CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

"To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the villages move and the Nation moves."

- Jawaharlal Nehru

1.1. General view of Women

A woman mirrors the wealth and prosperity of the society to which she belongs. Her role has been duly recognized by the civilized societie and developed economies. The level of development of a country can be best judged by the status it attributes to women. A country progresses with women or regresses with her.

India is the second largest country in the world in terms of female population which constitutes about half of the population. Women have greater responsibility in home management and the rearing of children, who are the future citizens of the country. The proverb, "education per se begins at home", can rightly be interpreted as saying that it is the women at home who are physically and mentally free from stress and strains when they produce a very good home environment for the development of children. The welfare of the family depends upon the woman's spiritual and psychological strength. There
is a proverb which goes this way - "hope and courage are the two diamond stones in the crown of success".

The study of the economic status of women has gained importance in India after independence. The status of Indian women has gone through changes over the centuries. On the one hand, it has been one of freedom and a position of importance, on the other extreme of considerable subservience.

A woman is not only a daughter, wife or mother but she is also a social being. She is a programmer, an adviser, a governess, an entrepreneur, an administrator, a scientist, a politician, a military personnel, a national leader, or a professional like a doctor, engineer, lawyer, social worker in various fields and feminist leader, not to omit a terrorist like Phoolan Devi. Most women in rural areas work in agriculture mainly as casual labour, while in urban areas many are engaged as teachers, nurses, medical technicians and recently ethnologists also. The first woman priest Miss. Elizabeth Paul had opposition from various angles in the religious field. Comparatively though women nowadays hold equal positions with men, they have not been given their due rights.

1.1.2. Women in the Family

A woman plays an important role in the family as a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a sister-in-law, a co-sister and what not? She is a help-mate to her husband, a co-worker, earning an extra salary helping financially, a
caretaker, a counsellor, a coordinator and fulfilling the basic needs of her family.

A mother's role is more important, as she has to mould the child into a dutiful member of society, and as a human being. A married woman now-a-days needs no instructions and enlightenment about her attitude towards in-laws of all categories. She learns many things in her own family or shared experiences of her mother, elder sisters or cousins. Modern women are highly endowed with intelligence, foresight, dignity and thoughtfulness to face difficult situations in their homes.

1.2. Women as a Human Resource

It is high time that the developing nations utilized their women force to the optimum level and realized that a woman is not merely a passionate, charming, delicate creature who can love, sing, dance, dress and serve, but also possesses knowledge and skill that are assets to the family and the society. They can also earn substantial income. Their earnings add to the income of an average family, in which, a male member earning might not be sufficient to meet the growing expenditure.

A Woman is an endless source of power. She is a formidable force that can change the complexion of growth, rejuvenate the human resource of development, absorb the strains of modernization and fight the forces of destruction and destabilization at work. She can play a creative, positive and
challenging role in nation building. It is imperative to note that men alone cannot break the shackles of poverty, unemployment, inequality and population explosion. Active and equal participation of women in accomplishment of these Herculean tasks is indispensable. Further, it is an illusion to believe that the “trickle-down” effect of development would automatically benefit women. Women’s concern must be incorporated in developmental plans.¹

1.3. Historical Perspective of Women

To study the status of the Hindu widows in India, it is necessary to have a glimpse of their changing status through a historical lens.

1.3.1. Women during the Vedic Age (2500-1750 B.C)

In the Vedic society, a woman occupied a high position in society. Women have the striking features of love, sacrifice, beauty, self-discipline, self-esteem, self-confidence, endurance and forbearance. These qualities have made her the queen of the house giving her the role of wife, mother and housekeeper. This status confined her within the small circle of her family restricting a wider perspective of society and universe. This prevailed for centuries and generations from the Vedic period.

Women had equal rights with men and enjoyed freedom in choosing their life partner. Women went to Guru Kula to receive education and married only after acquiring education. A woman was equal to her husband and performed all religious ceremonies along with him. In the joint family system
her authority was accepted and she had full liberty of action. Widow re-marriage was permitted usually within the family, but women could neither hold nor inherit the family property.\textsuperscript{2}

1.3.2. **Women in the Post Vedic Age (1750-350 B.C)**

During the post Vedic age the position of women slowly began to deteriorate. Altekar sees the period 500 AD to 1800 AD as one of progressive deterioration in the position of women in society.

