CHAPTER II

Problems faced by the Widows:
The nature of the problem and
the Family background
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Every one in the society has some problem or other. A widow is no exception. The problems faced by a widow, however, seem to be peculiar to her and her kind or group. Such problems, identified during our study are categorised into fourteen different types, such as of food, shelter, finance, emotional, bringing up the children, sexual harassment, settling of property rights, educating children, victim of cheating (Money and Gold), ill-treatment, death of children and so on.

1. The Food Problem:

Among the 27 informants coming from the high socio-economic background family of procreation, more than 50 per cent have no problem of food. For 40.74 per cent, this problem is of moderate intensity. A single informant, however, reported that she had lots of difficulty in arranging for her daily food (Case No. 18).

11.39 percent respondents (N = 79) in the middle background find it very difficult in meeting the demand of their food.
A large number of informants (68.36 percent), however, have this problem in moderate intensity. Only for 20.25 percent in this group food does not pose a problem.

The informants of low socio-economic background (N=100) of which 24.00 percent and 69.00 percent face the problem in acute and moderate intensity respectively. For a few, food seems to be available without difficulty. Whatever problem food poses to our informants, it seems largely confined to the middle and lower socio-economic group.

Among those from the families of orientation of high background (N = 29), 68.97 percent confront this problem in moderate intensity and the rest (31.03 percent), do not either face this problem or it is of minor consequence to them; while none of the informants face it in acute intensity.

Among the informants of the middle status (N = 57), there are 68.42 percent for whom the problem is of moderate nature whereas for 26.32 percent it is minor. For a few (5.26 percent) it is acute.
Among those from the families of orientation of lower background \((N = 120)\), 60 percent face this problem in moderate intensity whereas for 25 percent it is acute and for 15.0 percent food does not pose a problem.

Arranging for the daily food for oneself, the children and the dependents is a difficult task encountered by the widows in varying degrees. We have noticed that 34 (16.50 percent) of our respondents face this problem in acute intensity, though most of them are from low income group families of procreation. 9 are from middle income background and 1 comes from higher economic background. For 134 informants the problem is moderate, among whom 54 (families of procreation) are from middle and 11 are from higher economic background and 69 are from lower status. Only for 38 among our respondents this problem is reported to be minor. Thus for the majority in our sample 168 (81.55 percent) arrangement for food is a problem of some intensity (Tab.32) (Case No. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 20).

Looking at the informants from the background of their families of orientation (Tab.32), we note that lower income families seem to be unable to solve the problem of food. Our data are indicative of a situation, where a widow having come from a higher to moderate
income informants receives, some short of support from her family of orientation.

2. Shelter:

Shelter or housing is the other crucial problem that the widows face. Some of our respondents have taken shelter in Mathas. Among the 27 informants coming from the (family of procreation) of high socio-economic background, majority have no problem of shelter while for 14.81 percent the problem is moderate and for 7.41 percent it surfaced as a problem of acute intensity (Case No. 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 16) (Tab.33).

In the middle background (N = 79), for 49.37 percent, shelter is a minor problem; whereas it is of major consequence to 15.19 percent and moderate for 35.44 percent.

For 48 percent informants in the low-status households (N=100), the problem is moderate; for about 25 percent it is minor in nature and for 27 percent shelter poses a problem of acute intensity.

For 19.16 percent informants, coming from low socio-economic status families of orientation (N = 120),
the problem of shelter is of acute nature. While it is moderate for 43.33 percent and of minor consequence for 37.5 percent.

Among the informants of middle socio-economic status (N=57), 17.54 percent face the problem acutely; and for 49.12 percent this problem is of minor nature and for 33.34 percent it is moderate.

Among those from the high socio-economic background (N=29), 10.34 percent face this problem in acute intensity. For 20.69 percent it is moderate. For the majority, i.e. 68.97 percent in the group, shelter poses no difficulty.

3. The Emotional Problems:

Emotion is a "feeling state" of the mind. It can be said that, all problems lead to the emotional problem. In this state, the subject feels desperate, lonely and is overtaken by a sense of futility and insecurity. In this situation the subject faces many problems of social and financial consequences and becomes unstable leading to physical and mental breakdown (Case No. 8, 9). In case of young widows the severity of grief is greater, for
them life becomes harder and uncertain and this results in immense emotional and psychological stress.

