

# Widowhood among Muslim Women: Living Experiences of Conflict and Suffering in Kashmir

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## “Abstract”

*The patriarchal formulations of appropriate behavior for widows of different castes are reflected and are structurally integrated into the ideology and material relations of the caste system. The status of marginalized widows in different classes, castes, regions and religions of the different parts of the country has been analyzed. Widows are compelled to experience the difficulties and insecurity such as limited choice of remarriage, gender division of labor limiting the job opportunities, strong patrilineal family structure and pitiable economic support. It can thus be concluded from the above discussion that widowhood marks a transition from marital status which is not smooth, for it means not only a loss of status but also a loss of pride, privilege, prestige and independence. Widowhood brings about severe social, economic and cultural deprivation. It may have deleterious effects not only because of sudden loss of spouse but because of lack of well defined cultural expectations regarding the role of widow. Although various efforts are made to work towards the reformation in order to improve the conditions of widows. But still, glaring gender discrimination exists over the centuries. Particularly for the widows in India who are facing a lot of problems and hardships in the family as well as the society because of traditional norms, cultural practices and beliefs within the society. Being in Kashmir, the widows face a triple layer of oppression – first being the Muslim women, second being the widow and third living in an armed conflict situation. The multiple layers of oppression increases the vulnerability and hence socially ostracizes them. Hence, the structure of widowhood among Kashmiri Muslims is used as a means of their cultural reproduction and there prevails the stigma amounting to widowhood especially for the armed conflict victimized widows. This study tries to understand and describe the lived experiences of Muslim widows in Kashmir. This study is further designed to focus on the problems and sufferings faced by them in the current scenario by trying to evaluate the impact of socio-cultural, religious and political factors on the widows' experiences. Finally, this study seeks to explore the programmes and policies run by government for safeguarding the welfare of the widows of Kashmir.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, India, Kashmir, Suffering, Welfare, Widowhood.

## I. Introduction

Women issues are universally prevalent across societies and are assumed to be a natural phenomenon. The present international scenario also reflects the miseries of women being more intensified in the areas where political instability erupts. Women continue to be the worst victims of political disturbance and suffer in

diversified ways in the situation of political turmoil. These political conflicts negatively affect all the people in general and women in particular as they are a part of patriarchal character of society (GSDRC, 2009). Thus, increasing evidence also show that women experience conflict in a different way to men, something that is confirmed by those working in the field. Almost every instance of an armed conflict undoubtedly affects the entire society, but not to the same measure. Since women are particularly vulnerable, they tend to suffer more than men in almost every instance of armed conflict. War exacerbates the inequalities that exist in different forms and to varying degrees in all societies (Charu, 2004). An individual's sense of identity gets disrupted while living under severe conditions of prolonged conflict and organized violence (Das, 2007).

The position of women which consists nearly half of population of the country is not so good and the position of widow is even worse. Widows in every society face multiple and conflicting social challenges. Their status is defined by a diverse group of interrelated and intersectional factors - social, religious, cultural as well as economic. Widows across the globe share two common experiences: a loss of social status and reduced financial stability. In both developed and developing countries, widows suffer a dramatic and subtle transformation in their social position. The relative poverty of widows, especially those working in the unorganized sector and young widowed mothers, with children, marginalize them from mainstream society and increases their vulnerability to depression, ill health and violence. 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 and burial rites are prime examples of human rights violations that are justified by "reliance on culture" and "tradition" within the world (World Bank, 2000). Widows, of all ages, are often evicted from their homes, stigmatized and physically abused—some even killed. Widowed mothers, as sole supporters of their offspring, are forced to withdraw these children from school and to rely on their labor. The daughters of widows may suffer multiple deprivations, increasing their vulnerability to abuse (Margaret, 2000). While the problems are worse in the developing world, recent conflicts elsewhere have created a new class of widows—the product of armed conflict and ethnic cleansing (Margaret, 1999). Although widows make up a significant proportion of the female population in all societies, with a few laudable exceptions comprehensive research concerning their status in developing countries is lacking (WIDO, 1994).