The status of women took a negative turn in the post Vedic age. Only sons were vested with the responsibility of performing rituals. Since, the daughters were given to another family in marriage, their participation was considered illogical. The inferior status of women was reinforced when they became economically unproductive. The trend towards the degradation of women in the post Vedic period is clearly reflected in the treatment of widows. Women seem to be proverbially conservative even in matters affecting their own welfare. Hindu women themselves loathed to change their traditional ways because they considered it their “Dharma” (Duty) to practice them.\textsuperscript{3}

1.3.3. **Manu’s Edict on Women - Later Vedic Period**

With the coming of Manu’s Code in the post-Vedic age, the Vedic custom of husband and wife jointly taking part in religious functions slowly came to be rejected. Woman’s rights depended entirely on her husband and he declared that she was not his equal.\textsuperscript{4}
1.3.4. Women in the Medieval Period (1206-1773 A.D)

Gradual change in the status of women occurred during the time of Brahmins (1500 to 500 BC). Girls had some voice in the selection of their life-partner. Divorce was permitted, though it was not extensively practiced. It was during the age of Sutras and Epics (500BC to AD) the status of women had changed considerably. Certain forces in the society began to clamour for early marriage at 9 or 10 years of age. The decline in the status was negligible. A wife was expected to carry out all services needed by her husband and his parents and to keep him and everyone satisfied.\(^5\)

Women were considered as mere objects of pleasure and reduced to a state of helplessness and total dependence either on the father as a daughter, on the husband as a wife and on the son as a mother. Education was totally forbidden to women. A woman considered as a symbol of purity and chastity was disgraced and ill-treated.

1.3.5. Women in the Moghal Period (1526-1707)

Women faced a number of hardships and cruelty due to backward practices like child marriage, purdah system, sati, enforced widowhood, prostitution and devadasi system. Their rights in the educational, social, religious and economic fields were also lowered gradually.\(^6\)
1.3.6. Women in the British Period (1707-1947)

Liberal and the rational thinking of the British have led educated Indians to think about Indian problems like child marriage, female infanticide, the practice of sati, prohibition of widow re-marriage among high caste Hindus and the need for emancipation of women.7

1.3.7. Women in the Modern Period - 17th Century onwards

Greater participation of women in social and political life is equally important for their integration in the development process. Development is not merely economic, but also means participation in social and political life.

The increasing awareness of the existence of a significant relationship between the role and status of women and the ultimate economic well-being of the family is reflected in the growing volume of literature on women studies. In view of the special nature of most of the work done by women and the total contribution they make towards the family and the national economy, employment of women increases day by day.

The employment of women is an index of their economic status in society, especially with respect to equality. According to the Census data, the work participation rate (i.e. the proportion of employed or total workers to population) of women steadily rose from 14.22% in 1971 to 19.67% in 1981 and to 22.27% in 1991. The rise in work participation of rural women has been even steeper from 15.92% in 1971 to 26.79% in 1991.8
1.4. Women as Widows

Widowhood implies a shift in position from that of a wife with economic, social and emotional security to an economically dependent and socially and psychologically insecure woman. As such it compels the woman to reassess her own worth and ability in the light of the changed position. The new position and roles of a widow depends not only on her own characteristics like age, educational level, economic status, nature of obligations and family support, etc., but it also depends on the evaluation of others such as her in-laws, neighbours, kith and kin, etc. This evaluation determines her place in society.

When a woman loses her husband, she is often compelled to remove her mangalsutra and her toe ring. She is not permitted to wear colour saris and is forced to wear only white saris as a symbol of purity. Her head is tonsured. She is not allowed to keep flowers or use a bindi or ornaments. In short, she is not allowed to deck herself but at every point draw attention to the fact that she is a widow — an inauspicious person.

