple attributes that Dipti ascribed to widows in the community. Firstly, Dipti's response illustrates that she saw widows as strong-willed because she saw most widows in the community as having immigrated to Canada and felt this process to be such a difficult one that persevering the migration itself shows they are determined people. The statement above also indicates that she viewed enduring the death of one's husband to strengthen women. This characterization of widows by Dipti points to a focus on survival in the transitions from India to Canada and wife into widow, within the context of explaining why she felt women maintained their independence after becoming widows. What is apparent in this description is that Dipti both identified widows as maintaining their independence after marriage and distinguished them as strong because of their presumed life history, including withstanding the loss of their spouse.

Jiya, too, spoke to the quality of strength she saw widowed women as having. She believed a woman's change in marital status from wife to widow would impact the strength possessed by that woman. Jiya said that while she perceived a woman's strength could increase with the loss of a husband, it could diminish instead. She stated, "Some of them do get stronger. Some of them just fall apart." While Jiya identified strength as something that she saw as directly related to the transition into widowhood itself, she did not do so in the context of describing a particular widow with whom she was familiar. Though to different proportions, Dipti and Jiya both considered strength as a characteristic of widowhood, not because they recognized it as exclusive to women who had been widowed, in contrast to wives, but rather because the act of losing a spouse

impacted the degree to which they considered a woman was strong. However, unlike the identification of women based on strength that Courtney documents in north India, for both Dipti and Jiya, the term was ascribed to a general idea of the state of widowhood and not the degree of strength they classified an individual widow in their lives as having.

Neepa, who was a widow herself, also stated that she believed strength to be a characteristic of widowhood and further indicated that she felt it uniquely defined widows, but by contrast to that of widowers, not other women. She contended that widows were likelier to be able to "snap back" after the loss of a spouse, that men "can't manage" and that this was what demonstrated their strength. She stated:

> Women might not be physically very strong—but if they want to they can—but physically not very strong, but then mentally, I think it makes up mentally because they are the ones who bare the children, they are the ones who do everything else, they are the ones who, you know, go through lot of stuff that their friends go through, men don't have camaraderie like that, like women do, and women always take on other people's, you know, grief or whatever it is, you know? And yeah, so I think women have some—they've been through all that stuff. Whether you've been through or not it's in your genes.

By asserting that she believed women to be more capable of recovering from the loss of a spouse because she identified all women as having non-physical strengths, relationships, and gendered life experiences that she felt men did not share, Neepa suggested that widows are defined by a strength that widowers could not possess. Neepa, like Dipti, ascribed all widows the attribute of strength in part because of their survival of the change in marital status. While both Neepa and Dipti assert that strength is a quality of widows, neither suggest that a woman's identity is alone defined as by the degree to

which she is perceived as strong. Through these descriptions of widows that Dipti, Jiya and Neepa provided, what is evident is that, as within Courtney's findings, the quality of strength is often attributed to widows and widowhood in the Hindu community in St. John's, but it is not a value used to measure an individual widow or define her in their lives.

"Strength" was not the only quality that was repeatedly used to characterize Hindu widows broadly by the women interviewed; another term that was used multiple times to describe widows in St. John's was "scary." Dipti, in addition to "strong," described the Hindu widows she knew as "scary." The term scary reflects, again, one of Courtney's findings: that a widow can be designated as frightening to others in the community. In "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," Courtney discusses community members fearing widows in Vārāṇāsī, as demonstrated in a game of baiting, or teasing, widows. This teasing is detailed as a "Russian roulette" game, as widows are seen as related to death in widowhood they may curse the teaser as a result of being tormented. [192] Courtney states that this is part of "a broader spectrum of shaming behaviors" towards widowsand as mentioned above, is only done to women who are identified as weak and mad. [193] This was because her perceived diminished state was thought to make her too "weak to make her curses stick."[194]

Dipti's use of "scary" was deployed much differently. She identified widowed women as such because they would frequently chastise younger members of the

[192] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 87.
[193] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 87.
[194] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 90.

community. Dipti listed one's clothing choices an example of something for which an older widowed woman would criticize a younger woman. She attributed this to the perceived age of widows and stated that the widows she was familiar with were very "grandmotherly" with everyone. She felt that, while the widows in the Hindu community were somewhat quiet, they would "sit in the back of the Temple and all gossip among each other" as well as "tell you off if you're not wearing something properly" and call one a "foolish young kid." Dipti indicated that though she felt scariness was a quality of all older women, a widowed woman was more of a threat in this regard because it was a characteristic of the "grandmother type women," and she perceived women who were widowed were less likely to keep to their own families, saying that "widows sort of take on the whole community."

