

## WIDOWS IN INDIA: SOCIAL EXCLUSION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND POVERTY

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### **Abstract**

*Psychologically, losing a long-term spouse can cause symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and feelings of guilt. Physical illness may also occur as the body becomes more vulnerable to emotional and environmental stressors. The majority of widows in India are deprived of their inheritance rights, economic problem, and victim of violence. Indian widows are often visible, not least in relation to their economic contribution and unpaid family work in household. In our country, it has been keenly observed that widows are deprived of getting widow relief due to corruption. Widows come across economic hardship during their life. They are bound to send their children out to work to earn income instead of sending them to school for education. This qualitative study explores the exclusion, poverty, and unemployment of Indian widows.*

### **Keywords**

*Exclusion, Trauma, Widows, Poverty, Deprivation, Patriarchy, Socio-economic and Socio-cultural Milieu.*

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## **Introduction**

The total number of widows in India is extremely large which is a matter of grave concern. These widows till today, remain oppressed by norms, traditions, and cultural expectations of the past. “Widows across the globe share two common experiences: a loss of social status and reduced financial stability. In both the developed and developing countries, widows suffer a dramatic and subtle transformation in their social position. Today, millions of the world’s widows, of all ages endure extreme poverty, ostracism, violence, homelessness, ill health, and discrimination in law and custom. A lack of inheritance and land rights, widow abuse, and the practice of degrading, and life-threatening mourning burial rites are prime examples of human rights violations that are justified by reliance on culture and tradition. Many states in India have introduced a pension for widows. However, the monetary value of widows’ pensions is a continuing source of grievance, since the value often does not keep up with fluctuations in the ever-changing cost-of-living indices or with expectations.”<sup>1</sup> There is a striking lack of public concern for the quiet deprivations experienced by millions of widows on a daily basis. This gap in our understanding is particularly serious in view of the fact that some of these deprivations are quite severe and widespread and are reflected, as we will see, in relatively high mortality rates among widows.

## **Social Exclusion of Widows**

In a society totally governed for centuries by patriarchy, discrimination on the basis of sex exists in almost every political, economic, social, and legal institution. In such a situation the Indian widow is triply discriminated against, as a woman, as a widow, and as a poor widowed woman. In our country widows are systematically blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to women of a different group, society, and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights. Widows are living in very poor conditions and are excluded from facilities, benefits, and opportunities that others enjoy. The existence of social exclusion makes it difficult to achieve particular social objectives, such as reducing poverty and malnutrition, because they are often hidden barriers to reaching those who are socially excluded. Social exclusion tells us that social relationships are threatened or damaged, and therefore, exclusion tells us there is a crisis, by causing an aversive feeling. It leads to the impoverishment of human life and develops a poorer sense of well-being. It leads to inequality, poverty, and unemployment. When widows are wholly or partially, excluded from full participation in the society in which they live, this results discrimination, deprivation, isolation, shame, etc.

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment is a major issue in India. The effects of unemployment on the economy are equally severe; a 1 percent increase in unemployment reduces the GDP by 2 percent. “As of September 2018, according to the Indian government, India had 31 million jobless people.”<sup>2</sup> Unemployment affects the unemployed individual and his/her family not only with respect to income, but also with respect to health and mortality. Moreover, the effects linger for decades. Widows in India are the most sufferers and unemployment leads them to depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Due to unemployment, they have been exploited. They have to accept low wages and work under unfavorable conditions, and under the situation of unemployment, a widow has no source of income. Unemployment causes poverty. There is an increase in the burden of debt of these widows. Regarding derivation of economic rights many examples can be cited; the deprivation of women from property rights which is a major source of stable income in our rural areas where two-thirds of the people are dependent on agriculture. It has been seen that widows in most cases fail to inherit their share of land, their near relatives, especially in a joint family, are not ready to offer inheritance right on different pretexts.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is not having enough material possessions or income for a person's needs. Poverty may include social, economic, and political elements. The widows in our society lack of the means necessary to meet basic personal needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Women face a much greater risk of poverty for a number of inter-related reasons, including: Women are paid less than men, even when they have the same work hours. “The plight of widows is very pathetic because of the longstanding hold of orthodoxy, obscurantism, and superstitious beliefs. Besides cruel frustrations of widowhood, the widows suffer from severe social, economic and cultural deprivations.”<sup>3</sup> Poverty in India has negatively affected the livelihoods of millions of Indians. Female-headed households (Particularly headed by widows) are the most vulnerable members of the society. Psychological research has demonstrated that living in poverty has a wide range of negative effects on the physical and mental health and well-being of our nation's children. Poverty impacts children within their various contexts at home, in school, and in their neighborhoods and communities. Poor children and teens are also at greater risk for several negative outcomes such as poor academic achievement, school dropout, abuse and neglect, behavioral and socio-emotional problems, physical health problems, and developmental delays. These effects are compounded by the barriers children and

their families encounter when trying to access physical and mental health care. Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn.

