



Research Paper

The Detrimental Saga of Social Abandonment and Persecution Related To Widows in India

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Abstract

“No woman should lose her status, livelihood or property when her husband dies.”

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 23 June 2014.

Women in India have long been considered one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. The position of girls, particularly widows, may be traced back to the post-Vedic era, when widows were required to participate in socio-religious activities and ceremonies. They were seen as unlucky depending on the circumstances. As a result, widows from marginalized populations have been subjected to harsher restrictions. They face a variety of issues, but there are policies and programs in place to help them improve their social standing. The main goal of this monograph is to understand widowhood in Indian society. Widowhood as seen through the years, widows' socio-cultural and psychological situations, issues of widowhood, widow empowerment, widow property rights, the importance of spiritual locations for widows, and initiatives resulting in improvements in widows' status are all considered. The goal of this study is to paint a picture of the situation of female-headed households across the world, as well as the challenges that widows face. It also attempts to raise awareness of the difficulties and troubles that widows confront in today's world. There is a remarkable absence of feminist, scholarly literature on widows in India. In order to analyse the challenges that these women confront today, this research emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in our thinking. The elderly, the bulk of whom are widowed women, have been studied by NGOs. Younger widows and widows without children, on the other hand, are often overlooked in this type of activity. Even the percentage of women who are widowed is usually unknown. There is also an alarming paucity of knowledge and reliable statistics on widowhood in armed conflict, farmer suicide, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In order to inform and advise policymakers and planners, adequate quantitative and qualitative data is necessary. In developed or industrialized countries, data is more easily available than in developing or least developed ones. One of the most major impediments to influencing legislation and programs that deal with widows' status. In many developing nations, census data collection procedures are not designed to uncover widowhood discrepancies or to emphasize the unpaid economic contribution that widows of all ages provide to society. If widows are homeless or often travel between multiple residences escorted by family, they may be omitted from national censuses. Furthermore, because poverty surveys tend to mask inequitable distributions of money, land, and other critical resources within and across families, the poverty experienced by individual widows living within households is frequently overlooked. Widows have long been the victims of an unchecked patriarchal culture. Paule Friere (1993) defines this as a culture of silence among the downtrodden that preserves their subjugation. They lack critical awareness, the ability to respond to their dilemma, and even the simple words to reveal it as a result of their despotism. Widowhood is a representation of men's and women's historical power disparities. Despite this, widow care has mostly gone overlooked in the global feminist movement, notably in India.

Keywords: Widow, Society, Conditions, Property Rights, Religious Places, Measures, Problems, Trauma of Widows, Patriarchy, Socioeconomic and Socio - Cultural Milieu.

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I. Introduction

According to the 1991 Indian Census, the country has 33 million widows. This equates to 8% of the female population, or one out of every thirteen women. Many of these widows dwell in holy villages like Vrindavan, Varanasi, Mathura, Hardwar, and Puri, and migration to these places is ongoing. Not only are there a lot of widows in these places, but there are also a lot of homeless women. In a patriarchal country like India, when a woman's husband dies, her whole family considers her as a burden, and she is forced to live in seclusion. This is especially true for women who come from neglected and disadvantaged backgrounds. They are compelled to adhere to rigorous social norms and rituals, as well as refrain from engaging in a range of other activities. Widows began to be seen negatively by people of all socioeconomic strata. Various norms were placed on them relating to Food and socio-religious behaviour are two topics that come up frequently. They were not allowed to wear jewellery and were required to dress in white. Sati was first practised in some regions of Rajputana during the mediaeval period, and it gradually expanded to other sections of the nation. Many socio-religious groups were started to eradicate sati and encourage widow remarriage. But, despite the passage of more than a century and a half, the widows' lives have remained mostly unchanged, and they continue to adhere to the same standards and ideals. The situation of widows in rural regions is far worse. In most situations, once their spouses die, they are evicted from their houses and forced to fend for themselves. When these widows are evicted from their houses, they frequently end up in religious institutions.

II. Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary data gathered from many sources on the internet, as well as data gathered from various government sources and the Recent Research on Widows in India: Workshop and Conference Report. For the analysis, a methodical methodology was used. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to examine the data.

III. Literature Review

Living Death: Trauma of Widowhood in India Hardcover – 1 January 2012 by V.Mohini Giri (Author)

While this book provides an overview of widows' status, it also includes 25 case studies and critical articles by experts that focus on the marginalisation that is unique to certain locations and types of widows. It is a rich and comprehensive collection of essays from notable social scientists who have provided an academic evaluation of the impact of the recent armed war in Jammu and Kashmir and Kargil on individuals who have been subjected to unending mental and physical suffering.

Widows Of Vidarbha – Making Of Shadows By Kota Neelima

While unveiling the faces of Vidarbha's widows, a little sliver of attention has been shifted from farmer suicides to the lives of the deceased farmers' families. The agriculture industry in India has recently seen a downturn, resulting to an increase in the number of farmer suicides and distraught widows. Widowhood is undeniably the most prominent result of suicides.

The impact of the agricultural crisis on widows and their families has received very sporadic attention. In her book "Widows of Vidarbha: Making of Shadows," Kota Neelima, a political author and journalist, chronicles the turbulent lives of 16 widows to whom the state has easily turned a blind eye.

The widows of Vidarbha reflects on their lives over a three-year period, contemplating the transition from hopelessness and misery to optimism and a promising future.

The book was studied and published based on the author's extensive field work and frequent travels to Vidarbha. One of the book's distinguishing features is that the stories openly express feelings. Instead than shying away from depicting these widows' pain, the author prominently emphasises sensitivity in every manner conceivable.

The book's 18 tales cover four essential subjects in a subtle yet effective manner: In a patriarchal culture, there is an identity issue; the government has a responsibility to provide quality education to the young generation. Following then, the novel focuses on the transformation in family members' goals and hopes following the death of farmers. Finally, the state's and politics' perspectives.

IV. Research Analysis

Widowhood perceived through the Ages

When a husband died during the Vedic period, a widow was expected to perform symbolic self-immolation. The widow lies down by the dead man, and his bow is placed in his hand in one of the Rig Veda's funeral hymens, after which the bow is withdrawn and the wife is summoned back to life. It's unclear whether the rite was limited to nobility. In later years, a widow may have burnt herself on her husband's funeral pyre, which may have been the commencement of the practise of sati. By the Middle Ages, the practise had expanded, and sati stones can be seen all throughout India, remembering the many loyal wives who followed their husbands to their graves.

India in the Middle Ages - The advent of the Bhakti movement, a cult of devotion to God, permitted women in mediaeval India to employ their sexual and emotional energy in new ways, transcending their social and family responsibilities. Throughout the Middle Ages, widows were largely engaged to religious activities and beliefs. They even defied patriarchal social customs by refusing to marry and have children, as well as rejecting patriarchal social conventions. In today's India, there have been efforts to liberalise attitudes about widows, remove practises such as sati, and provide them with access to religious life. As women enhanced their educational skills and took on professional professions such as physicians, attorneys, teachers, and journalists, opportunities grew, leading to women's empowerment. Gender discrimination in general, and prejudice against widows in particular, has only been recognised in the last two or three decades by the Indian government, volunteer groups, and social science experts. Unfortunately, many affirmative initiatives such as welfare and empowerment, as well as research studies, fail to recognise widows as a separate group in need of particular attention, but rather as members of the wider category of women. Widowhood is unpleasant, unfavourable, and humiliating for women because of societal prejudice and ceremonial sanctions. Widows in India face not just social and economic repercussions, but also a host of psychological consequences, such as isolation and, in certain cases, deprivation, all of which add to mental discomfort and unfairness.