All this, notwithstanding, the issues and concerns of widows have been sidelined at the International level. For instance, The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) which has come to be known as the Women's Bill of Rights, and aims at achievement of substantive as against merely formal equality makes no direct reference to the problems of widows (World Conference, 1995). It is particularly noteworthy that although The Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 identifies 12 critical areas of concern, yet widows remain an uncounted and excluded category.

Life is unceasing misery for hundreds of millions widows living in India, (Leonard, 2009). While widowhood is unwelcome for anyone in the Indian milieu (Parwar, 2003). The death of a spouse brings profound change to the living conditions of the surviving party (Alter et. al, 2007) which is particularly true in Indian context, where the life of an individual is governed by certain socio-cultural norms which determine a person's social standing as well as purpose and function in life. Developed over centuries, these socio-cultural norms are mainly responsible for the subordination of women. Traditionally, widowhood in India has been characterized by certain distinct and deplorable social norms. Thus, cultural patterns even shaped the access to remarriage. Furthermore, remarriages were more likely consanguineous than first

unions because of socio-economic reasons (Manfredini, 2006). The sufferings of women are doubled if they happen to be widows in the Indian soil. A woman is surrounded by the culture that seldom she can come out from. Though social change is very fast due to the growing globalization, still few areas remain unchanged. Setting apart the laws, societal norms are strong here. 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. With the result, widows in India not only suffer with social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological consequences, loneliness and in many cases deprivation causing emotional disturbances and imbalance (Leonard, 2009). The customs and traditional deities which are followed after the death of the husband turn out to be highly cruel meted to a woman in the world in the name of widowhood. In spite of her emotional problems like loss of spouse, loss of security, loss of income, insecure feeling regarding love, care or affection and plenty of more restrictions on a woman in the name of widow is still in practice in India (Chakravarty, 2003).

In India and probably elsewhere irrespective of religion, caste, class and education, millions of widows are deprived of their universally acknowledged human rights (Reddy, 2004: 13). Widows' needs are marginalized in Indian society and they are not taken into mainstream. Gender hierarchy is deep rooted in Indian culture. Due to patriarchy, women are considered as a secondary object and this gender hierarchy is observed in family as well as in society too (ibid, Reddy: 15). In such a highly patriarchal, gender insensitive and skewed sex ratio scenario, can widows be immune from the treatment meted out by women? Widows are doubly vulnerable first because of gender and secondly as victims of circumstance. Even though the Indian Constitution guarantees equality to all, discrimination against widows is still prevalent, and widowhood is overwhelmingly a woman's problem. In India, there are three times as many widows than widowers. Child-marriage, polygamy, the wide age-gap between men and women, war and increasing rate of AIDS have greatly increased the number of widows, especially young ones (Godavari, 2000).

In addition to all these turbulent conditions faced by women, in recent years gender in relation to armed conflict and peace building has come to the fore as an issue for international attention. The devastating consequences of a conflict situation involve multiple psychological, social, economic and environmental challenges to the integrity of an individual and to public life as well (Pedersen, 2006). It even stifles his/her psychological integrity (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkkian, 1999; Punamaki, Kanninen, Qouta, & Sarraj, 2004). Women throughout India are vulnerable to many problems but the plights of women living in politically conflict zones of India are more prone to violence. The violence in conflict zones is having serious ramifications on the people, who may be simply the silent victims of such conflict. Among such conflict zones, the Indian part of the Kashmir is highly discussed zone. Specifically, from the last two decades, which has mostly been perceived as the most obvious reason of the India and Pakistan conflict, and is considered very crucial factor for the peace in the South Asian region? Kashmir is one of the most volatile regions in entire South Asia as the territorial dispute has brought the painful currents, unforgotten memories, heavy loss of lives and property. Some of the victims are very much visible, whereas the others are silent therefore invisible and marginalized. The conflict has deeply affected people's livelihood, their living environments, health, their work, their access to education and so on. As Kashmir has seen a lot of violence in recent years and while it continues to affect all the people of Kashmir, women bear the scars of violence deeper than men. Therefore, it is the women of Kashmir who have felt its impact most severely. While women are not direct victims of violence, they are still affected by it, nonetheless. Women are affected by its short and long-term effects and thus are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for many reasons not only the gender-based violence as the economic deprivation, displacement, poverty etc are also the cost of conflict that are borne disproportionately by women and their children. Violent conflicts in Kashmir have led to the destruction of many homes, and for many women, the loss of the bread earner in

their families. Kashmir has seen, since the resurgence of violence, a proliferation of female headed households. Forced by circumstances, these women are thrust into new responsibilities, and are forced to sell their labor to sustain their children (Charu, 2004: 12). The resurgence of violence in the last several decades has turned many married women into widows. The social impact of this conflict is most visible in the emergence of women-headed households. Widows are abruptly thrust into a position of responsibility owing to the need to sustain the family (JKSHRC, 2005).