Another woman, Madu, who being in her earlier twenties, was, like Dipti, one of the youngest respondents, similarly noted a sensation that younger women feared the rebuke of widows, and again, made specific reference to one's clothing choices. She stated that, if her neighbour's mother-in-law came to visit, both Madu and her neighbour would change what they were wearing, listing pants as an example of something she would not wear in front of her friend's widowed mother-in-law. These two accounts demonstrate an identification of widows generally as feared in the Hindu community in St. John's, rather than any cultural values assigned to a particular widow defining her individually as dangerous. This differs from Courtney's findings of descriptive criteria informing the perceived degree of threat of each widow in Vārāṇāsī. In St. John's, the treatment of a Hindu widow from other members of the community is not obviously

constructed by a designated potential risk of rebuke that is based on an identification of an individual widow's level of strength. Additionally, unlike the fear of widows that is observed in Vārāṇāsī, both Dipti and Madu's statements suggested their fear was constructed out of a respect for an elder's opinion, rather than fear of any curses or perceived inauspiciousness.

Respect for a widowed woman was not only talked of in the above discussions with Dipti and Madu in regards to why a widow may be feared, but additionally, the terms "respect," "respected," or "respectable" themselves were directly used numerous times to describe who widows were in the social context of the Hindu community. One respondent, Gargi, stated that "every effort" had to be made to treat widows with "normal" respect. Sushmita argued similarly that she felt respect was not defined by widowhood. She stated that it was something she believed, if present before a woman was widowed, should endure the change in marital status, stating, "Respect is a very important component of it, if you respect that person, [you] still respect [them] after the person has become widow, then widowhood becomes immaterial. You know? So, respect is very important."

For Sushmita, respect was not a characteristic of the state of widowhood or marriage, but instead, something unique to the individual regardless of marital status or a change in that marital status. Another respondent, Anwita, stated, "I know so many mothers were widow here, like seniors, so many seniors and they are very well respected in the community." At another point, when asked to describe how Hindus thought of widows, Dipti responded, "they're like elderly women who are just very respectable."

While these last two statements depict widows as being respected outside of their own family, they also suggest that respect is assigned to Hindu widows because of their assumed old age in widowhood. Widows in these comments are described as senior and elderly, and therefore ascribed the status of respectable.

The use of this term shows both that, for these women, widows are believed to be equally respected as married women of the same age, as women indicated the level of respect they have been designated is not believed to be determined by marital status, but also that widowhood is seen as a quality of older age. In both women's statements, it is not widowhood that determines respect and characterizes a woman as respectable or having respect, but that widows are categorized as old. While, as discussed in Chapter Three, not all women believe that widows are treated equally to women of the same age,[195] for the four women quoted here, widowhood itself is not identified by an increase in respect or loss of respect, but rather the use of the word respect demonstrates that widows are perceived as equal to and frequently synonymous with all older women.

Courtney concludes that, in Vārāṇāsī, rather than the life events of widowhood or menopause, it is the "particular qualities displayed by a woman" that result in her being characterized as old.[196] While Hindu widows are not assigned a clearly noted set group of qualities and values individually that determine their circumstances in St. John's in a like manner to the way Courtney observes in Vārāṇāsī, there are characteristics that women note for widows collectively. These terms: scary, strong, and respect, in addition to

[195] In Chapter Three of this thesis, I report that Brinda stated that she sees women who are widowed not treated as equal to women the same age in specific reference to perceived auspiciousness for partaking in celebrations and ceremonies, 71.
[196] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 94.

demonstrating a perception of the status of widows that is less consistently negative than that observed in scholarly works in South Asia,[197] categorized all widowed Hindu women by perceived qualities of widowhood in general, rather than identifying attributes that designate who and what a woman is in widowhood to the St. John's Hindu community. Sushmita's statements above regarding respect as a quality unchanged by widowhood demonstrates that, though she uses the term to describe widows, to her, measures of respect are evidence that women are not identified by widowhood and that they hold or do not hold respect as individuals rather than as widows.

5.2 Widowhood Shaping Identity

As Courtney asserts that particular values ascribed by others shape the cultural context of marginalized women, in a continuous process of identifying and constructing her,[198] another construction of Hindu women's identity is observed by Susan S. Wadley in her article, "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural north India." She states that "each individual woman is herself a multiple person: a daughter, wife or widow, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, mother etcetera." Each of these various identities become

[197] Accounts mentioned earlier such as those in Sharleen Mondal, "Hindu Widows as Religious Subjects: The Politics of Christian Conversion and Revival in Colonial India," *Journal of Women's History,* vol. 29, no.3, (2017):110-136, and Punam Yadav, "White Sari-Transforming Widowhood in Nepal." *Gender, Technology and Development* 20, no. 1 (2016): 1-24, amongst others observe the status of widows in South Asia as "devalued" and a denied existence, stand in contrast to these terms.
[198] Courtney, "Attraction, Amusement and Anxiety," 75-76.

"foregrounded in different life contexts, necessitating behaviors and decisions that may be difficult or unwelcome to some other role held by that same woman."[199]

Ultimately, what Wadley argues is that, within rural north India, relationships are changed once a marital status changes, especially from wife to widow. She indicates this is because a woman's role as widow may conflict with her roles as daughter, mother, or mother-in-law. While existing scholarly works such as Wadley's observe that women are identified as wife and then widow, not only in marital status but in relationships and social status,[200] this sequential change in status was not clearly evident in some of my interviews with members of the Hindu community in St. John's.