The sample shows that 25.93 percent informants of high socio-economic families (procreation, N = 27) are emotionally very much disturbed. For more than 66.67 percent, the problem is moderate. Only for a small number (7.40 percent) the problem is of minor nature. A few, (5.06 percent), in the families of middle socio-economic status (N = 79), are not emotionally disturbed. For 46.84 percent this problem is acute and for 48.10 percent it is of moderate intensity. Among the informants of low-socio-economic status (N = 100), a large number face this problem acutely. Only 3.00 percent feel it as of minor nature. For the rest 32 percent it is at a tolerable level.

37.94 percent informants from the families of (Orientation, N = 29) higher socio-economic status face the emotional problem acutely. For 10.34 percent it is of minor intensity. For the remaining 51.72 percent feel that this problem is moderate in nature. Those from the middle background are no better of. The problem is moderate for more than half (56.14 percent). It is acute for 38.60 percent. Only a minority (5.26 percent), is free from this problem. The problem is comparatively
intense for the lower socio-economic group wherein 60 percent face it in acute intensity. It is of minor nature only for 2.5 percent and 37.5 percent face this problem moderately (Tab.34).

Our data indicate that our subjects from the lower socio-economic status are emotionally more disturbed than their counterparts from the upper socio-economic levels.

4. The Financial Problem

Widowhood is an instant certificate of penury and mental torture. Of all problems, the financial one is the most crucial. A large number of widows suffer silently from this crisis. Soon after the husband's death the financial problem surfaces, and gradually gets manifest in the falling standards of living. We have instances of widows who have faced the financial problem acutely (Case No.12, 13, 17, 24, 25, 26,).

For 33.33 percent of our subjects in the families (Of procreation) of high socio-economic status (N = 27) finance is a problem of acute intensity; whereas for 29.63 percent this problem is of a minor nature, and for 37.04 percent it is moderate. For 35.44 percent in the
middle socio-economic background this problem is acute; and for 55.70 percent it is moderate, and for 8.86 percent this is no problem or only minor in nature. Among those in the low socio-economic status (N = 100), 58 percent face the financial problem acutely. A few (2.00 percent) do not consider it as a problem. For 40.00 percent it is a problem of moderate intensity.

Among the respondents of low socio-economic background (families of Orientation, N = 120) more than half (51.67 percent) face the problem of finance in acute intensity, while 40 percent face it moderately. The problem is minor for a few (8.33 percent).

29 respondents belong to high socio-economic status families. Of them, 41.38 percent face the financial problem in acute intensity and another 41.38 percent in moderate intensity, whereas the problem is of minor for the other 17.24 percent. There are 57 informants in the middle socio-economic category. For more than half among them (56.14 percent) finance is a problem of moderate nature whereas for 35.08 percent it is of acute. For a few (8.77 percent), the problem is of minor consequence (Tab.35).
Thus financial difficulties seem to be directly related to the socio-economic status of the widows' family backgrounds.

5. Bringing up of Children:

Bringing up a child, in a broad sense, connotes looking after the child for its all-round development, such as health, education, proper socialisation, etc. Some women, consequent upon widowhood are burdened with the sole responsibility of bringing up the children. As the child grows, each stage of development presents specific problems. By far, the most crucial and common problem is inadequate finance. As the child enters the adolescent stage, the peak period of growth, a widow mother begins to feel restless. Most often, this is the stage when the children are likely to go wayward. It is this period when parental guidance is crucial to shape the personality of children. For a widow to handle this situation single handed is to pull "a chariot without wheels."

Many Indian mothers are ill equipped to provide adequate economic support. They also find it difficult to guide the child. It is a joint parental venture to integrate the child with the family, and to help him/her
to develop to face life. A widow mother is often at loss to do this job alone.