Problems of Widowhood

Widows all over the world, not just in India, have been proven to have issues, notably in terms of social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors. The following is a list of them:

Finance - In India, widows have a huge financial challenge. A large proportion of widows struggle to fulfil their basic demands as well as those of their family members. The main issues they face with their children are the inability to provide adequate food, clothing, and school fees. Other issues include their inability to buy luxury products, maintain give-and-take relationships with friends and community members, repay debts taken out by their spouses, and meet personal costs. Another important issue that widows have is how they will pay the dowry and fulfil their children's marriage costs. As a result of their significant financial issues, widows limit their spending on food, clothes, social, cultural, and recreational activities (Singh, & Gill, n.d.).

Child Rearing - The majority of the widows stated that they had difficulties with child rearing. Many of them struggled to meet the needs of their children on a daily basis, as well as to deal with their sicknesses and health issues, and to discipline them. Widows also express concerns about assisting children with school assignments, choosing subjects for their higher education, enrolling them in higher educational institutions, employment opportunities, taking them on outings and leisure activities, picnics and trips to hill stations, and planning their weddings. The loss of a reliable source of income may be the root of further challenges in adjusting to widowhood. There have been instances where children refuse to follow their single parents and become maladjusted; as a result, regulating and disciplining them is a huge issue for widows (Singh, & Gill, n.d.).

Personal and Social Life - Widows frequently have issues in their personal and social lives. Their personal appearance was severely restricted; they were not permitted to wear embroidered clothing and were expected to dress soberly. They felt lonely and distant, and they had difficulty communicating with other people. They were expected to manage home demands on their own, to care for their own needs, and to acquire talents to interact with the outside world. They attended to the requirements of the attendees at social gatherings on their own. Widows are often afraid of a variety of things, including criticism and maltreatment from family and friends, being alone at night, and attending community gatherings. They may retreat from society as a result of these causes in some situations (Singh, & Gill, n.d.).

Violence and Mistreatment - Widows are viewed with distrust by society. There have been occasions where they have been suspected of murdering their husbands, primarily for the sake of property and fortune. They are unable to live a life of respect and adoration because of this mindset. Various sorts of abuse and maltreatment have been perpetrated on them. They are verbally and physically humiliated, harassed, and denied the opportunity to participate in weddings, ceremonies, and other events, as well as being expelled from their houses. Cutting their hair and forbidding them from wearing cosmetics or jewellery is another type of cruelty. In other situations, they are even denied the opportunity to seek custody of their children and are forbidden from seeing them. They are malnourished in certain circumstances due to a lack of access to a decent and nutritious meal (The Challenges Faced by Widows, n.d.).

Forced Child Marriage - The daughters of widows who live in poverty and backwardness are equally vulnerable to the brutality of a forced child marriage. The removal of their children from school and marriage, or the sale of their daughters to older men, is a common action among poor and impoverished status widows. They believe that they will be unable to meet the demands and wants of their daughters and so perceive them as burdens, therefore they marry them off at a young age. In the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, such men are frequently widowers and HIV carriers. Child marriage is a kind of violence in and of itself, but most of these young girls end up as child widows, and they endure the same shame and abuse that their mothers did (Sahoo, 2014).

Conflicts - Armed conflict and its aftermath have resulted in a large increase in the number of widows, since the separation and death of men and boys is a regular characteristic of modern wars, and sexual violence, including rape and harassment of women and girls, is a byproduct of conflict. Widows have been forced to watch the murder of their husbands in several wars, either before or after they have been subjected to mental torture. Widows face death threats, assault, and are frequently sentenced to death. It is critical that they have the fortitude to testify against the rapists in international or national tribunals. Displacement as a result of conflict has a disproportionately detrimental influence on the status of widows and their dependents, because they are at danger without an adult male guardian, whether in IDP or refugee camps, or in flight seeking safety across borders (Sahoo, 2014).

