

WIDOWHOOD: THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACE BY WIDOWS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

A widow is a woman whose spouse dies. This condition, in which the spouse dies, is called widowhood. The loss of a husband is felt more than any other loss and disrupts the lives of women. The standard of living of the people in India has improved to a great extent but there is still a class whose condition has not improved and they are widows. The way society treats widows is very reprehensible. Widowhood is a crisis and a problem that suddenly changes a woman's life and also including new social adjustments. The main reasons for publishing this paper is to describe the difficulties in the life of the widow, the imposition of rituals on her in the name of the practice, and the mental and financial difficulties faced by the widow. Although the Government of India has implemented several schemes in India for a widow, the condition of widows is appalling. The government plans to reduce the economic burden on widows, which also gives benefit to some extent, but it is not enough. It helps a little, financially and a lonely widow also suffers from mental depression. Society does not support her enough, even family members do not support her. Society does not want to take responsibility for the fact that a widow does not have a place in society and a widow is not respected as a married woman. Many works in the country are in the interest of widows but the problem of widows is not lessened by society.

Keywords: *Widow, Patriarchal Society, Socio-Economic Status, Cultural Practices.*

Introduction

India is a culturally rich country inhabited by people of different religions. The customs of each religion are also varied. As we can see that there are two sides to the coin, so there are two sides to different customs in which we see both good and bad results. There is a problem that has been going on for centuries and that is the problem of widows. One section of the society is aware of the problem and also strives for it while on the other side there is a conservative section of the society which sees it as a custom and "turns a blind eye" and lives their life. In India, women are taken for granted and they are regarded as the most disadvantaged section of the society. Women hold half of the population of the world's population. Women are not given their due status as they deserve, women face various problems in her life but one problem that remained the same in women's life that is the problem of Widowhood. A widow in the world experiences two similar problems. That is a loss of status and financial stability reduces. (Thara Bhai. L. 2004)

Problems and Challenges Face by Widows in India

Being a widow is never in the hands of a woman, or a woman does not want to be a widow. But this time comes in the life of some women and this time brings with it many difficulties and responsibilities. In the current situation in India, there are approximately 40 million estimated widows as per the 2010 census. Widows face many problems in their lives. The widowhood makes the biggest and saddest change in a woman's life. The death of her husband is the beginning of many problems in the life of a widow. The woman struggles to bring herself into a new role by facing grief and sorrow in a situation that is suddenly in front of her.

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Suddenly this situation affects the life of the widow financially and emotionally. When the financial and mental support of the family, the head, dies, the whole family is in crisis and all the burden now falls on the widow. Our conservative Indian society associates widows with superstitious and unreliable rules. In India, widows are facing many problems in society and family and it is because of the traditional norms, superstition, cultural practices, and wrong beliefs. India is a patriarchal Hindu society in which women derive their status from their husbands, where widows are regarded as misfortune and their presence was thought to be inauspicious on happy occasions. (Sharma, B. and Boro, U.R., 2017). Widows are victims of such superstitions and such backward social attitudes. We all know that in ancient times the practice of sati was such that widows were forced to burn themselves alive at their husband's funeral. The efforts of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy helped to ban the practice of sati but resulted in harsh treatment of living widows. The widow was told to shave, to wear white clothes, to avoid eating almost anything good, and to abstain from almost all good works. The simple food we eat in our daily lives, onions, garlic, potatoes and pickles, and meat, was kept away from widows. They had a superstition that such food increases sexual feelings but who can explain to them that to keep the body healthy and prevent malnutrition, this food is very important and a common man takes this food every day in his life.

The practice of sati was completely abolished during British rule. The rule of widow remarriage was also enforced during British rule. India is now an independent country. India is achieving new success day by day. India has achieved a lot in globalization, economic liberalization. Although many cultural practices have changed over time, there are still many societies and regions where the condition of widows is deplorable. In the North Indian state of Punjab, a widow is referred to by the regional word *rundi*, which means prostitute. In this region, the widow is forced or encouraged to marry her deceased husband's brother. If she is owned by a man, it will eliminate the possibility of rape. A similar practice is also found in South India. Here, widowed women are not allowed to wear blouses with saris. In the name of superstition, different customs and rituals on widows have been imposed.