A widow was believed to be a curse to society. She was shunned from participating or even appearing in any religious or social function. Widows were treated as untouchables. Her very presence in ceremonies and public functions was considered as inauspicious and it is still so in the interior parts of our country. As education was denied to women, widows were a prey to the atrocities committed on them in the name of custom. Many a time, widows
were thrown on the streets, as they were not accepted by their parents and parents-in-law due to economic and social conditions. If at all accepted, she was more ill-treated than an animal. If she fell sick, treatment was denied by her parents and relatives, who prefer her death, to her living. When a widow had children, they also suffered equally. Education and other basic needs were out of reach for a poor widow’s children.

1.4.1. Widows Through the Ages

During the Vedic period, widows were permitted to re-marry. A widow was given her husband’s share in the property. A childless widow also inherited her husband’s property by right. The re-marriage of the widow to a brother-in-law to beget sons appeared to be acceptable since the son, born out of such a wedlock, was qualified to perform the rituals for an ancestral worship. Widow burning was rare and prevented throughout the Vedic period, but this practice prevailed among the non-priestly warrior families.

During the medieval period, a widower could get married soon after the loss of his wife; a widow was not allowed to do so. As a result, a majority of widows wasted their lifetime and became lazy, engaged in gossip or became sex workers, instead of using their talents and time in constructive ways.

1.4.2. Manu’s Edict on Widows

In India, girls were normally married before the onset of puberty. Men usually married girls much younger to them in age. Hence, Indian girls became
widows at an early age due to the age difference between the two and were destined to widowhood for the remaining adult life. Females do not marry again as much as do the males. Moreover, widow re-marriage is socially disapproved among the high caste Hindus of India.¹⁰

Manu was resolute in his attitude towards the re-marriage of widows. He did not permit women to remarry in the event of their husband’s death. A widow must lead a “celibate life”, never insult the memory of her dead husband, live on fruits and roots and undergo all forms of austerities.¹¹ By leading such a life, she was guaranteed immortal fame in this world, a place in Heaven and a happy life there together with her husband.¹² On the other hand, if she married another person after her husband’s death, she was threatened with a terrible consequence in her next birth.

1.4.3. Widows in Hindu Religion

Hindus regarded widowhood as a punishment for some horrible crime or crimes committed by them in their previous birth, such as disobedience or infidelity or fate.¹³ Widows in the Hindu society had been subjected to severe restrictions, sanctions, prohibitions and taboos. Even young widows could not escape from these disabilities.¹⁴ The death of her husband placed her in an inferior position. The practice of Sati (though abolished now) was in vogue in India till recent past. The voluntary sacrifice on the part of the widow was startling. During the cremation of her husband’s corpse, she climbed on to the blazing pyre and allowed herself to be burnt alive. However, the modern law
of the state has abolished the practice of Sati. It is considered illegal. The Hindu Law, since 1856, permits re-marriage of widows.

1.4.4. Status of Widows in Other Religions

(a) Christianity

Christianity has accepted widowhood and re-marriage as a natural phenomenon. Widowhood, therefore, was not considered a very serious problem, since both men and women enjoy equality. The social life of Christians enables them to remarry. Christian women and widows are treated with respect (Roman 7:3, I Timothy 5, 11:16). ¹⁵

(b) Islam

In Islam, 'widowhood' is a non-issue. Its acceptability in society should be free from inhibitions and taboos.¹⁶ Muslim emperors discouraged sati and adopted measures to prevent it as far as possible.

(c) Jainism

In Jainism, widowhood is not a serious problem. Though widow re-marriage is not allowed, they enjoyed freedom in the religious, social and political fields. A widow becomes a direct heir to the property of the deceased husband regardless of whether or not she had a son.¹⁷

(d) Buddhism

In Buddhism, a widow did not suffer any social or moral degradation due to widowhood. There was no restriction on her dress or food habits and
did not have to shave her head. She could participate in social and religious functions.  

1.4.5. Re-marriage of Widows – A Taboo

In general, the status of widows has been difficult in most of the societies. In traditional Indian societies, a widow is not allowed to remarry or is socially discouraged. While in modern societies a widow is allowed to remarry, the right is subjected to certain restrictions. Widow re-marriage is high among Muslims (35.37%).