Though characterizations of widows generally, as detailed above, were often readily provided, my participants did not immediately recognize their own familial or personal relationships with widows. Several women interviewed said they did not have any personal experience with widowhood prior to the interview. Anwita, a married woman, stated early in her interview that the experience she had with widows consisted of her experiences with her sister and her two sisters-in-law who had been widowed. When asked if she had ever lived with a widow, she replied that she had not, and then a few moments later, she corrected herself, saying, "I have. Now I remember when you are

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[199] Susan Wadley, "No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Lindsey Harlan, and Paul B. Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93.

[200] Ahmed-Ghosh also notes the definition of women in India by her marital status stating, ""Historically (and pre-historically) women's status in society and family in India is defined by controls over her sexuality. This is achieved by molding her identity as an individual through the institution of marriage, the termination of which, if her husband dies before her, redefines the controls over her sexuality by a patriarchy." Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India: Issues of Masculinity and Women's Sexuality." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2009), 3.

talking about it, I know somebody." Anwita then talked of an aunt that she had lived with for periods in India when she was a child. She described this aunt as a young widow, who had been "taken care of by her brother" but had stayed with different relatives on and off. When asked what Anwita thought a widow's role in the household was, she indicated that she could not say because, "I don't know that much. Closely, I don't know anybody except my aunt when you asked. And she was a very mild person, she adjusted everywhere." Anwita here showed that while earlier in the interview she had described immediate family members who had lost their husbands, she failed to see them as widows in the sense of the question. The only family member she identified as a widow is her aunt who had been widowed at an early age, and she clarifies that, even in that instance, she cannot comment on a widow's role because this aunt was "mild," implying perhaps that being mild is not a typical characteristic for a widow.

What Anwita's description of a widow's role indicates is that Anwita did not immediately view the women in her life according to widowhood. Her lack of continuity in identifying widows in her life suggests that she does not recognize her close family members as widows, but rather as sister-in-law and sister. Her description of her aunt as "mild" and able to "adjust everywhere" might suggest that Anwita has a particular view of the characteristics of a widow, and that the women she has relationships with do not fit that image.

Anwita further exemplified this when I asked her to compare the life of a Hindu widow in Canada to a Hindu widow in India. Her response was that, despite being introduced to me by a widow in the Hindu community, and having lived in Canada for

over 40 years, she did not know any widows in Canada at all, Hindu or otherwise. Thus, Anwita demonstrated that, to her, even when trying to recall widows in her life, she did not identify her friend as a "widow."

Sushmita echoed this non-recognition of "the widow" among women in her life. When Sushmita first agreed to participate in a discussion on Hindu widowhood, she indicated that she was interested, but did not know any widows personally. Throughout the course of the interview Sushmita indicated that not only were both of her grandmothers widows, but her aunt, her mother-in-law and her mother had all lost their husbands. Additionally, like Anwita, she only recalled during the course of the interview itself that women she knew had been widowed, though she said that she had tried to think of women she knew the day before, remembering other extended family members and close friends that had been widowed as the interview proceeded. At the end of the interview Sushmita said:

> To me, it was an invisible thing, never occurred to me. And when you said … [I thought] *How, I don't know any widows?* But then everybody was a widow around me. I never thought of my mother as a widow or my nans as a widow or my mother-in-law as a widow, or even my grandmother as a widow. I mean and there are so many of them around me now. I can think, you know, as I was talking to you, a couple of names came out. Never thought of them as widows, the relationship still remained as relationship that was there earlier because I respect them for who they are and what they've done rather than put the respect on their situation or their status. I mean, it's not about status, it's what—who the person is.

Sushmita's assertions on widowhood provide significant evidence that women in the Hindu community in St. John's very often do not perceive women to be identified by the change in marital status that widowhood typically signals.

This tendency to avoid perceiving women in terms of marital status was not only found in literal familial relationships, but also in descriptions of friends as family. Dipti, whose use of ‘scary’ and ‘strong’ are examined above, used the words "elderly", "senior" and "grandmother" interchangeably with the word "widow," suggesting that she did not distinguish between women by marital status, but rather by age. She spoke of this distinction being a positive one, stating that because she perceives widows as older women, they are more respected because of their age. As mentioned earlier she stated that, in the Hindu community in St. John's, widows are "like elderly women who are just very respectable." This was followed by the statement, "I don't really think of them as like ‘widows." They're just, you know, grandmothers." Here Dipti showed that to her, women are not defined by marital status, but rather their relationship to the community, and that that relationship is determined, at least in part, by age.

