

Analysis Of Rural Widows' Self Perception And Attitudes With Special Reference To West Bengal

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ABSTRACT:

Widowhood is a period of crisis in woman's life; it often changes the identity of a woman. She is confronted with a number of emotional and cultural changes which include changes in social & economic status and the nature and extent of her social interaction. These changes affect her mental and social set up. Adjustment to changed circumstances involves a compromise. This is meant to discover the subjective experiences of the widows. It includes some of the subjective dimensions of self-perceptions and attitudes towards widowhood and social environment in which they are placed. The self-perceptions of the widows are assessed through their responses to statements pertaining to their status, role in the family & neighborhood, their feelings of satisfaction, contentment or anxiety about their future. In this article, analysis of rural widow's self-perception and attitudes with special reference to West Bengal has been discussed.

Keywords: Rural, Widows, Self-Perception, Attitudes, West Bengal.

INTRODUCTION:

Historically, widows had to forgo sexual contact, give up marriage, be unable to pronounce the names of other men, and be compelled to live only off of fruits, roots, and flowers. When a woman loses her spouse and does not remarry, she is said to be a widow. [1-2] They got haircuts, had their jewellery removed, slept on hard surfaces, only had one meal per day, and once every two weeks went for twenty-four hours without eating. They were made to work for free and were barred from attending feasts or other celebrations due to their unlucky and cursed presence. [3-4]

Many widows still experience a lot of the harsh treatment mentioned above, despite the fact that a lot of it has changed. A widow has no place in society. In the past, she was a physical sati; today, she is a psychological sati. Even now, she is not allowed to join in on the festivities in modern families. [5]

According to the most recent census statistics, India is home of almost 40 million widows. Nine out of every 100 women are widows, and around half of them are under 50. In India, widows are estimated to be present in every fourth household. Women's studies has become a growing area of study for social scientists over the past four to five decades, with about 50% of widows being under the age of 50. In India, widows are estimated to be present in every fourth household. More and more social scientists have turned their attention to women's studies over the past four to five decades. They made an effort to concentrate their studies on diverse features of women. [6]

In India, women are more vulnerable than males, making them the weaker sex. Widows are particularly vulnerable because of the sudden decline in their socioeconomic status that occurs after the loss of their spouses. In a married union, the loss of one partner results in the development of new ties within the family, within the kin-group, and among the community. Widows are frequently forgotten, even by women. [7] No matter what social background they are from, widows in India live miserable lives. She is exposed to several taboos and severe limitations because most castes prevent remarriage. The worst part is that others think she's unfortunate. [8]

In a nutshell, being a widow is a really challenging situation. As a result, many are emotionally, socioeconomically, and culturally disadvantaged. Widows experience several social stigmas. She can't attend social or religious gatherings. She must isolate herself from civilization. A widow shouldn't wear vibrant sarees, talis, flowers, or kumkum. She needs to eat only the most basic foods. She must forego all the comforts and pleasures of society.

In the traditionally male-dominated Hindu society, a widow cannot live independently. Others have always disparaged her and had some doubts about her. It is believed that being a widow is a retribution for the wrongs she did in her former life. When a woman goes away while her husband is still alive, it is frequently appreciated. A widow has no business participating in any activities, and her presence is considered unlucky.

According to Abbe Du Bois (1977), a woman's death while she is still married is the most joyful because it is seen as a reward for goodness that transcends many generations. The worst outcome, on the other hand, is for a wife to live on after her husband has passed away. [9]

Being a widow is perceived as an unfortunate situation and a burden that must be carried till death. Both the woman herself and the rest of society frequently hold the lady responsible for the passing of her husband. In traditional society, especially in rural areas, widowhood is seen as a calamity brought on by some bad done during a person's previous birth.

If her spouse dies, she is immediately dependent on her kids, in-laws, parents, or other family members. When a woman loses her spouse, she also loses her pride, prestige, social standing, independence, and social privileges. As a result, she undergoes catastrophic status changes.

Widowhood "is a phase of crisis in a woman's life. Widows were consequently forced to live in squalor and poverty. Despite the safeguards offered to widows by the Hindu Marriage Act of 1954 and the Widow-Remarriage Act of 1856, their essential status hasn't changed significantly.

Women's studies, especially those that emphasize widows as a marginalized and unfortunate minority in our culture, are quite uncommon in our country. Politicians and other people frequently downplay widows' concerns, maybe as a result of their own concerns. The problem is present in society's top classes. Yet, according to demographic estimates, the overall number of widows will increase soon. In view of the growing trend towards nuclearizing families, the overall decline in the size of families, and, most crucially, the continued destruction of kinship and family bonds, even in rural areas of the country, the problem is made even more urgent.