In North India the system of ‘levirate’ is in practice. Under levirate marriage, a widow has to marry her husband’s younger brother, or in the absence of a younger brother, a cousin. Marriage with the elder brother of the deceased husband is generally not favoured. This marriage takes place after 12 months of the death of the husband or on the date of the first death anniversary. At a small community gathering the person places bangles on the head of the widow or wraps a piece of cloth around her. After this ceremony, the widow enjoys all the rights and privileges of a married woman.

1.4.6. Widows and Castes

In India, though widow re-marriage is allowed among some of the lower castes and encouraged especially in rural areas, it is in disfavour in high castes. Census report of 1911 (Mysore) states that, “the marriage of widows is prohibited only among Brahmins and in a very few other castes. In few
castes like Besta and uppar a fine has to be paid for the benefit of the caste people if a man married a widow.\textsuperscript{23}

Nair asserts that widow re-marriage is universal among the tribal people of India and the proper groom is her younger brother-in-law. In case a widow wishes to marry an outsider, the groom has to return the bride price to the deceased husband's family.\textsuperscript{24}

In South India, the Thanda Pulyan castes in Tamil Nadu permitted widow re-marriage but not to the deceased husband's brothers.\textsuperscript{25}

The above-cited review reveals that prohibition of widow re-marriage was a peculiar phenomenon of Hindu culture. Although the marriage of widows was allowed among a few lower castes of Hindus, the married widow was looked down upon with disfavour and the practice was not encouraged. Hence, cases of widow re-marriage were few. In India, re-marriage for divorced and widowed women carried with it a certain stigma.

1.4.7. A Poet's View of Widowhood

The joy of the life is crumpled even before it has blossomed. A few lines of a poet are quoted below:

``She is but a child

Seven years old

With sweet lotus

Jet, black eyes.\n\n
Tiny lips and a slender waist

A tender rose bud,

A fawn with tottering steps

A child widow as she is

Back to father's house,

The father, a widower

Now has a second wife

The child is a frowned wife

Even despised for her widowhood".26

1.4.8. Widows-Denial of Human Rights (Sufferings)

1. A widow is denied access to nutritious, tasty, delicious food. She is denied of bindi, flowers, turmeric, bangles, coloured clothing, cosmetics and ornaments.

2. She is deprived of consuming honey, meat, drinks and salt.

3. She is denied the comfort of sleeping, even on a mat or bed spread.27

4. Eating in bronze plates is abstained from.

5. She is not allowed to eat two meals a day but only one and that too a very simple one.28

6. Even her blessings for her children during marriage is not invoked.

7. She is not to look up, not to mingle with other women, leave alone men.29

8. She is expected not to show her emotions like anger or dislike.

9. If at all she fell ill, she goes uncared for by family members.
10. *Any one expressing sympathy towards her is chided.*

11. Young widows are more humiliated, harassed and exploited than middle-aged widows.

12. Expected fatherly protection from the father-in-law turns into sexual exploitation.

13. The young widows know little about their husband’s business accounts, bank balance, insurance policy and bonds. They become easy victims to the members of the family who try to acquire their inherited property and life insurance benefits, if widows happen to be uneducated.

14. The normal respect which is entitled to a young widow is denied to her by the mother-in-law and the siblings of her husband.

### 1.4.9. Prevalence of Widowhood

In India from 1951–1971, the percentage of widows remained more or less stable around 12%. However, in 1981 and 1991 this figure has come down by single digit number.

### 1.5. Crusaders of Widows

Notable among the crusaders of widows are Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Thiru.V.Kalyana Sundaranar, Subramania Iyer, Annie Besant, Iswar Chandra Vidhya Sagar, Gandhiji, E.V.R. Periyar, Subramania Bharathiar, Bharathidasan and Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy. They fought for widow’s rights and denounced the practice of degrading widows. They
advocated the prevention of the practice of “Sati” and also encouraged the re-marriage of widows.

1.6. Social Reform

The term, ‘reform’ generally refers to advance, progress or modernization. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term “reform” as ‘the amendment or altering for the better some faulty state of things, the removal of some abuse or wrong’. Reforms become essential for a society when its institutions are obsolete. At the dawn of the 19th Century, Christian missionaries in collaboration with native Indians became the harbingers of social reform in (Social evils and disabilities such as Sati, child marriage and enforced widowhood) Tamil Nadu.