Furthermore, widowhood practices across different religions are not identical. Widowhood in Islam is a non-issue. This is because marriage in Islam is not a sacred vow or a sacrament. It is a civil contract. The prophet himself married a twice widowed lady. Positive Quranic injunctions provide for inheritance of property by widows and their children. Thus widows enjoy a comparatively better social status in Islam (Kareem, 1988).

## II. Review of Literature

- a) *Institute of Social Studies Trust (1985)* conducted a study on **“India’s Female Headed Households”** which offers a conclusion and reveals that a majority of female headed households suffer greater economic disadvantage than male headed households as most of the development programmes have not reached them at all and even awareness of such schemes is missing.
- b) *Shalini Bharat (1987)* in her study **“Incidence, Nature, and Causes of Single-Parent Families in a Slum Area of Bombay”** focuses on the problems encountered by widows heading the households. Female headed households also imply an increase in various responsibilities of the widow, such as education and marriage of the children and a decline in the family income, consequent upon the death of the husband.
- c) *Ranjana Kumari (1989)* in her study entitled **“Women Headed Households in Rural India”** found that survival strategies adopted by female headed households varied according to the resource base, mainly land, and the socio-cultural milieu they belonged to. The study concludes that female headed households fail to utilize the resources to the extent a male headed household could due to a weak support structure for widows as well as lack of support from kith and kin.
- d) *S. K. Ghosh (1989)* in the volume titled **“Indian Women through the Ages”** while analyzing the status of women in India also focuses on widows. The author stresses on the restrictions imposed on widows regarding food, ornaments and behavior.
- e) *Martha Alter Chen and Jean Dreze (1992)* in their study **“Widows and Health in Rural North India”** observe that widows become dependent on their children, because, socio-cultural norms, patriarchal set up, and gender division of labor restrict their mobility. Thus, the socio-cultural and patriarchal set up is also traced to be the cause of neglect and marginalization of widows at the hands of their children. Further, the social and economic deprivation leads to ill health and in turn higher mortality among widows.
- f) *Zinat Kausar (1992)* in the volume entitled **“Muslim Women in Medieval India”** highlights the birth, marriage and customs affecting women in Mughal period. The author further outlines the food, dress, ornaments, and festivals of the Mughal period. In relation to widows, she reveals that they enjoyed a better and respectable status in the society. There were no restrictions on remarriage of widows, their food, jewellery, dress and so on. So, she concludes that the Muslim widows were treated well.
- g) *T. N. Kitchlu (1993)* in **“Widows in India”** observes the necessity of employment, notwithstanding, widows finds it difficult to get jobs and the barriers are primarily lack of education and religion.