In addition to this tendency to avoid identifying women as wife or widow, two women directly discussed a tradition of women’s identity being defined in terms of male relatives and/or according to marital status as something that belongs to Hindu culture of the past. Ratna, for example, described a similar idea to one Wadley documents from rural communities in north India. Wadley found that there existed a "native terminology" that spoke to a women's life cycle, "*bacpan* (childhood; also *mā kā rāj* [mother's kingdom]), s*ās kā rāj* (the mother-in-law's kingdom), and bahū k*ā rāj* (the kingdom of

the daughter-in-law)."[201] This north Indian terminology echoes *the Laws of Manu's* declaration for women that, "As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She must never seek to live independently." [202]

Similarly, Ratna stated:

> Womens were the property of the family. There is a quotation, 'To whom am I belongs to?' You know, she said ok, 'and when I'm young my brother look after me, when I am middle age my husband belong to me, and then when I'm widow… when I am old, also my family, brother, sister or somebody. So, who am I?

As Wadley found, Ratna here acknowledges the existence of a convention where personhood and relationships are based on marital status, in which women belonged to someone, and that their identity and status was determined by whomever they belonged to at that period in their life. [203] However, unlike what Wadley observed in north India, Ratna uses this as an example of historical practices that have now changed. Furthermore, Ratna went on to say that this manner of understanding women's identity was not exclusive to Indian culture but was a factor in Western culture in the past as well. She indicated that this had changed because of education and, similar to the statements of participants above, because of women's strength.

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[201] Wadley, "No Longer a Wife,"97.
[202] Olivelle, Patrick., Olivelle, Suman, and ProQuest. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. South Asia Research (New York, N.Y.). New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005. 5.148-149. Though statements below echo this passage, no woman directly attributed it to the *Laws of Manu*.
[203] Wadley, "No Longer a Wife,"97.

Another woman, Chandi, discussed this concept of marital status defining a woman's social status, saying:

> Once a girl is married—and this is a part of our very old, traditionally, not so positive side of the matrimonial culture—they say: women is like ownership, as if! A girl is a dad's ownership—dad has ownership when it's a girl, little girl—then when the girl grows a little older, she's her brother's ownership, brother has to decide who she should be out with, where is she going? Then she is getting married, outside that home, then she is her husband's ownership, husband's property. I'm not using that word, property—but then that's how it is. So once the husband is gone, your everything is gone. Your whole existence of a women—that is the widow.

Like Ratna, Chandi went on to say that views were changing and again, that similar ideas of women being identified only by marital status were present in Canadian culture, "It's not only a problem with Hinduism. Women, we were not considered—1919 only recently, this century we are considered to be person. We were not person before. Forget about property itself."

Ratna and Chandi were not alone in these sentiments. Many women, when discussing the possibility that a woman would be considered differently because she was a widow, indicated or implied they believed any such practice to be wrong, and argued that such a shift in perception went against their understandings of the core ideals of Hinduism. "If somebody really practices the real religion, they will treat one human to another just as equal," Anwita stated.

What is evident is that women feel that a woman’s identity is multifaceted and not to be defined solely in terms of marital status. This is demonstrated both through participants’ assertions that describing and valuing women by their marital status are

negative traditions of the past and/or not part of the true Hindu belief, and through the tendency on the part of participants to not immediately recognize personally known women as widows.

5.3 Identifying and Defining Widowhood

In addition to the tendency that many participants had to not immediately identify a friend or family member as a widow, many women, like Anwita above, differentiated between those they personally knew as widows and a conception of widowhood these widows did not fit into. When asked about widowhood, many women spoke general terms, as noted above, and suggested that their family was different, their caste was different, or that education, either formal or informal, and personality traits differentiated the women they knew from what they saw as a typical widow.

Women also spoke of things that they had seen or heard of through the news, television, movies[204] or other representations, but had not actually experienced personally. For instance, the concept of a widow being inauspicious, as discussed in Chapter Three, was something that several women listed as something they had heard of

[204] The TV show "Satyamev Jayate" was referenced as well as a BBC documentary on widowhood in India. Films referenced included *Goynar Baksho* and *Suhagan.* The most frequent of these films was the Canadian film *Water* which several women stated brought their attention to widowhood in Hindu traditions and India for the first time. Scholars have noted this film as having a large impact on awareness of the state of widows in India, in part because of the protests associated with it, see Sheleyah A. Courtney, "The Storm of Deepa's Water: From Violent Tempest in Vārānasī to Glacial Account of Hindu Widowhood," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (2007): 115-120. See also Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Widows in India: Issues of Masculinity and Women's Sexuality,"9; Nimi Mastey, "Examining Empowerment among Indian Widows: A Qualitative study of the Narratives of Hindu Widows in North Indian Ashrams," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 2 (2009): 191-197.

taking place in the past or in other families, but that they had not witnessed themselves. These distinctions suggest that women, once again, did not see the women they were close with as what they considered to be the Hindu widow that needed to be discussed, but rather saw widowhood as distinct from the mode of being of those they knew personally.