1.6.1. The Phases of Social Reform

1. The first phase of Social Reform began in the 19th Century with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. During this phase, notable individual attempts were made to abolish social customs like Sati and child marriage.

2. In the second phase, education for women received greater attention. It began from the mid 19th Century.

3. The third phase, characterized by the struggle for political rights and granting adult suffrage to women, began somewhere at the beginning of the 20th Century.
1.6.2. Social Reformers of Maharashtra

Among the Social Reformers of Maharashtra, the following were the strong supporters for the cause of widows.

1. Balashastri Jambhekar (1812-46) condemned the evil customs of sati and infanticide as well as the trafficking in female children.

2. Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-92) argued for the replacement of old laws by new laws which would guarantee justice to all including widows.

3. Jotirao Govinda Rao Phule (1827-90) emphasized education to women and advocated widow re-marriage.

4. Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925) advocated not only widow re-marriage, but gave his consent to the re-marriage of one of his daughters who was a widow.

5. Mahadev Govinda Ranade (1840-1901) founded a high school for female education in 1882.

6. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-95) argued for compulsory education for the emancipation of women.37

1.6.3. Social Reformers of Tamil Nadu

a) Bharathidasan (1891-1964): Bharathidasan, in his poems condemned the people who opposed widow re-marriage. He says that an older widow should encourage a younger one to search for a husband just as a man searches for another life partner after the
death of his wife. Widows could help one another in finding a new life.

To quote a few lines from his poem.

\[\text{A girl like fresh flower, lost her husband, can't she remarry?} \]

In nature, itself we can't see silent bees, still breeze, why make a lady unnatural?\(^{38}\)

b) Thiru V. Kalyana Sundaranar (1883-1953): T.V. Kalyana Sundaranar held the view it is not right to prohibit re-marriage without eradicating child marriage. When a woman desires to remarry, she should not be denied. If she is unwilling she should not be compelled, it leads to indirect torture.\(^{39}\)

c) E.V.R. Periyar (1879-1973): E.V. Ramsamy, Nationlist leader of Tamil Nadu, popularly known as Periyar, belongs to Karnataka. He was infavour of widow re-marriage and not infavour of child marriage. He arranged the re-marriage of his sister's widowed
daughter (10 years widow). Periyar himself set an example by marrying a widow Mrs. Maniammal, in whose memory the Tamil Nadu Government has established many institutions.\(^{40}\)

d) **Arignar Anna (1907-1967):** Arignar Anna, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, contented that widow re-marriage or inter-caste marriage are not blunders. Equality could be established when the widow re-marriage are made easy.\(^{41}\)

e) **Muthulakshmi Reddy (1886-1968):** Muthulakshmi Reddy had constructed *Avvai Illam* (Home for the orphans) as early as 1930 for the welfare of the widows, deserted women, destitute etc. Besides, she had established Educational Institution for this type of people.\(^{42}\)

1.6.4. **Contribution of Foreign Missionaries towards the Emancipation of Widows**

To begin with, only young women from Western countries came as missionaries to India. Besides medical help and education, they concentrated on emancipation of women also. They spread literacy among women so as to make them aware of their legal rights which had been denied to them for long. The pioneers among the foreign missionaries who worked for the widows' rights were Mrs. Peit, Mrs. Debrin, Mrs. Ratheffler, Miss. Wycoff,
Miss. Dora Boomstra, Dr. Ida Scudder, Mrs. Sarah Zweemer, Mrs. Marshman, Mrs. Wilson and Miss. Cooke.\(^4^3\)

1.7. Social Reform Activities

1.7.1. Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962)

He was the founder of Stree Shikshan Saustha (now named after him as Maharshee Karve Stree Shikshan Saustha) at Pune in Maharashtra State, which gave shelter and education to child widows.\(^4^4\)

1.7.2. Pandita Ramabai Saraswathi (1858-1922)

Ramabai, a Hindu Brahmin lady toiled for the uplift of Indian women and child widows.\(^4^5\)

1.8. Legislative Measures on the Status of Widows

There are various legislations passed before and after independence. Some important resolutions were passed by Indian National Conference in order to improve the condition of widows or at least to try to reduce the discriminations against them. Some of the legislative measures stated below were taken in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries.