There are many parts of India where widows have no roof over their heads, no food to eat, no relationship to say, no place to go, no one willing to keep them. In India, Vrindavan and Varanasi are also known as the city of widows. Here, old widows are forced to live on the Vrindavan road, they are forced to beg and they are helpless. On the other hand, the young widow is exploited and pushed into prostitution, forcing the young widow into a state of helplessness. Widows whose fortunes are a little better are called to sing hymns for 3-4 hours a day. Widows have to register themselves first and then they are called at a given time and then only they can work. Widows who are called for hymns are given a one-time meal and some financial assistance of 5 rupees in return for singing hymns, this hymns ashram is run by the rich religious people. There is almost no one to take care of the elderly widows, they on their own in every way take care of themselves, some elder widows are forcefully sent for bagging. And this is how life goes, there is almost no one for these people, and they are forced to work this way for their financial help and this is what becomes their daily life.

Widows are likely to suffer, extreme and systematic physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence both within their families and in the outside community. Across regions, religions, cultures, caste, and class, widows can be stigmatized as bringing bad luck, as "inauspicious", or "the evil eye". (Sahoo, 2014)

The Government of India has launched several schemes to assist its citizens. Similarly, plans have been made for widows to take action and receive financial help. An estimated 40 million women in India are widows as per the 2010 census. The state and central government scheme that are being launched, from which a widow gets the benefit and can do something for themselves and be an independent woman. The Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme has been introduced by the Government of India to help widows. The widow pension scheme has been implemented under the National Social Assistance Program, from where financial assistance is provided to widows.

Widows constitute 10% of the total population of India. Out of which approximately 1.52 lakh widows are availing the benefit of widow pension scheme in Gujarat. If the widowed children are small, one of the children will be given Rupees 100 per month. By taking advantage of this scheme, the widow gets some financial help. The government has also come up with another such scheme, which is the Vidhva Sahay and Talim Yojna. With the help of this scheme, widowed women between the ages of 18 and 40 are helped to improve their economic status to some extent. And women between the ages of 18 and 30 are entitled to Rupees. 500 per month and his two children Rupees. 20 by post office fee. Similarly, the Madhya Pradesh government has set up a Krishna Kutir in Vrindavan for widows in which widows can stay for free.

Conclusion

There are many such problems of widows in India and whether society takes notice or not, the government takes note of it and works hard for it. The government has also implemented various schemes for widows so that widows can get more help and widows get their due amount. When a woman becomes a widow, the situation she suddenly encounters changes her life. Widows fall both economically and socially. She is more socially numb because she is being looked upon differently instead of helping her. A married woman also sees a widow differently. Even in modern times, a married woman speaks for a widow that she cannot wear whatever nice clothes she likes. We can say that one woman cannot understand another woman, then how does society would understand her. The condition of women will improve only when women help themselves and other women also and give up their wrong thoughts, and superstitions. One of the reasons widows suffer financially is because they are illiterate. Such less educated women suffer more financial problems. Because they don't understand the government's plans and they can't do anything to get the necessary evidence and paperwork done because they don't understand the process. One of the reasons many women do not reach out to the schemes is that they lack literacy and cannot take advantage of such schemes. The reason for not taking advantage of the schemes is their legal understanding and to some extent corruption.

We have to take initiative for the betterment of society. We have to raise voice above such superstitions and rigid customs and rules. We have to give up such a mentality. India is a country where a woman is worshiped as a goddess on one side and a widow on the other hand is treated badly. We have to take the initiative to change the society and come forward to help such women and always be ready to get their rights and necessary help and every citizen of India must always help such women, if the thinking of society improves towards widows in that condition the widow's position will also improve.

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