Homelessness - Homelessness is a major concern among widows. A person is considered homeless if he or she is living on the streets, pavilions, ashramas, or at the home of a friend or family. The term "homeless" refers to those who do not have their own houses or shelters. Widows face this dilemma when they are evicted from their home by members of their family, most commonly in-laws or children. The issues that arise as a result of homelessness are significant. They suffer from health problems and illnesses, as well as a lack of access to a nutritious diet and safe drinking water. As a result, they are malnourished, unable to meet the needs and requirements of their young children, and unable to find work to support their living conditions. In some cases, this problem forces them to sell their children. Their situation deteriorates, and they are unable to attain a nice and comfortable lifestyle.

Problems of Child Widows - The issues faced by child widows are particularly serious, since they contribute to depriving them of all of their childhood activities. The most significant issue that child widows face is obtaining an education. There have been cases where girls have become widows before they reach the age of 18. They are exposed to a variety of restrictions that widows are expected to observe at such a young age. They are expected to wear white clothing, refrain from wearing jewellery and cosmetics, abstain from certain foods, pleasures, and comforts, and commit themselves to their convictions. The most significant hurdle that develops is throughout the process of acquiring education and enrolling in educational institutions. They must adhere to religious teachings, traditions, values, and beliefs throughout their life.

Empowerment of Widows

In certain locations, widows have been neglected in the past, as well as in the present, and are considered an underrepresented category in Indian culture. After their spouses died, the widows were subjected to the oppressive old societal standards and traditions. Even fundamental human rights such as attending ceremonies, writing letters to friends and family, and participating in other social and cultural activities are prohibited to them. In most circumstances, widows are afraid of being abused and tormented by other men. They are fed low-protein food and are kept in secluded areas of the house, where they are viewed as emblems of misfortune. They are not permitted to appear in public. Widows in India face several challenges as a result of societal conventions, cultural customs, and beliefs. They were obliged to withdraw totally from the community's social life and to adhere to a strict discipline, making their existence a virtual social death. They acquired apprehension and susceptibility as a result of these causes. During the early colonial period, efforts were undertaken to introduce reforms to better the situation of widows in India (Anji, & Velumani, 2013).

Several advocates and activists have fought for widows' rights. In several regions of India, social reform groups arose with the goal of improving the condition of widows. Various legal reforms, like as the Abolition of Sati Act and the Hindu Widows Re-Marriage Act, have resulted from such societal uprisings. Widows have been recognised through the procedures that have been implemented. They are permitted to leave their isolated locations and participate in rituals and other festivities. Discriminatory treatment of them should be eliminated, and they should be provided with rights and opportunities. Since the beginning of the Five Year Plans, many welfare schemes for the progress of widows have been implemented in Tamil Nadu. Several charitable organisations have worked to improve the lives of widows. What has to be investigated is the extent to which these laws, reforms, social action, and welfare programmes have impacted their lives (An Exploratory Study, n.d.).

Education, employment opportunities, participation in social, political, cultural, and economic affairs, working for the welfare of the family and community, and raising awareness and knowledge about various areas that are required to live an efficient life are the main factors that lead to individual empowerment. Widows' attitudes regarding remarriage, career possibilities, engagement in politics, social and cultural issues, education after widowhood, child adoption, and other activities that contribute to happiness are all favourable. Other people, on the other hand, had an unfavourable attitude toward widows, notably their parents-in-laws, brothers-in-law, and other ladies. These negative attitudes primarily act as roadblocks in the process of achieving empowerment. Compulsory education for women, employment for widows, property rights in the name of widows, and the formation of Self-Help Groups for widows are just a few of the approvals. This will have a major impact on their lives. Education and work are the major variables that contribute to women's empowerment, not only widows (An Exploratory Study, n.d.).

In rural areas, girls are often seen as liabilities, and their parents think that marrying them off at a young age is the best way to protect them. They are frequently educated on how to conduct home tasks and then married off. Within the country, there have been a large number of child widows. There have been instances where their parents or in-laws have supported them and sent them to school. The major goal of enrolling child widows in school is to empower them and assist them achieve self-sufficiency. Their lives normally come to a standstill when their spouse dies; they have no idea what to do with their lives, so getting them educated would help them to gain self-sufficiency and become goal-oriented. Adult widows, on the other hand, are obtaining education, expertise, and engaging in a variety of vocations and career prospects; some even work as entrepreneurs and own firms. Widows enjoy full rights in today's society, in both urban and rural places, and they are not constrained by any rigorous social or cultural conventions, beliefs, or traditions.