One of the widows interviewed, Neepa, like Dipti, seemed to associate widowhood with age rather than marital status and in fact, seemed to not identify herself as a widow. Like Chandi and Ratna, she suggested that within Hindu culture in the past, a woman without a man had not been considered valuable and, again, stated that she viewed this as not part of the Hindu religion, but as something that was a changing part of Indian culture. While discussing this, she referred to Hindu widows as "they." When I asked her what was her experience of talking about widowhood with other women, she replied, "I don't know of any Indian widows here. Maybe old people. But I don't know of any Indian widows that I've met." In both these responses, Neepa is suggesting that she herself does not expect to be included with the Hindu widows being discussed, despite being Hindu, originally from India and having lost her husband. Like the non-widowed women above, Neepa, here, is indicating that her identity is separate from her idea of widowhood. She perceives widowhood as something pertaining to a culture in the past, or older Indian women in the community, rather than to herself as a widow.

What is clear is that often women in the St. John's Hindu community do not identify the women around them as being single, widow, or wife immediately, but rather perceive those around them in terms of the personal relationship they share as mother,

sister, friend or even self. They also indicated they believed classifying a woman by her male relatives and/or according to marital status to be something that should be stopped and was in the process of being stopped.

Both Courtney and Wadley's analyses of the frameworks that identify Hindu widows in India speak to changes in roles for widows in an Indian context. Courtney, in describing the lived experience of the three widows in her case study, demonstrates that the qualities they are assigned by others in the community continuously define woman's roles in widowhood, such as a weak beggar and subject of torment, or as a strong woman capable of protecting herself while taking on a lover. Wadley argues that it is the woman's role itself as wife then widow that changes a woman's identity along with her marital status. Though identification of a woman by marital status was not evident amongst most participants as discussed above, there were some roles and positions noted that defined who or what a widow was to some of the community.

5.4 Defining a Widow by Position and Defining a Widow's Position

One non-widowed participant, Brinda, who, as discussed in Chapter Three, felt widowed women were treated as inauspicious unless they overcame that by making themselves important in the community, spoke of the volunteer work of Tavishi and Neepa, stating each woman was "doing well," and went on to call Tavishi and Neepa "important people." Brinda's focus on each woman's volunteer work indicates that while she sees these widows in her life as doing well and important, it is their activities that allow them to be perceived as important. Similarly, Lavani, a woman in the St. John's

Hindu community who had been widowed before moving to Newfoundland, was also mentioned by another participant in a separate interview who advised that Lavani should be interviewed because she had strong knowledge of the Vedas, advising that she could be a resource for scriptural information, though this participant did not mention that Lavani herself was a widow. While Brinda's comments indicated that she saw Tavishi and Neepa as positive examples of women experiencing the loss of their partner, who were doing well because they were seen as important through their volunteer positions, Lavani was not described in terms of widowhood but rather by her role for others in the Hindu community.

Each of the three widowed women interviewed held what could be classified as a leadership position within the St. John's Hindu community. These positions all included being solely in charge of a group of people, both married and unmarried. Two of these leadership positions included teaching in some capacity, including teaching males. Tavishi indicated that she became more active in the community in widowhood, in part because she felt that volunteering with those who were less fortune than herself eased her grief following the death of her husband. However, the other two of the three widowed women interviewed stated that they had held the same role, or one similar, prior to the death of their husbands, and this role had not changed because of the death of their spouse.

One widow, Neepa, when asked what she thought her role in her community was, answered, "I'm not involved in the community." However, other women interviewed spoke of her as someone who was widowed as well as a significant member of their

community. This was directly stated by Gargi who, when discussing the relationship of widows to the Hindu community in St. John's, listed Neepa as an example of someone who was "very much involved in the community," "working at making this a better society not just for Hindus but for all Newfoundlanders," and who was "providing support to others."

Brinda, in addition to speaking of importance that she believed Neepa had gained through her involvement in the community, as discussed above, talked about the need for a woman to have skills prior to the death of her husband. Brinda argued that the level of skills an individual woman possessed would define whether life following a husband's death would be "happy, medium or tragic." To Brinda, Neepa exemplified this, and she stated, "Just like Neepa— leadership skill is useful." This account of Neepa's work in the community not only establishes that Brinda saw a widow's role in the community as defining that widow for others, but that she felt skills were required to obtain a position that shaped the state of widowhood for the better. While Neepa did not see herself as having any role in the community, Brinda viewed Neepa as a leader in the community who had gained a happier experience of widowhood from a position that was earned from skills developed before the death of her husband.

What these remarks on the role of individual widowed women in the Hindu community show is that as with self-identification as widow, a woman may not perceive or ascribe her own role in the community in the same way as do others. Neepa, in widowhood, occupied for others in the Hindu community a leadership position that she did not recognize about herself. For Brinda, Neepa's participation in the community was

evidence that a woman could be important in widowhood despite widowhood's stigma but to Neepa her role was both unremarkable as well as unchanged. This lack of consensus on this widow's leadership position suggests that a widow's role in the community is not clearly defined, even between a widow herself and those in her community. Lavani and Neepa maintained the same roles they were perceived as having in community activities as they had in marriage. These roles therefore do not define widowhood, construct an identity of a widow, or exemplify how they are characterized by others, as Courtney and Wadley observe of women in north India, but furthermore, widowhood does not define these roles either.