### Review of Literature

**Bindeshwar Pathak and Satyendra Tripathi (2016)** *Widows in India: Study of Varanasi and Vrindavan*. This book on widows in contemporary India delves into multiple forms of material and emotional deprivation including a most oppressive kind of renunciation forced on the widows living in Varanasi and Vrindavan. The book argues that the widows need a measure of social security for their sheer material survival, as they have for long been subjected to humiliation, neglect, and blatant exploitation. In spite of modern India's constitutional provisions which grant equal rights to women, a large section of these women continue to suffer due to the heterogeneous and hierarchical nature of our social structure based on the most glaring forms of socio-economic inequalities. This book investigates the people's attitude towards the widows and their own self-image.

**L. Thara Bhai (2004)** *Widows in India*. Women form half of the population of the world and share one percent of the resources. In India, women are born to suffer till their death. The sufferings of women are doubled if they happen to be widows on the Indian soil. Society is not positive even today for widow remarriage. Setting apart the laws societal norms are strong here that a widow has to die as a widow whatever her age and surroundings are. The widows in India are one of the categories of women who are not given importance by Women's Studies Scientists, social analysts, and policymakers.

**P Adinarayana Reddy (2004)** *Problems of Widows in India*. Entering into widowhood is more hazardous, painful, and humiliating to women than to a widower because of the discrimination and ritual sanctions of the society against widows. As the result, widows in India not only suffer social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological consequences, loneliness, and in many cases, deprivation causing emotional disturbances and imbalances.

**Margaret Owen (1996)** *A World of Widows*. This book provides a global overview of the status of widowhood. Neglected by social policy researchers, international human rights activists, and the women's movement, the status of the world's widow - legal, social, cultural, and economic - is an urgent issue given the extent and the severity of the discrimination against them. The author shows the prevalence of discrimination against widows in inheritance rights, land ownership, custody of children, security of home and shelter, nutrition, and health.

### **Objectives of the Research Study**

1. To highlight the socio-economic issues of widows in Indian society.
2. How are the lives of widows different from other women?
3. What are the measures to evacuate the deteriorated condition of widows?
4. To emancipate women from poverty.

### **Research Methodology**

The methods section is an important part of any research work. All the claims and recommendations of the study will be weighed against the procedures and analysis techniques used in this section. The present research study is depending upon primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through personal discussions, observations, and one-on-one interviews. The researcher also used books, previous research articles, newspapers for the collection of secondary data.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited only to the widows of India. The study is not focused on widow characters in the novels, but the practical events.

### **Conclusion**

Widowhood is an event that constitutes the greatest and saddest change in the life of a woman. The death of the husband brings numerous problems for the widow. She realizes that, for the in-laws, she is a burden on the family economy and, hence, not welcome. All of a sudden, she is exposed to face the pain of bereavement as well as realign herself to a new role. All over the world widows are found to have many problems in common. Economic and emotional setbacks are inevitable for them. However, Indian widows are especially the target of backward social attitudes. Indian women are trapped in so many ways that even in their thoughts they dare not attempt committing to desires that otherwise come naturally to people. For decades they have been kept prisoners inside the very loops of petting and pampering just to keep their eyes off the sky and their hearts, off what is desirable. The problem of widowhood calls for action on various fronts, based on different forms of organization. It is extremely hard for a widow on her own to challenge the social restrictions and economic deprivations of which she is the victim. Effective collective action is, therefore, a basic condition in order to achieve change in the situation of widows. The primary concerns and demands of rural widows include not only some economic security but also dignity and respect. These psychological and social aspects of well-being are of great significance even for those who live extremely deprived lives in material terms. The education of women plays a central role in the process of social change, and in helping women to have greater control over their own lives. It must be made a compulsion to educate every girl for a better

future. Therefore, each one of us must be ready to treat women as equal counterparts. We must help them at every stage and more than that empower them to make their own decisions. We must join hands to protect and safeguard our women in India. It will help us thrive as a country and make the world a better place. This is central to a long-term solution to their vulnerability and a firm step towards greater autonomy and self-reliance.

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