

"A man is
great by
deeds, not by
birth"
-Chanakya

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**From Being Born Single to Becoming Single:
Life-Course Analysis of Indian Women's Lived Experiences**

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Abstract:

Single women's experiences are often studied as a uniform category, obscuring how age, social timing and cultural context shape the emergence of singlehood. This study addresses this gap by examining how Indian women move 'from being born single to becoming single' across the life course. Drawing on autobiographical narratives of nine single Indian women (Jain, 2023), we conducted reflexive thematic analysis using Terpe's actor-centred framework of spheres of life and a life-course perspective. Organizing themes across childhood, young middle and late adulthood, our findings reveal that singlehood is not a static status but a temporal process that unfolds through shifting intersections of family, work, romance, culture and spirituality. The study contributes to theory by temporalizing singlehood, identifying age-graded sphere-specific influences, and situating singlehood within India's collectivist, marriage-centred context. For HR research and practice, the study reveals how organizational norms built around marriage and family intersect with age and gender to influence single women's careers, access to benefits and perception of inclusion. A life-course perspective offers a framework for designing age-graded HR policies and benefit packages that recognize non-marital career trajectories and their unique needs.

Keywords: Singlehood, Life Course, Social Timing, Indian Women, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Qualitative



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