Property Rights of Widows

The following are the proposals given to encourage the registration of joint property in both husband and wife's names: (Chen et al., 1995).

Property should be transferred promptly and quickly, and the widow's name should be automatically registered in the land records following the husband's death. Furthermore, if the husband's piece of land is still held jointly with his father and/or brothers, the holding should be transformed and divided at the same time. The responsible property dealer should be held accountable for the transformation and partition of the property. The right to property is defined as a fundamental right, and widows should be prioritised. In light of these guidelines, land registries or records must be rationalised and maintained on a regular basis. When the government distributes cultivable land, landless widows should be given special consideration. When the government allocates cultivable land, widows who do not have access to land ownership are given priority.

Furthermore, when land is assigned to married couples, it should be recorded in both husband and wife's names. Widows' property rights should be protected under modern legislation. After the death of their spouses, the laws and policies should be written in such a way that widows have the right to their property.

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 needs to be modified to make the section that allows a man to will away his whole estate invalid. State tenancy rules should be scrutinised for clear prejudices against women in general, and widows in particular. Widows have been denied property in the past and have even been evicted from their houses. As a result, there have been instances where widows have been granted property rights.

Land reform legislation should be scrutinised for clear prejudices against women in general and widows in particular. The state should intervene in situations of bigamy and levirate since only the first wife has the legal right to sue the husband, and because forced remarriage through levirate is one means of depriving a widow of her property rights.

Widows should be assisted in implementing their legal inheritance rights, and current legislation should be promoted. It is critical to undertake study on the following topics: the alternatives open to widows regarding property inheritance and remarriage, as well as the incentive available to women in making their own decisions. The joint family system should be implemented as quickly as possible. Customary practises and how they interact with and conflict with the law. It is necessary to identify the gap between legal theory and practise, as well as how these discrepancies might be bridged. Men have accepted the concept of property rights because of the justifications given by women. The techniques that others have used to deprive widows of their inheritance rights, as well as the methods that they might use to exercise these rights.

Measures leading to Improvement in the Status of Widows

There has been the implementation of initiatives aimed at improving the situation of widows:

Widowhood is regarded as a complicated institution in India, and many widows do not meet the imagined standards of widowhood. Interestingly, the ideals of widowhood have changed over time and in different parts of the world. Widowhood is a feature in Indian society, particularly among Bengalis, that works to isolate a certain group of women from the mainstream of life, and their situation deteriorates as they age. The survivor's ego strength, the type of past relationships, the availability of support from others, health facilities, loss of money, and expected loneliness are all elements that impact the challenging nature of the transition to widowhood. These are some of the challenges that widows face, but they must take steps to address them. The first is that widows have the right to become goal-oriented and achieve something in their lives, such as finding work or starting their own business. Widows are allowed to enrol in educational institutions and training centres. They have the right to self-sufficiency and autonomy (Summary Report of the Situation Analysis of Widows in the Religious Places of West Bengal, 2009).

Recognizing the role of widows in society, ancient Hindu legislators established a set of rights and responsibilities for Hindu widows. In theory, a widow is entitled to her late husband's part of his property or support from his extended family. In exchange, the widow's responsibility is to protect the husband's family and lineage's propriety, respect, and wholesomeness. A widow has certain residual rights in her natal house if her husband's extended family does not support or help her. Even though the law clearly states that widows have the

right to maintenance and inheritance, their family members do not recognise this entitlement. After the loss of a son in the family, most family members do not want to part with their belongings. As a result, an attempt was undertaken to learn how well-informed the women are about their rights to inherit property as widows (An Exploratory Study, n.d.).