While Hindu women in St. John's readily provide examples of the general traits of widows, like strength, scariness and respect, they frequently do not define the women who are widowed in their lives by these characteristics or by the state of widowhood itself. This is evident in a reluctance to identify, or nonrecognition of women with whom they are familiar, as widows. While the women interviewed do list qualities they feel define widowhood, they often view those definitions as distinct from the women in their lives whose husbands have died, even extending to themselves as widows.

Wadley observes that women's identities are shaped by marital status, and Courtney concludes that specified qualities identify and construct "who and what any particular older marginal women might be." In a Newfoundland Hindu context, some women identify widows as generally respected, or strong; some viewed widows as maintaining the strength and respect they had in marriage; and some women believed widows to be important and respected as individuals overcoming an implied lowering of

status through skills and active participation in the community. For some, the roles of widowed women in the Hindu community exemplified importance of individual widows, including roles seen as a unique achievement of that woman despite being a widow, in a manner quite like the one Courtney found in Vārāṇāsī. However, unlike the relatively clear definitions for women as they enter widowhood seen in north Indian contexts, the identity of Hindu widows in a Canadian context is not as fixed in its definitions or understandings, even for the widow herself, but rather, it is as, Courtney says of aging in for women generally, a continuous process.

Conclusion

The examination of Hindu Canadian women's perceptions and experiences of widowhood in this thesis demonstrates that though there exist decisions unique to widowhood for widows to navigate, the roles, rules, and attributes of a widow in the Hindu Canadian diaspora are not fixed or permanent. In women's perceptions and experiences of modifications to clothing and diet, no set prescribed code for these practices was established among the participants. Women found it hard to identify what changes did take place for Hindu widows in St. John's because they considered the Canadian context a private one for individuals, and therefore were not aware of a widow's adherence to any restrictions as they would be in the more "collective" culture of India. Participants did list restrictions they were familiar with, but examples of shifts in clothing and diet were largely located within the South Asian context. Lavani, who was perceived by others as having adopted white-coloured garments in widowhood, stated that she did this prior to widowhood. Tavishi, who was the only widow who had made

clothing changes because of being widowed, described her experience as a series of temporary changes rather than a ceremonial definitive shift into a certain prescribed attire. Tavishi's experience demonstrates that an individual widow's clothing changes are often not definitive, but rather an open-ended choice. Perception of Lavani's clothing change illustrates that even the significance of attire choice is not always clear to others. Both experiences speak to the individual motivations and methods of a widow's practices that are unique to that widow.

A similar picture of a widow's participation and involvement in the religious and social activities in the community was drawn by women as they discussed stigmas in and of widowhood in St. John's. Like a widow's clothing and dietary changes, restrictions from religious and social components were not acknowledged broadly by the women in the community as defined in an absolute way. Understandings of marginalization and exclusion for widows were frequently based on experiences in South Asia, and often denounced as not practiced by Hindu Canadians. Degrees to which a woman is excluded based on marital status varied in the assessments of the women interviewed. Brinda viewed exclusion of widows from auspicious occasions as prevalent, but in a subtle way that was not discussed in the community, while the three widows interviewed felt any restriction on participation in auspicious activities are the choice and responsibility of each individual widow herself. Further to these statements asserting that it is a widow's choice to restrict herself from auspicious activities, the examination of gossip and slander demonstrated the effect other people have on a widow's decisions in negotiating the understandings and beliefs of the proscribed practices for widows in their daily lives.

Incidents of marginalization in a widow's social life were also not obvious. Changes to social relationships were perceived as shifts, not diminishments or exclusion, and while remarriage restrictions were often denounced, the acceptability of remarriage is not a clearly approved or prohibited practice. As with attire and clothing practices, the positions and status of a widow in the Hindu community in St. John's were not clearly distinct in widowhood.

The status of widows in their family was likewise not clearly distinct in widowhood, and understandings of a widow's position or role within the family and household once widowed were not uniform or consistently identifiable. For some, widows within the family claim and are attributed respect, as they hold leadership positions, no different than when they were wives. Relationships were unchanged, and widows were often not seen as "widow" but as mother, grandmother, or aunt. Though as women discussed familial relationships, it was also clear that the degree to which a system of hierarchal, central-peripheral, long-term intergenerational reciprocity, as identified by Vatuk and Lamb, existed for each woman in the diaspora was not uniform. The perceived adherence and perceived desire to adhere to such a system was not certain even within an immediate family. The presence of this seemingly South Asian system within the Canadian context, with equivocal observance in each family, constructs different understandings of a widow's relationships and status to both the widow and those around her, sometimes creating conflicts within a family. Like any restrictions, religious practices, or exclusion from the community, a widow's role in her family is not fixed or universal to women in the Newfoundland Hindu community.