A young child often misses the father and asks several questions which the mother finds difficult to answer. Children need a surrogate father figure. In a joint family it was possible. A grand father or an elder uncle could probably play the role of a surrogate father. But now-a-days the family structure is often nuclear where there is no other person to play the father role. We have many such cases who have faced this problem (Case No. 15, 16, 25, 26, 27).

14.81 percent respondents from families (procreation) of high socio-economic background (N = 27) found it extremely difficult in bringing up their children while 18.52 percent managed it with some difficulty. 66.67 percent, however, had got over this situation with minor difficulties. More than half informants 54.43 percent in midle socio-economic background (N = 79) did not have much difficulty shouldering this responsibility. For 18.99 percent, however, the situation presented difficulties in acute intensity, and for 26.58 percent the problem was moderate in nature. For nearly half among our informants 49 percent of lower socio-economic status, the bringing up
of children was a problem of minor nature. For 19 percent it was acute, and for 32 percent the problem was moderate.

54.17 percent informants from the families (Orientation, N=120) of lower socio-economic status, bringing up children did pose considerable difficulty whereas it became acute for 22.5 percent and for 23.33 percent it was of a moderate nature. Nearly half in the high socio-economic group (N = 29) did not have much of difficulty; whereas it was moderately felt by 44.82 percent. Only a few 6.90 percent faced this problem with acute intensity. For 54.38 percent of the respondents from the middle socio-economic background (N = 57) this was a problem of minor consequence. For 29.82 percent it was moderate. It had been acute for 15.79 percent (Tab.36).

By and large, bringing up of children does not appear to be a very difficult task for the widows in the sample we have studied.

6. Settling of Property Rights:

In 1937, the Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act permitted the women to inherit the property of their
husbands but the widows still are not accepted as copartners. She is not supposed to dispose or sell it except under "extreme circumstances". After the death of the widow the property goes to the closest kin of her husband. Though the Hindu Succession Law of 1956 has given the women the right over the property, in the traditional set-up of this region, a widow has only some rights to her maintenance from the property left by her husband which her sons inherit. Our data, however, indicate that some of our subjects particularly the childless and having only female children (Case No. 13, 14) are still deprived of a fair share of their parental and of their husbands' property.

Among families (of procreation) of high socio-economic background (N = 27) 11.11 percent informants find it extremely difficult to establish their rights to their husbands' property. For 81.48 percent, the problem is of minor nature; and for a few (7.41 percent) it is moderate.

For nearly 60 percent informants of lower socio-economic background (N = 100), it is again no problem or only minor in nature. While for 32 percent it is of acute intensity. For a small number (10 percent) this is of moderate nature.
For a large number of informants, that is 70.89 percent of middle socio-economic status, property matters do not pose a serious problem. Only for 17.72 percent, the problem is of acute nature and for 11.39 percent it is of moderate intensity.

An overwhelming number (82.76 percent) of respondents of (families of Orientation) of high socio-economic background (N = 29) do not find it difficult to establish their rights over their husbands' property. Only for 10.34 percent, the problem has proved to be acute and for 6.90 percent it is moderate.

Again nearly for 60 percent among our informants from the families or lower socio-economic status (N = 120) this problem is of minor consequence while for 30.83 percent it is acute and for 11.67 percent it is moderate.

Majority among the informants (75.44 percent) of middle socio-economic status (N = 57) this is no problem. Only about 15.79 percent faced this problem in acute intensity whereas for a few (8.77 percent) it had been moderate in nature (Tab.37).
Thus most widows in the sample do not find it difficult in establishing their rights over their husbands' property.

7. Educating the Children:

Financing education of the children is a responsibility that a widow mother, when she has school or College going children, has to face almost single handed. This responsibility becomes formidable when the mother is non-literate or less educated. The children are often forced to be withdrawn from their studies to support the family after the death of the father (Case No. 6 & 17). Those who face widowhood in a later age, when children are beyond school or college going age, do not normally face this problem.

In the sample among informants from the families (of procreation) of high socio-economic background (N = 27) 11.11 percent find it very difficult in educating their children. For 11.11 percent this problem is of moderate intensity. Whereas for 77.76 percent it is of minor consequence. For 15.19 percent informants in the middle socio-economic status group (N = 79) this problem is acute whereas for 56.96 it is minor, and moderate for 27.85 percent.
Among those in the low socio-economic group, only 43 percent do not find it difficult to educate their children, whereas for 41 percent the task is moderate in nature; and for 16 percent it is acute.