1.8.1. Bengal Sati Regulation Act XVII of 1829

Bengal Sati Regulation Act XVII of 1829 declared Sati or self-immolation of widows as illegal. Sati means self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Self-immolation, especially of widows, was
popularly described as Teepaidal in Tamil Nadu. Sati existed in Tamil Nadu from early Sangam period. To abolish a custom which was deep-rooted in the Indian soil was, by no means not an easy task. Fortunately for Lord Bentinck, Governor General of India, most of the educated Indians were in favour of his measure, specially Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Thus, fortified by public opinion, he moved the bill and on December 4, 1829 it was enacted into law as Act XVII of 1829. It declared that “the practice of Sati or burning alive the widows of Hindus, is hereby declared illegal and punishable by the criminal courts”. This Act was passed only for the Bengal presidency.46

Following the Bengal Code, Stephen Rumbold Lushington, the Governor of Madras, passed “the Madras Sati Regulation Act of 1830” and it declared that the practice is illegal and punishable by the criminal courts.47 The regulation on Sati was a landmark in the history of India. Sati was abolished by law in 1830.48 As. R.C. Majumdar has observed, the abolition of Sati gave a fillip to the movement for social reform.49

1.8.2. The Hindu Widows Re-marriage Act, 1856

This act was passed to legalize the marriage of Hindu widows, and received the assent of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General (1848-1856), on July 25, 1856. The government declared that the legislation legalizing the marriage of widows “will not interfere with the tenets of any human being, but will prevent the tenets of one set of men from inflicting miseries and vice upon
the families of their neighbours, who are of a different and more human persuasion.” The provision of the Act is

(a) a Hindu widow was eligible for re-marriage, provided she gave her consent and that the children born of such marriage was legitimate.

(b) Upon her second marriage, a widow was not entitled to get her deceased husband’s property.

(c) In the event of failure to declare the widow as guardian of her children, the court could intervene and appoint a guardian from paternal grandfather or mother.

(d) A widow who had no children was eligible to inherit the property of her deceased husband.

(e) A widow by her re-marriage was not entitled to forfeit her property or right except as provided in Sections 2, 3 & 4 of the Act.

(f) In the case of a widow who was a major or whose marriage was not consummated, her own consent was enough to render her re-marriage legal.

(g) If the remarrying widow happened to be a minor whose first marriage was not consummated, she was not permitted to marry without the consent of her father or other lawful guardian. Marriages contrary to this section were to be declared illegal by the court of law.
The status of Hindu family was determined by the moral standard of its female members and so widows of orthodox families shuddered to think of a second marriage.51

1.8.3. Indian Succession Act, 1925

There is no distinction between those related through the father and those related through the mother. The husband, surviving his wife, has the same rights in her property as she would have in his property if she survives him.52

1.8.4. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (Sarda), 1929

To prevent child marriage, The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 was passed in 1929.53 It declared that any person who celebrated the marriage of an infant girl or aided or abetted such a marriage or any person who had attained the age of eighteen and married an infant girl, was punishable with simple imprisonment up to three months or fine up to Rs.500/-, or both.

1.8.5. The Hindu Women’s Right to Property Act, 1937

Under this Act, the widow gets a share in the joint family property as well as in the separate property of her husband. The widow is entitled to the income out of the property and, after her death, the property reverts to her husband’s heirs. The widow is a limited heir to her husband’s property. It means that she cannot sell, mortgage or gift away the property.54
1.8.6. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

This Act fixed the minimum age for marriage as 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys; now it is has been raised to 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.⁵⁵

1.8.7. The Hindu Succession Act, 1956

This Act gives a widow a share in her husband's property equal to the children's share and the right to hold and dispose off property inherited. Even the daughter-in-law whose husband is dead has a share in the self acquired property of her father-in-law. Whenever applicable, the widow can claim her "Streedhan" too.⁵⁶