There have been laws and procedures put in place to prevent violent and illegal acts against widows. As previously said, widows are subjected to various sorts of violent and criminal treatment; thus, it is important to put in place measures to eliminate these treatments. First and foremost, the incidence of occurrences of violence against widows must be determined. What is the rate of incidence of violence, what are the most common types of violent acts, and so on. To eliminate all sorts of violence and criminal activities against widows, laws, regulations, norms, and processes must be developed. When widows are subjected to different sorts of abuse, harassment, or rape, they are allowed to seek help from the legal authorities. Widows are normally helpless, there has been an increase in the criminal and violent acts against them, therefore, legal authorities are available to make provision of support and assistance to them (Sahoo, 2014).

Because of a lack of finances, the widows are forced to live in poverty. The government has sponsored programmes aimed at increasing the consumption of a healthy and nutritious food. Antodaya Ann Yojana is a temple-sponsored programme that gives a one-time meal. The government provides BPL rice to a large number of widows. The temple administrators provide mahaprasad to the majority of widows. According to research, widows were able to get some financial assistance under the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS). Widows, on the other hand, are unable to recall the names of the programmes due to a lack of literacy. They reported that they received roughly ten thousand rupees after their husbands died (An Exploratory Study, n.d.). This sum of money was useful to them in certain ways, and they were able to meet their requirements with it.

The status of one's health is said to be an essential indication of one's socioeconomic well-being. The widows' precarious living conditions, as well as a lack of sufficient diet and nutrition, would almost certainly lead to a decline in health. It is difficult for widows to maintain excellent health when they are without family support. On the other hand, if family members are available, there are assistance and carers nearby, and they have financial means, it is not difficult for widows to meet their health-care needs. Health issues must be addressed; otherwise, they may become a hindrance to carrying out everyday tasks. In remote locations, medical and health care facilities are being established so that elderly widows do not have any difficulties. Medical professionals even pay visits to widows in their homes if they are unable to get to health centers.

V. Conclusion

Widowhood is a complicated institution in India, as women face both hardships and support. Widowhood is a feature in Indian society that serves to separate a certain set of women from the mainstream; in the majority of instances, they devote themselves to praying to God and holding religious ideas. People's health deteriorates as they age, and they suffer illnesses and health problems. The survivor's capacity, the availability of help and care, health facilities, a source of income, and isolation are all factors that determine how tough the transition to widowhood is.

Remarriage is not permitted, and clothing, food consumption, and involvement in social events are all controlled. Widowhood highlights the disconnect between cultural and societal reality, as well as beliefs and behaviours. Losing a husband is traumatic, especially when widows are forced to care for their little children alone. Money, sustaining their living conditions, meeting the requirements of their children, paying tuition, and so on are the most pressing concerns they have. Initiatives and strategies have been put in place to assist them in improving their circumstances. In addition, the number of widows remarrying has grown. Widows in today's society are gaining empowerment and pursuing jobs as physicians, attorneys, teachers, journalists, and entrepreneurs, among other occupations. Widows, on the other hand, experience a scarcity of empowering opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Complete economic reliance on others, the stigma of widowhood, and cultural limitations on remarriage, especially among the upper castes, have made their standing in Indian culture unstable. Gender discrimination is addressed in the Indian Constitution Acts of 1937, 1956, and 2005. The Indian Constitutional requirements, however, are not observed due to illiteracy among Indians. The following remedies are already included in India's Constitution and can be utilised to assist widows:

Despite the fact that the Constitution contains provisions to safeguard gender equality, most widows are ignorant of their rights. If an attempt is made to educate widows, they will be able to articulate their rights and empower themselves. The constitution can also be used as a solution in the following situations:

1. Despite the fact that the Constitution contains provisions to safeguard gender equality, most widows are ignorant of their rights. If an attempt is made to educate widows, they will be able to articulate their rights and empower themselves.
2. Under Indian constitutional provisions, a widow's claim to land and property, as well as her right to equality and the right to live in dignity, might be recognised. Furthermore, annual statistics on violence and abuse against

widows in India should be compiled and given to MPs in the Parliament so that social legislation to protect their rights may be enacted.

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