- h) **K. Shanthi (1994)** in the article **“Growing Incidence of Female Headship - Causes and Cure”** observes that incidence of female headed households is higher among low income groups and scheduled castes. She concludes that women in low income group are driven to seek employment after widowhood and forced to setup separate households in the absence of help from parents and in-laws. Financial crisis, lack of recognition and feeling of insecurity are the major problems confronted by such widows.
- i) **Bina Agarwal (1998)** in **“Widows versus Daughters or Widows as Daughters? Property, Land and Economic Security in Rural India”** emphasizes that to ensure economic security for widows in India, they must have command over property, by which she implies arable land. Such rights, moreover, must be ensured not merely after widowhood, but also for a daughter.
- j) **Lotika Sarkar and Narayan Banerjee (1998)** in their study **“Widows in a Tribal Setting in West Bengal”** highlight that property ownership by widows is a rare phenomenon and even where ownership has been established, control lies elsewhere. They observed that widows are trustees of the property till their son/sons become adult and after that they are dependent on them. They further conclude that in case of joint property, a widow is not entitled to her husband’s property and is thus left without any means of support. Thus the economic problems of widows are further accentuated by their deprivation of property and inheritance rights.
- k) **S. Abdul Kareem (1998)** in the article **“Widowhood in Islam”** elucidates the high treatment of widows as enjoined by Islam.
- l) **Shobha Nandwana and Ramesh Nandwana (1998)** in their study **“Land Rights of Widows in Rajasthan”** found that widows did have land rights, but the right was restricted to those who did not remarry. Moreover, due to restrictions on their mobility, they could not take active part in the management of their land and hence their property rights were exercised by the adult son/sons.
- m) **Jeanette Pinto (2003)** titled **“The Indian Widow: From Victim to Victor”** reveals that the status of widows under Islam is high as she is not discriminated against due to positive Quranic Injunctions.
- n) **Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2008)** in the article **“Caste, Widow-Remarriage, and the Reform of Popular Culture in Colonial Bengal”** highlights the ways in which social reforms in Bengal in the nineteenth century affected the gender relations and the condition of women, particularly widows. The author also highlights how different castes perceived widow remarriage.
- o) **Dipti Mayee Sahoo (2014)** in the article **“An Analysis of Widowhood in India: A Global Perspective”** stresses that widows are more vulnerable to violence. She suggests that their rights should be protected by national policies and laws under the guidance of CEDAW and CRC to enable them to exercise their rights with dignity and be able to take decisions impacting them.

On concluding, from the above literature review it is revealed that the female headed households endure greater economic drawback. Prevalence of low income is higher in them and the economic crisis is more accentuated by the denial of property and inheritance rights. Lack of education makes it more complicated for them to secure a job which adds to their miseries. The female headed households have amplified responsibilities of their children concerning their education and marriage post husband’s demise. In the light of Indian scenario, more restrictions are imposed on the food, ornaments, behavior, mobility etc because of cultural norms and patriarchal misogyny which makes them dependent on their children or forces them to setup separate households that further causes their marginalization. Social and economic deprivation leads to ill health and higher mortality risks among them. Thus in nutshell, financial crisis, lack of identity and feeling of insecurity are the major issues faced by the widows. But among Muslims, widows have a respectable status – no restrictions on remarriage, food, jewellery, dress etc. They are treated well and no discrimination is posed against them according to the Quranic revelations.

### III. Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to assess the status of widows in Kashmir. The specific objectives are:

- To understand and describe the lived experiences of Muslim widows in Kashmir.
- To focus on the problems and sufferings faced by them in the current scenario by trying to evaluate the impact of socio-cultural, religious and political factors on the widows' experiences.
- Lastly, to explore the programmes and policies run by government for safeguarding the welfare of the widows of Kashmir.

### IV. Methodology of the Study

The present study was based upon 'secondary sources'. The data was collected from the secondary sources that included research paper, articles, newspaper, journals and books. Descriptive research design is the method which was involved for the study. The study area undertaken for the present study is the Kashmir division of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

### V. Results of the Study

Armed conflict is a typically masculine activity, marked by violence, aggression and force. There are indeed certain deep rooted social and political grievances that legitimate these conflicts, but the violence and force on which they depend to realize their objectives cause untold pain and suffering for ordinary men and women. An important feature of armed conflict is that it operates within a masculinist frame of reference, and sets out hierarchical roles and attributes for both men and women in their respective societies (Chenoy). In any society there are vulnerable individuals and groups who have little power over events that affect them. Women continue to be the worst victims of political disturbance and suffer in diversified ways in the situation of political turmoil. The women of Jammu and Kashmir also are such a group whose well-being is affected in a major way due to the ongoing conflict in Kashmir and the larger social context in which they are located add to their vulnerability immensely. The women of Kashmir are more vulnerable as traditional patriarchy prevails strongly in Kashmiri society. Both Kazi (2009) and Shekhawat (2014) strongly argue that:

*"In Kashmir, patriarchy did not cease to exist even momentarily during the conflict period. The escalation of conflict made women the most vulnerable object, of both, the patriarchal and traditional Islamic society and militarized state. Even in a woman's victimization, patriarchal values played crucial role. Women confronted discrimination from 'all men' surrounding them, whether militants, or security forces, or their own families".* (Shekhawat 2014: 155)