The widow's situation is more challenging when a middle-aged spouse dies and leaves behind a wife and small children as dependents. The death of the husband has severe repercussions for the widow in addition to the tremendous emotional strain of adjusting to his loss. That typically suggests that the widow would have to face the burden of providing for every need of the family. [10]

The two facets of life that change the least in India are marriage

and kinship. Developments in one area can presage changes in a number of other areas. A society may be viewed as humane and civilized if it permits widow marriage and does not disdain widows. Hindu marriage still clings to its traditional traditions and ceremonies, thus researching the changing attitude towards widow remarriage would be fascinating and fulfilling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Study Areas:

Two districts namely Malda and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal state were selected in this research.

Hypotheses:

1. Young widows suffer more from emotional problems than the old widows.
2. Old widows face more economic, social, mental and physical problems than the young widows.
3. Higher caste widows suffer more from inauspiciousness than the lower caste widows.
4. Economically independent widows suffer less than the widows who are economically dependent on others.
5. The widows residing with the members of their own family suffer less than the widows residing with in-laws, parents and relatives.

Variables:

Independent Variables: Age, Caste, Working Status, Type of Family etc.

Dependent Variables: Social, Economical, Emotional and Cultural Problems and Child-Rearing Practices of the widows.

Research Methodology and Tools:

In the sociological investigation the structured interview method is accepted as a reliable field technique for the collection of data. The present study is based on primary data

consisting of the responses received from the 300 respondents with the help of 'structured interview schedule'.

Keeping the objectives in mind the data pertaining to the self-perception and attitudes of rural widows were collected.

The questionnaire schedule consisted as follows:

Personal information:

Under this section, relevant information was obtained regarding the personal characteristics of the respondents like age, religion, caste, education, occupation, income, type of family etc.

Widows - self-perception and attitudes:

In this section, information was collected about the self-perception and attitudes of widows towards kinship, friends, men, society and their children.

Sample and Sampling Plan:

Selected State: West Bengal

Selected Districts: Malda and Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal state

The present study was exploratory in nature and random sampling were used for this study.

Out of 375 samples, finally 300 samples were selected for this study.

Secondary Data:

The secondary data was collected from reports and documents available with the Department of Women and Child Development, University Libraries and relevant departments. Similarly, the National and State Commission for Women reports was incorporated in the study. The annual reports were collected from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) including newspaper reports. The Researcher was reviewing numerous books and other literature published on the plights and predicaments of the widows.

Pilot Study:

A pilot study was conducted before the main interview schedule was finalized in order to ensure the suitability of the questions. This kind of study was found helpful to prepare the final structured interview schedule. It helped the researcher to add a few more direct questions and useful modifications were also made on the basis of experience gathered during the pilot study.

Field Work:

Most of the respondents agreed to participate in the discussion and spent their valuable time in answering the questions. The responses were recorded in the schedule in the presence of the respondents.

The normal duration of an interview was one hour approximately. To establish good rapport with respondents, so that they could believe the researcher and share their personal experiences and answer the questions, a friendly environment was created after visiting three or four times.

Limitations:

1. The research was limited to 300 samples only.
2. The study only limited to Malda and Uttar Dinajpur districts in West Bengal.
3. This study also limited to dependent and independent variables.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The data analysis and interpretation has been made under the following parameters:

- Age of the respondents
- Religious composition of the respondents
- Caste composition of the respondents
- Type of family of the respondents
- Caste and type of family of the respondents
- Occupational status of the respondents
- Monthly income of the respondents

- Occupation and monthly income of the respondents
- Educational level of the respondents
- Literacy and education status of the respondents
- Respondents' size of family
- Living arrangements of the respondents
- Respondents age at marriage
- Age at marriage and caste of the respondents
- Educational level of deceased husbands
- Occupational status of the deceased husbands
- Monthly income of the deceased husbands
- Causes of death
- Age at widowhood
- Continuation of husbands' occupation
- Respondents' type of family: before and after widowhood
- Decision-making power of the respondents: before and after widowhood
- Respondents type of family and decision-making
- Economic status of the widows
- Working status of the respondents: before and after widowhood
- Causes of their working
- Respondent's family income; before and after widowhood
- Economic problems faced by the respondents in running the family
- Respondents' problem of debt
- Purposes of the borrowing
- Amount of debt
- Sources of debt
- Share in the husband's property
- Problems faced by the respondents in work place

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

The findings regarding the self-perception and attitudes of widows reveal that a majority of the respondents considered themselves useful to their family and children. They considered their working essential to run their familial responsibility.

The findings regarding attitudes of widows reveal that a majority of the widows have favorable attitude towards other women, neighbors and society. They tried to buildup good relations with other members in society. They changed their food habits after widowhood and controlled their temper. Only few (17.00 Per cent) have favorable attitude towards widow-remarriage and government and they are more ambitious about their future.

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