Among the informants of low socio-economic background (family of Orientation N = 120), 18.33 percent face this problem in acute intensity, for 34.17 percent it is of moderate and minor for 47.5 percent. For most informants from the middle socio-economic background, the problem is either minor in nature or of no consequence. 21.05 percent face it moderately. Only for a few, i.e., 10.53 percent the problem is acute.

Among informants in high socio-economic status of families of orientation (N = 29), 10.34 percent find this aspect of life very difficult to face; whereas for 31.03 percent, the problem is moderate and for more than half in the sample (58.62 percent), it is of minor consequence (Tab. 38).

Those who consider this as no problem are largely supported by their families, or have faced widowhood in old age.
8. Victim of Cheating (Money and Gold):

The childless widows are particularly unfortunate who become utterly helpless after the death of their husbands. Having no support, they forced to take shelter under the roof of near relatives or depend upon a adopted son. Such women, are often cheated by their near relatives. Our data, indicate that most of our subjects (case No. 7 and 8) are cheated by their 'near' relatives.

Only 1 informant from the families of (procreation, N = 27) of high socio-economic background was of cheated of her gold and money out right. The rest 96.26 percent, however, had no such problem (Tab.39).

3.79 percent informants from the middle socio-economic background (N = 79) were victims of thorough cheating, while 1 escaped marginally, the rest (94.94 percent) were lucky enough to escape the ordeal. Among those from the low socio-economic background (N=100), 92 percent escaped cheating, the rest 8 percent were less fortunate. Among these, 7 percent were worst hit.

No informant coming from the families of high socio-economic status (N = 29), is reported to have felt
substantially cheated. But almost each feel that she is cheated in one way or the other.

In the middle socio-economic background (N = 57) 5.26 percent had substantially been cheated and the rest (94.74 percent) escaped it.

In the low socio-economic background (N = 120), 6.67 percent felt that they were outright cheated by their relatives. For 1.67 percent this was marginal. The rest were fortunate enough to be safe from this hazard.

9. Ill-treatment:

Ill-treatment of most widows starts from her own home and her own family. Once a woman becomes a widow, she is looked upon as a burden by the husband's, as well as by the parental family. She is transformed into a glorified servant (Case No. 5). 18 percent in the sample reported that they were very 'badly' treated during their early years of widowhood. It is found from the data that a widow having no off-spring is troubled most by the husband's relatives to scare her away from her share in the family property. We have instances of widow mothers driven away from home by their own sons (Case No. 27) by
adopted sons (Case No. 4, 24 and own brothers (Case No. 6.7).

A young widow is often looked down as a 'Kulakhyani'. She is made responsible for the death of her husband and become the eyeshore to the members of her husband's family. In her parents' family, particularly when parents are not alive, she is unwelcome, where she is often made to feel as an intruder. On the other hand, old widows often have problems with their daughters-in-law. Quarrels surface apparently on trifling matters but the real cause is rooted ir. the control over the family budget and 'rights'. If a widow does not possess any property, her life in her family and with her close relatives may become more miserable. Often widows are made to cook separately for themselves while living in the family, under one roof.

There are 27 families of (procreation) of higher socio-economic status. Among them, 3.70 percent reported to be ill-treated whereas 43.74 percent donot feel that they are ill-treated. For more than 50 percent it is at a tolerable limit (Tab.40).

Among those from the middle socio-economic background (N=79), 13.92 percent are reported to be very
much ill-treated. A large number of informants from this background are tolerably well of. About 25 percent in the sample feel that they are not ill-treated.

On the other hand, the widows from the lower most socio-economic status (N = 100) are treated badly by their immediate family members. Only very few are really well of. 62 percent in the sample are able to accommodate the nature of treatment meted to them in the family. 20.69 percent from the families of (Orientation) higher socio-economic status are treated well; for 58.62 percent it is at a tolerable limit, and for the other 20.69 percent it does surface as a problem.