The harsh and repressive gender relations that emerged here in Kashmir have victimized the women sexually, mentally, emotionally and physically. The societal control over women's public and private lives has increased many folds with the reinforcement of patriarchy. Thus, it is in this context, the absence of men in their families adds to their vulnerabilities immensely. The roles assumed by the widow after the death of her husband often confused her as to how to respond to news situations because even in the most liberal era of mankind, widows are still enslaved and have yet to free themselves from the socio-cultural stigma associated with the term 'widowhood'. Widows as a result of political trauma constitute the most oppressed categories among all whose life narrate a series of panic sufferings and reflect gloomy shades of darkness and desperation. Widows in Kashmir face the serious form of alienation within self, society, judiciary and the State also. The absence of husbands renders widows in Kashmir economically vulnerable and in already

economically backward families, the status of most remains poorest of the poor. In the first place, lack of skills place them in a position of acute dependence on their husbands. Death of the husband, therefore, implies loss of the breadwinner, which further affects them, often throwing them into extreme penury. The widow and her children are seen as constant reminders of the family's loss and are considered to be the burdens with additional mouths to feed. So, they are forced to leave the in-law's home and sometimes then the maternal homes become the source of their shelter and food (Qadir and Roy, 2017). Economic deprivation is further accentuated by the lack of education (Dreze and Srinivasan, 1997). Widowhood coupled with economic vulnerability affects the well being of the children of widows also. Thus, lack of finance compels the widow to withdraw her children from school and even send them out to work. Also, the responsibility of having a daughter of marriageable age in the house is a 'psychological burden' and makes the woman more vulnerable in the absence of her husband. In socio-cultural context of Kashmir one needs to understand why it is a 'psychological burden' because firstly, making financial arrangements for the marriage of her daughter(s) which they find extremely difficult to mobilize as the huge resources are necessary to meet the expenses of social customs at marriage and secondly, due to the death of her husband, suitable match for her young daughter(s) are difficult to find.

Caste is a social organization prevalent in Kashmir that creates a well-defined social ordering. It is such a social structure that is highly visible, and has an influence on most aspects of life, including employment and social opportunities, access to resources, customs, occupation, marriage and relations with others especially there is a great deal of caste segregation regarding marriage and residential patterns in Kashmir. Caste norms often discourage women and widows in particular, from working, and most of the widows face immense problems in retaining control of their husband's property share upon his death. Upper caste widows face restriction even on mobility due to socio-cultural and religious reasons. Moreover, it is primarily among the upper castes that most of the deplorable practices pertaining to widowhood are practiced. Further, there are a variety of other social practices, customs, attitudes, and beliefs that is mandatory for a widow to follow that is, following the death of her husband, she is expected to undergo a period of seclusion and followed by remaining in the home for a period four months and ten days which is called *Iddah* period.

Widows considering remarriage may face conflicting emotions. There are frequently family members, such as children or in-laws, or even friends who may raise objections (Mohan, 2003). Remarriage, legalized by law, continues to be frowned upon, especially if the widow has children. Remarriage of widows is also more of an issue with the upper castes than the lower castes. If the widow is young, especially in some higher castes, levirate marriage is practiced under which the widow is married to the brother of the dead husband. Such a remarriage may be forced upon her because of economic reasons.

'Absence of husband pushed widows into the public sphere to negotiate with both the State and society for their survival as well as of their families on an almost daily basis' (Shekhawat 2014: 90). They are forced to move from door to door to seek compensation or judicial justice after the death of their husbands (Qadir and Roy, 2017). Thus, emotional trauma is the most immediate outcome of widowhood, and the woman had to do the balancing act in a gender biased social context.

**Provisions/Schemes:** Widows do find mention at the National level and a few laws and schemes have been floated for their benefit. The Domestic Violence Act 2005 equally pays attention to the concerns of widows. It includes widows within the definition of domestic relationships along with other women members of the family [Section 2(f)]. The widow also has a right of residence and cannot be thrown out of the shared household except through procedure established by law (Section 17). She can get a residence order under

Section 19 if she apprehends being thrown out of the house or in cases where she has been thrown out and wants to return to her house (Section 19). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001 also makes provision for protection and empowerment of vulnerable sections of women including widows and elderly.