This is seen too in the definitions, classifications and categorization of widows and widowhood among both widowed and non-widowed women. As discussed in Chapter Five, Wadley and Courtney both note frameworks, which they observe form the identities of widows in north India. Both analyze how women are defined after the death of their husband, and both examine how these women are distinct or separated from other women. However, to the women in St. John's, widows were not separated or distinct from a previous identity as a wife in a way that allowed other women to attribute characteristics to them as widows. "Widows" are a group thought to be present at a distance from a woman's personal experience, who are believed to be generally strong, respectable, and scary as authority figures, but frequently widowed women are not defined individually by these characteristics, or by the state of widowhood itself. As within a widow's familial roles and relationships, some women viewed widows as maintaining the strength and respect they had in marriage, and additionally, some believed widows to be important and respected as individuals, overcoming an implied lowering of status through their individual skills and active participation in the community. Ultimately, as with a woman's clothing and diet choices, her participation in or marginalization from the religious and social community, and her familial relationships and role, the identity of a Hindu widow in a Canadian context is not fixed in its definitions or understandings, even for the widow herself, but rather is individual for each woman as it changes in a continuous process.

Sushmita stated to me, "Hinduism is an evolving religion. It's not a religion that's stuck way back when it started. It's a way of life more than a religion." In this way, as

Hinduism is an evolving religion, so too is the identity of a woman in Hindu traditions evolving. It is not stagnant, or fixed, choices are not permanent or determined. Though for widowed women there are choices that a woman not widowed does not have to decide or negotiate, the roles, practices, relationships, and identities of Hindu widows are not prescribed or consistently recognized by any one understanding in the St. John's Hindu community. Classifying a woman by a single life experience that she does not select for herself, and thereby defining her as a person, Hindu, family member, leader, and community member through that categorization, is to separate her from others in a way women in the Hindu Canadian community do not. Therefore, as with many scholars in this area, I emphasize the need for more research into the lives of Hindu widows, especially in contexts outside of South Asia.

Research examining the lives of Hindu widows in the wider Canadian context is necessary to better understand experiences and perceptions of widowhood for Hindu Canadians. St. John's is a unique diaspora setting, as the city's metropolitan area total population in 2016 was 205,955 (196,954 in 2011) with only 540 (255 females) identifying as Hindu in the 2011 National Household Survey[205], and it is only one of many in contexts for religious lived experiences in Canada. Many women noted that they felt some statements they made were distinct to St. John's. Neepa, for instance, felt that Hindus in larger cities in Canada, such as Toronto and Vancouver, would be more likely to hold on to more orthodox Hindu traditions, especially with regards to women's role.

[205] Statistics Canada 2016 Census of Canada and 2011 National Household Survey (NHS).

In both St. John's and elsewhere, men's perceptions of and relationships with widows is also an area where further research is needed. When Jiya and I met for her interview, she told me that her husband was jealous that he was not asked to be interviewed because he wanted to discuss his thoughts on widowhood. She laughed and said "I told him "Too bad! She only wants to talk to me!"" While, to limit the scope of this study, only women were interviewed, extant data, as well as the statements of participants, has shown that the relationships of widows with men in their lives is central for many widows. Jiya's statement illustrates that men in the Hindu community feel that it is important to them too.

Research into men's experience of widowhood as widowers is also an area of study to explore. A few women stated that they felt widowhood is harder for a man because, in addition to being stronger, women are more social, and more independent. Studying the Hindu Canadian male experience of widowhood would also offer further insight into women's experience of widowhood through comparing the two, like Kate Davidson does of British experiences of late life widowhood for both men and women. In addition to the limits of the scope of this study by the demographics of St. John's, and the exclusion of male participants, it should also be reiterated that it is limited by me as a researcher. This thesis documents the views that women in the Hindu community chose to share with a researcher who is an outsider to that Hindu community, a community that is a minority community religiously and ethnically. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, some women very strongly emphasized the difference between Indian culture and "true Hinduism," including rejecting my questions all together. The responses of

women may represent, in this way, attempts to differentiate between the religious and the cultural to me as a researcher, and to actively counter stereotypes, rather than discuss the presence of darker undercurrents, like those that Brinda notes exist in a very subtle way in Chapter Three.

Though attempts to present widowhood in the Hindu community in a conscious way to me as an outsider may have impacted the study, this too is important data, as these statements represent what women believe ideal widowhood in a "true Hinduism" would be, as well as demonstrating a perception of what they see as stereotypes of Hindu widows. As noted in the introduction, Mastey states that films such as *Water*, in addition to extant articles, "other" Hindu widows. This thesis attempts to provide further research into Hindu widowhood to assist in examining the complex understandings and experiences of widows in different contexts, however, because of my position as outsider, its findings may have been influenced by previous works which have othered widows.

The question that is put forward at the beginning of this thesis, "Are there really widows anymore?" was one Gargi asked me during her interview. Gargi asked me this when we were discussing the project itself. She explained that because many women choose not to marry or remarry, widowhood does not impact a woman's life the way it did in previous times, saying that now "it's fine not to have a partner." She then stated, "Women are empowered."