1.8.8. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956

This Act entitles widows to adopt a child. The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 accepts them as the natural guardian of their children after the father's death. As far as insurance policy or provident fund are concerned, if the widow has not been nominated as the beneficiary and if she files a suit for succession for the rest of the property in a court of law, then the legality of the insurance nomination is also challenged. If she is granted succession by the court, the insurance benefits are also accrued to her.⁵⁷

These legislative measures have played a dynamic part in establishing social and economic justice of equality between widows, married and unmarried women. However, legislation alone cannot raise the status of widows.⁵⁸
1.9. Welfare Schemes of Tamil Nadu Government for the Betterment of Widows

1.9.1. Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiyar Widows (re-marriage) Assistance Scheme

The aim of the Scheme is rehabilitation of widows by presenting incentives in the form of National Savings Certificate to both husband and wife to the value of Rs.7,000/- to be kept in deposit for 6 years or Rs.3,000/- to be paid in cash.

1.9.2. EVR Maniammaiyar Widow’s Daughter Marriage Assistance Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to avoid the delay in the performance of marriage of the daughters of poor widows for want of adequate funds.

1.9.3. Annai Sathiyavani Muthu Free Supply of Sewing Machine to Destitute Women

This Scheme aims at rehabilitation of destitute widows, deserted wives, socially handicapped women and physically handicapped men and women.

1.9.4. Free Supply of Text Books and Note-books to Widows Children studying up to X standard and Higher Secondary Course

Under this scheme, provision has been made for the free supply of text books and note-books to widow’s children upto X std and Higher Secondary Course.
1.9.5. Pension Scheme in Tamil Nadu

The Government of Tamil Nadu has implemented Old Age Pension Scheme (OAP) and Widow Pension Scheme. All persons above the age of 65 are eligible for the OAP, irrespective of gender. Tamil Nadu has special pension schemes for agricultural labourers and elderly destitute widows.

Tamil Nadu has introduced a pension scheme as a measure for providing social security for the aged in 1962. In 1975, this scheme was extended to destitute widows. The amount payable to the pensioners was increased from Rs.150 to Rs.200 in 2000. A widow is considered as destitute if she is without any regular income or source of income and if she has no relations of 20 years of age or above, particularly a son or a grandson, or if she had not remarried. This scheme has also provision for pension for war widows.60

1.10. Women Welfare Organizations

Women Welfare Organizations run by the Government for the enrichment and betterment of socially and economically downtrodden women including widows, destitute and rural women.

(a) Service Homes were started at Gandhigram by Kasturba Sevikashram Gandhigram, at Erode by Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust and at Madurai by Sevashram.61
(b) A Teacher Training Institute was set up to train preferably widows, deserted and destitute women.  

(c) Working Women's Hostel: Working women's hostels accommodate widows, divorcees and married women whose husbands work elsewhere.

(d) Mahalir Mandrams: Mahalir Mandrams have been organized to bring together the women of rural areas cutting across various social and economical barriers.

In the year 2000, about 600 mahalir mandrams were functioning in 20 blocks, 30 in each Block at Vellore district.

(e) Guidance Bureau: It was set up to help needy woman, especially widows, deserted wives and the destitute to obtain Bank loans. help women to liaison with other government departments and in settling LIC dues, Provident Fund, Pension Benefits, etc. All these schemes are handled by the officers of this Bureau along with the District Social Welfare Officer.

(f) Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Limited: It was registered by the Government with the objective of creating employment opportunities for women and to arrange training programmes.
(g) **Programme on Group Savings:** The main aspect of this programme is to educate women on the importance of savings. Women, selected through the NGOs (Non-Government Organizations), were formed into an informal group of 15-20 to manage this saving fund. After being a member for three months in this group, women are eligible for subsidiaries and loans from a commercial bank for their economic development activities. Loans and subsidiaries were sanctioned after fulfilling the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) formalities.  

(h) **Self-Employment Scheme:** Nationalized Banks select women entrepreneurs and provide training in related skills and also provide finance to start their self-employment. After providing finance, the concerned bank also provides assistance for marketing their products to earn their livelihood. e.g candle-making, painting, kitchen items, screen printing and such others.  