Apart from these legal provisions, both the Central government as well as majority of the State governments has instituted certain schemes for widows. At the state level, schemes like Financial Assistance to Widows and Destitute Women have been provided. Under this scheme, financial assistance will be provided to women who are below the age of 60 years and have no means of subsistence or have been deprived of husband's support due to any reason. The unmarried women above the age of 30 years living a life of destitution are also eligible to get the benefit of this scheme. Another state sponsored scheme is Ashirwad to Scheduled Caste and Daughters of Widows at the time of their Marriage. Under this scheme the girls belonging to these will be provided financial assistance on the occasion of their marriages.

Among the Centrally sponsored schemes foremost is the National Old Age Pension Scheme. Under this scheme, the benefit will be given to the following: (1) Disabled persons (2) Issueless persons (3) Widows and Destitute Women. Persons of 65 years and above having little or no source of income will be given old age pension of one thousand rupees per month over and above the amount paid under the state level old age pension scheme. The Centre under another scheme also provides for a Grant of five lakh rupees for purchase of plot/house for widows of martyrs from the year 1999 onwards. Undoubtedly, a large number of legal safeguards and schemes for widows have been launched by the Governments at both central and state levels.

## VI. Conclusion

India has recorded the largest number of widows in the World. These widows till today, remain oppressed by norms, traditions and cultural expectation of the past. Within the feminist discourse, the currently prevalent myths, stereotypes, assumptions and perceptions need to be challenged and examined, in the context of culture and history. Social policies and actions must be oriented, to ameliorate the condition of widows. This must occur at two levels – At the individual level, women can be seen as the victims of the tragic episode, leading to social discrimination and economic deprivation. At the societal level, widows can be seen as a part of an uncaring society. In Post-Independence, we get another picture of widows, who are single and work for a living, bring up children, cope with loneliness and pressures of urban life (Sogani, 2002).

Armed conflict and post conflict has resulted in a huge increase in the numbers of widows, since a common feature of present day conflicts is the killing of men. The marginalization of women in the broader culture of conflict in Kashmir is painful, but an accepted reality in the region. For many, the loss of a husband is only the first trauma in a long-term ordeal. The children of widows are also affected, both emotionally and economically. Widowed mothers, now supporting their families alone, are forced to withdraw children from school and to rely on their labor. Moreover, the daughters of widows too suffer multiple deprivations, increasing their vulnerability to abuse. Such cruelties are seen as justified in terms of cultural or religious practice.

To appreciate the rights of a widow it is essential to understand her position in society, her economic status and her state of empowerment. It is also necessary to look at customary law, statutory law and actual practice. Though customary and statutory law might give a widow certain rights, in actual practice none of

these rights might be effective because she is not socially empowered to assert those rights and fight for them. It is in this context that one needs to look at the historical background and the present position.

Also, it may be asserted that the provisions for widows fail to realize the objectives with which they are launched. First and foremost is the problem of enforcement of laws as well as the implementation of schemes. In relation to laws, it may be asserted that they remain only on paper as the widow is unable to break the shackles of socio-cultural traditions and assert her rights. Introducing pension for widows but keeping 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. As for the pension schemes, firstly the amount is meager, a widow can neither sustain herself nor her family. Even the provision for employment of a widow in case of death of husband while in service fails to provide relief as majority of the workforce is in the unorganized sector where such laws are not applicable. Combined with the structural drawbacks of rigid procedure for eligibility as well as complex bureaucratic arrangements, delays and corruption, one has a situation where the widow remains bereft of all financial assistance. Further, even where the widow does manage to get financial aid or inherit property, her own illiteracy, lack of legal knowledge as well as the strong socialization into the socio-cultural traditions and patriarchal set-up prevents her from utilizing these. None of these schemes or policies attempts to empower the widow to be able to deal with her problems. All the schemes treat her merely as a recipient of state (read male) generosity, a beneficiary of dole-outs. The result is her continuing subordination and in some cases increasing exploitation.

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