This question exemplifies that within this Hindu Canadian community, widowhood is not a clearly identified state, and as demonstrated in this thesis the roles,

rules, relationships, and attributes of a widow are not definite either. As examined in the preceding chapters, the perceptions and experiences of widowhood analyzed document how the Canadian Hindu widow both claims and is attributed respect, status, and independence and that the identity, relationships, and practices of widows, though part of continuous process of change, are not set apart from those of wives in any absolute manner.

As existing scholarship has spent a large amount of time examining the practice of *sati*, and South Asian experiences of widowhood, widowhood has been observed as a distinct status. What is evidenced by the responses from women in the St. John's Hindu community is that the lives of widows, though not unaffected by widowhood, are not categorized by any ascetic-like changes, attributes as defined by others in the community, or role in familial life in the way that extant literature has observed of widowhood in South Asia, because widowhood is not recognized or defined in these ways by women in the Hindu Canadian context.

Gargi's question "Are there really widows anymore" is not only important to take note of as it signifies modern Hindu Canadian views, documented in this thesis, on a woman's identity based on marital status, but it is also important to ask when considering any further research in this area. Gargi's question, along with the individual descriptions of widowhood received within this research, point to the need for researchers to further examine the full range of experiences of Hindu women rather than looking solely within the received, the stereotypic and often assumed physical and conceptual boundaries of the South Asian context.

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Appendix A - ICEHR Approval Letter

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Office of Research - IC2010C
St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864 2561 Fax: 709 864 4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	**20140409-AR**
Approval Period:	August 30, 2013 – August 31, 2014
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Patricia Dold Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Title of Project:	*New Contexts: Hindu Widows in the Canadian Diaspora*

August 30, 2013

Ms. Caitlin Russell
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Russell:

Thank you for your email correspondence of August 9, 2013 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project.

The ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the justifications and revisions submitted, and is appreciative of the thoroughness and clarity with which you have responded to the concerns raised by the Committee. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* to August 31, 2014.

If you revise the "second tier" questions after the "first tier" of four interviews, please provide the updated version to the ICEHR. If you intend to make any other changes during the course of the project which may give rise to ethical concerns, please forward an amendment request with a description of these changes to Theresa Heath at icehr@mun.ca for the Committee's consideration.

The *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual status report on your project to the ICEHR before August 31, 2014. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, including a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide the final report with a brief summary, and your file will be closed. The annual update form is on the ICEHR website at http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr/applications/. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Gail Wideman

Gail Wideman, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research

GW/th

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Patricia Dold, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts

Appendix B - ICEHR Amendment Approval Letter

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Office of Research - IIC2010C
St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 Fax: 709 864-4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	**20140409-AR**
Approval Period:	August 30, 2013 – August 31, 2014
Funding Agency:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Patricia Dold Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Title of Project:	*New Contexts: Hindu Widows in the Canadian Diaspora*
Amendment #:	***01***

October 11, 2013

Ms. Caitlin Russell
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Russell:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) has reviewed the proposed addendum for the above referenced project, as outlined in your email correspondence dated October 4, 2013, and is pleased to give approval to hold two meetings / interviews with the second tier participants (rather than one two hour meeting); and to include a possible participant who is 17, with consent from her legal guardians, as requested, provided all previously approved protocols are followed.

If you should make any other changes either in the planning or during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, please forward an amendment request with a description of these changes to Theresa Heath at icehr@mun.ca for further review by the Committee.

Your ethics clearance for this project expires August 31, 2014, before which time you must submit an annual status report to ICEHR. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, including a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide the final report with a brief summary, and your file will be closed. The annual update form is on the ICEHR website at http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr/applications/.

The Committee would like to thank you for the update on your proposal and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Gail Wideman

Gail Wideman, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

GW/th

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Patricia Dold, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts

Appendix C - Index of Participant Information

Pseudonym	**Interview Tier**	**Marital Status**	**Years living in Canada**	**Age** (asked in ranges)
Chandi	Pilot	Never married	Not asked	Not asked
Brinda	Pilot	Married	Not asked	60-70 years old (Not asked but stated during interview)
Gargi	Pilot	Married	Not asked	Not asked
Ratna	Pilot	Married	Not asked	Not asked
Anwita	Second	Married- 47 years	40 years	60-70 years old
Jiya	Second	Married- 40 years	37 years	50-60 years old
Sushmita	Second	Married- 43 years	38 years	60-70 years old
Dipti	Second	Never married	Since birth	Under 18
Kamal	Second	Never married	6 years	18-25 years old
Madu	Second	Never married	3 years	18-25 years old
Padma	Second	Divorced- 20 years	40 years	60-70 years old
Lavani	Second	Widowed-23 years	23 years	80-90 years old
Neepa	Second	Widowed-2 ½ years	35 years	70-80 years old
Tavishi	Second	Widowed-38 years	3 years	60-70 years old