Women in Patriarchy society has always been in a lower position and status. They have been facing discrimination, violence, and exclusion in some form or other. If in case a woman has become widow then their condition becomes even worse and vulnerable. A woman who has lost her spouse and not remarried is called as widow. Women in general and widows in particular, have always been a subject matter of subjugation and discrimination since time immemorial. Widows’ situation and status in society like India, where male dominancy prevails throughout the ages, is extremely miserable and women are always considered as a curse to the society. They have excluded or deprived not only from the family matters but also from societal ceremonies. Despite of rapid change in the world and the standard of living of people worldwide, the condition of women (particularly widow) still remains unchanged.
It can be said that no group of the world is neglected than are widows. Widows are deliberately remaining outside the statistics of development scenario. They are rarely mentioned in the any of the reports of development in the last 20 years. Widows have always been looked upon in the social gatherings. They are considered as a curse for the mankind in orthodox Indian society.

**Demographic picture of widowhood**

Worldwide widow’s population figure estimated at 245 million with half of them living in extremely poverty. (Loomba Foundation report, 2010). The countries with highest number of widows population is China with 43 million, India with second highest population of 42.4 million population and after that United nations with 13.6 million population. Widows have been looked upon at most social gatherings be it a marriage, child birth or house warming ceremonies in a bad manner. They are not permitted to give blessings even to their own newly married children as it is believed that these blessings will turn into curse and the newly married bride would also become widow.

**Widows: throughout the ages**

**Position of Women and Widowhood during the Vedic Period**

In that era, women were tied to their husbands in burning pyres and forced to death, a practice called ‘SATI’. If a women undergoes sati, as she was worshipped Goddess, temples were built in her memory and it was believed that she would go directly to heaven and can be with their husbands forever. In Mahabharata there is an example of King Pandu that, after the death of king Pandu, his younger wife Madri commits sati. Another example was of Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madira were burnt with King Vasudev corpse.

**Status of Women and Widowhood in the Medieval India**

Indian leader, Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) through his organization, Brahmo Samaj was the first who fought to eliminate sati. Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) tried to legitimize the remarriage of Hindu widows on the basis of scriptural authority. In the twentieth century, Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi actually work a lot to stop the practice.

**Status of Women and Widows in the Modern Era**

Over the last few years there has been a high decibel noise for women’s rights and against women inhumanity. Many constitutional safeguards are introduced from the last two or three decades by the Government of India against widow discrimination but condition of window is still pitiable.

**Objectives**

(a) To determine the social and cultural deprivation faced by widows;

(b) To know the socio-economic problems of widows; and

(c) To study the life of a woman before and after widowhood.

**Methodology**

The study based on exploratory research design. Fifty widows were randomly interviewed from the two villages Bhoranj and Bassi villages of the Hamirpur District (Himachal Pradesh) with the help of semi-structured interview schedule. Observation technique is also used in the study. The study is based on the primary data, consisting of the responses received from the respondents to the interview schedule.

**Findings**

**Economic Deprivation**

Overall Thirty two percent of the respondents mentioned that their financial condition was average but twenty eight percent of the respondents were having good financial problems as their sons were in government jobs and while twenty four percent of them were coming under the category of poor, their life was full of miseries and sorrows. Even out of fifty, sixteen percent of respondents were not able to maintain their livelihood satisfactory even for their basic needs they have to struggle.
Psychological/Health Deprivation
Most of widows were facing psychological problems like tension, mental unrest, many times they find difficult to adjust to the changed environment, moreover when they were just being tolerated and were not being treated well in their family. The loneliness also makes them psychologically depressed and they persistently face such psychological problems as old age worries, emotional instability, lack of proper response etc.

Social Deprivation
Overall, irrespective of age the widows opined that they were treated badly by the society but the emphasis was more with the younger. Majority of widows did not find any change in their children's behaviour. But few of the widows said that her son got married without her will, as there was no male member to check his activities. In the both age groups they faced many problems regarding their health. Old age widows were ignored by their family members and younger ones neglected their health because of their engagements in household works.

Cultural Deprivation
All the respondents have extreme faith in God and their Hindu Religion. After becoming widows they practiced many fasts, festivals throughout the year due to respect for Hindu religion. They have become purely vegetarian, started wearing white sarees and started attending religious programmes. According to them after their husband death, nobody was helping them except God.
As per the question of remarriage all the widows gave the similar reason for not getting married again. But still the burden was greater with the younger widows who had to bring their children by educating them and getting them married. Few of the respondents also added that since they faced lot of difficulties in their first marriage they didn’t want to marry again.

**Expectations from the government for widows welfare**

Overall, there were differences in the expectations from the government towards the welfare of widows. Widows who had attained widowhood after fifty years expressed that they expected the government to supply Ration similar to handicapped persons. But younger widows emphasized the government should give some loan and jobs for their survival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Expectation from Govt.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provide loans with low interest</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provide job reservations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Provide adequate pension</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Any other</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The women interviewed in this study face similar issues to other women in their community, such as exclusion from health care and restrictions in their social mobility, but their status as widows make them particularly vulnerable. Moreover, widows’ vulnerability especially during the early stages of their widowhood stems from an accumulation of challenges: limited resources, high levels of restrictions and responsibilities, and a lack of entitlements. Our study supports policy suggestions that have been proposed by others working in India, recommendations stemming from workshops and conferences that brought together activists, scholars, lawyers, and widows themselves. They advocated a multi-pronged approach that would simultaneously address material needs and social identity and respect. Family support is often insufficient to ensure an adequate living standard, there is a need to improve her (and her children’s) material opportunities by securing women’s property rights, expanding employment opportunities, and ensuring adequate social security benefits. So it can be concluded that there should be changes in the attitude of society towards widows and their widowhood through different sensitization programme by the intervention process of professional Social workers in family, school, college, community level etc. The people must develop positive view towards them and should treat them as human beings.

**References**