15.79 percent in the middle socio-economic background (N=57) are ill treated. For 26.32 percent, the problem is minor and for 57.89 percent the problem is moderate.

It appears that the widows are not properly treated. The empirical data point out that the widows feel that the treatment they receive is at the tolerable limit. Very few really feel that they are safe in their family circles.
10. Death of Children:

When the widows have to bear with death of their children, they tend to believe that the death is due to poverty leading to non-availability of proper treatment. An acute feeling of helplessness often prevents them from communicating their problems to someone. The relatives largely ignore and neglect them. The problem of helplessness becomes intense when the child is on the sick-bed bordering on death (Case No. 3).

The sample shows that not even a single informant from the families (of procreation) of high socio-economic status (N = 27) ever faced such a situation. There are (N = 79) informants in the middle socio-economic background. For 3.80 percent informants among them, the problem was acute and for 2.53 percent it was moderate while for 93.67 percent the problem was of minor consequence. 8 percent informants from low socio-economic background (N = 100) had to face this situation in acute intensity, 2 percent moderately, whereas for the 90 percent informants it was of least consequence.

None from the families of (Orientation) of high socio-economic status (N = 29) have never faced this problem in acute or moderate intensity. There are 57
informants in the middle socio-economic status. Of them 7.02 percent had faced this situation in acute intensity, 3.51 percent it was moderate. For the 89.47 percent such an occasion did not arise. The problem was severe for 5.83 percent informants of the low socio-economic background \(N = 120\). For a few, it was at a tolerable limit. The rest (92.5 percent) were safe (Tab. 41).

Our sample study indicates that widows from families (procreation and orientation) of middle and lower socio-economic status are exposed situations of helplessness while fighting to save their children from illness and death.

11. Property Related Problems:

Widows are often forced to sell their property due to expenditure incurred during the husband’s illness and subsequent death. Some are forced to sell it to defray the expenses of the marriage of daughters. In such situations again, the widows are tricked and were not paid the reasonable price.

1 (3.7 percent) informant from the families of (procreation) of high socio-economic status \(N = 27\) had miserable experience in this regard, while for the other
96.30 percent it was of minor nature. 8.86 percent informants coming from the middle background (N = 79) had been worst hit, for 2.53 percent the condition is slightly better. The other 88.61 percent were lucky enough not face such a problem. Only 89 percent informants from the lower socio-economic background (N = 100) face this problem moderately and the other 10 percent acutely. The only 1 rest had escaped this ordeal.

For all informants (N = 29) coming from high socio-economic background (families of orientation) this problem is minor in nature. Among those from the middle background (N = 57), 3.51 percent face the problem moderately while for 10.53 percent it was acute. The rest were safe. 120 informants from the lower socio-economic status had faced this problem. Among them, for 10.83 percent it was acute and for a low (1.67 percent) it was moderate and for the rest (88.33 percent) it was of minor nature (Tab.42).

Our data indicate that the informants in the middle and lower socio-economic background from the families of (procreation and orientation) seem to have been often outwitted in the matters of property.
12. Sexual Harassment :

Among the most significant problems in the life of the widows, sex, particularly those who are young, is a problem of crucial importance. Ideally, relatives male as well as female, are supposed to protect the fidelity of a widow. In practice, however, close relatives take advantage of a widow’s helplessness and try to exploit her sexually (Case No. 1). We found that more or less all young and middle aged widows faced this problem. Sometimes, the culprit is a father-in-law or a brother-in-law (Case No. 2, 10).

An informant from the family of (procreation) higher background (N = 27) confessed that she was greatly harassed in the matter of sex (Case No. 2). For 3 (11.1 percent) it was not much of a problem. Others 85.19 percent did not confront sexual harassment. Most of informants from the middle background (N = 79) never experienced sexual harassment. A small number (8.86 percent), however, had to face it in some intensity but a similar number did face the harassment in considerable intensity. Those in lower socio-economic status (N = 100), are no exception. 13 percent reported that they were badly exposed to this hazard and 8.00 percent faced
it in some measure. Majority (79 percent) however, had remained safe on this account.

Again, only one informant from the family of (Orientation) high background (N = 29) faced this situation mildly and rest 96.55 percent were safe. 14.04 percent families of middle background (N=57) faced this harassment and 7.02 percent also faced it, though mildly, the rest 78.94 percent were safe.

78.33 percent among the subjects lower family background were safe on this account. A few (11.67 percent), did experience mild harassment. Another 10 percent had serious problems (Tab.43).

13. Adjustment in the Family and the Household:

Life is adjustment. Human beings always try to adjust to their environment. A widow’s necessity to adjust arises out of a situation of her changed status and the new identity following the death of her husband. Many widows are forced to depend on others, such as parents, in law, children and grand children. In the early days of widowhood one faces various types of problems, such as emotional, financial, identity crises etc. She feels insecure, particularly when she is
subjected to the authority of the in-laws and that lowers her capacity to adjust.

Tension prevails. Trifling matters lead to fierce quarrels and harassment. That makes adjustment increasingly difficult. The problems get accentuated when widowhood forces a change in the residence. There are instances in our sample where widows face difficulty in adjustment even in the same house (Case No.21 & 22).

14.81 percent of informants from families (of procreation) of high socio-economic status (N = 27) found it extremely difficult to adjust with other members in the family after the husband's death. 62.96 percent, however, adjusted themselves with manageable difficulty. Only for 22 percent post widowhood adjustment had been smooth.

The widows from middle socio-economic background are reported to face more difficulties of adjustment in the family. Except for 17.72 percent, for whom adjustment in the family consequent upon widowhood, was not difficult. The rest found it to be hazardous in varying intensity. The situation is not different in the lower socio-economic levels. Here again onnly 7 percent
of informants escaped from the problem of adjustment. The rest had to face it in one way or the other.

For 20.69 percent subjects from the families of (Orientation) of higher socio-economic background, adjustment had posed a situation of major difficulty, and for 58.62 percent it was not smooth. Only for 20.69 percent the adjustment had been comparatively easier.

Nearly 70 percent among informants from the middle socio-economic background (N = 57) had managed but with some difficulty, to adjust with the family. A few (about 14.04 percent) failed to do so. Only 17.54 percent found the situation tolerably easy (Tab.44).

For those, from families of lower socio-economic background, situation was untolerable for 35.00 percent. About 55 percent the situation appeared slightly difficult, could manage it whereas only 10 percent found it congenneal. The data show that the acceptibility of the widow in the immediate family decreases with the decrease of the socio-economic status of the low family both of orientation as well as of the procreation.
14. Arranging Marriage for Daughter:

A widow finds it difficult in arranging suitable matches for the marriage of her daughters. The difficulties arise from the constraints of her poor mobility and financial insolvancy.

For most of the informants (N = 27) coming from high socio-economic background (families of procreation), arranging marriage for a daughter is not found to be a difficult task. However, a few found it be tolerably difficult, some (7.41 percent) moderately difficult and a few (3.70 percent) extremely difficult. Those coming from the middle background (N = 79) also did not find it very difficult in finding suitable matches for their daughters. For only a few it posed a problem of some magnitude. 12.66 percent moderately and for 18.99 percent acutely. In the low socio-economic background (N = 100), except for 9 percent facing the problem moderately and 19 percent acutely, the rest could easily arrange the marriage of their daughters.

Likewise, among the 29 informants from families of (Orientation) of higher socio-economic status, 10.4 percent confronted considerable difficulties in arranging marriage of daughters and 6.90 percent faced it only
moderately. For a large number of subjects, however, it did not pose any difficulty. Those in the lower background (N = 120), majority percent (21.67) face similar difficulties in acute intensity. 8.33 percent could arrange the marriages of their daughters with some difficulty. For a large number subjects (70 percent), however, it was of minor consequence.

The informants coming from the middle background (N=57) a large number did not find it very difficult in finding suitable matches for their daughters whereas the problem is acute for 10.53 percent. And 12.28 percent face the problem moderately (Tab.45).

By and large, arranging the marriage of a daughter, does not appear to be a difficult task, even for a widow, in this part of the country, though a few do find it a very difficult task.