(i) **Government alloted certain percentage of seats for widows and their children for professional courses like Medicine, Engineering, Law and such others.**  

(j) **The Government introduced ‘Thottil Kulantai’ Scheme during the tenure of Miss. Jayalalitha, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, in the year 1995.**
(k) Sneka: A voluntary organization was launched on 1986 by Dr. Lakshmi VijayanKumar. It is mainly to provide an outlet for those who may feel depressed or lonely or showed a tendency to commit suicide.68

During the last 40 years, Indian women have been slowly but steadily emerging into public life. Women's Associations and Conferences have not only contributed much to the progress of women in education and politics but also in bringing them out from their seclusion into public life. Women's organizations give widows opportunities for their self-expression and self-development.

1.11. Women Movement in Tamil Nadu

1.11.1. Working Women's Forum, 1978

This is a movement marked by voluntarism of its membership motivated through specific class objectives such as to help downtrodden women.

1.11.2. Pennurimai Iyakkam-Movement for Women's Rights, 1978

The work of the Pennurimai Iyakkam was to ensure implementation of Government Welfare Schemes, like the Widow and Old Age Pension Schemes, Distress Relief Schemes, helping in the securing of loans for various purposes etc.
1.11.3. Joint Action Council for Women, 1982

This is a non-Governmental organization (NGO) formed as a spontaneous response to a call for united action by women activists and women’s organizations of Chennai in 1982.

1.11.5 All India Mahila Sanskrit Sanghatan, 1985

The main aim of this organization is to organise thousands of women in various parts of the country against the evils prevailing to-day. It is known as Magalir Kalachara Sangam in Tamil Nadu (1987). 69

1.11.4. Pennurimai Padukappu Iyakkam, 1983 – Women’s Right Protection Movement

The Pennurimai Padukappu Iyakkam champions the cause of the downtrodden and women living in slums in various ways.

1.12. Statement of the Problem

While women had a chequered growth transcending spatial, temporal, religious and caste barriers, the widows had undergone a quiet suffering. Widowhood is natural, for a wife becomes a widow after her husband’s demise. The Hindu religion had imposed severe sanctions on widows. Consequently, the widows in the Hindu religion have undergone physical, mental, moral and spiritual agony. It had gone to the extent of denying human rights to widows. Instead of supporting a widow during her time of distress and grief, the cruel hands of the society had inflicted unbearable pain on them by attaching various
taboos and disabilities. As a result, widows as a class in the Hindu society, were forced to live a social ostracized, economically dependent, and physically austere and spiritually pious life. A widow’s public presence was not considered auspicious and, therefore, she had to live in seclusion.

By realizing the untold misery undergone by the widows, several social thinkers and reformers had championed the cause of widows and advocated several remedial measures like abolition of ‘sati’, child marriage and widow re-marriage during the last 200 years. In order to prevent inhuman practices to widows, social legislations like Abolition of Sati Act and Abolition of Child Marriage Act were passed. The social activists in different parts of India had implemented a number of projects with a view to ameliorate the welfare of widows. Both Central Government and State Governments as well as many NGOs have introduced various schemes in order to protect widows from the social onslaught and to promote their welfare.

The present study on the socio-economic condition of widows, particularly the widows belonging to Hindu Naidu Community, focuses on the following issues.

1. What is the position of Naidu widows in the family?

2. Are the widows in three generations aware of the social legislations aimed at protecting them and social activism aimed at ameliorating their welfare?
3. To what extent has the society's attitude towards widows changed over time in the light of social activism and social legislations?

4. Do the widows feel that they are being recognized on par with other women?

5. Which generation of widows among the young, middle or old generation, began to feel safety and security?

6. To what extent are the widows socially and economically independent?

The present study aims at finding out answers to the above questions and to seek remedial measures. The overall objective of the study is, therefore, to analyze the socio-economic condition of Hindu Naidu community widows in three generations and to find out the change in their socio-economic status and suggest measures for their improvement.

1.13. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are given below:

1. To find out the social status of widows in the Hindu Naidu community. The social status relates to the marriage with kins, preference to live with, the nature of their households, pattern of their living in terms of food, dress, entertainment, performing rituals, attending marriages, visiting relatives and friends, going to theatre and parks, role in the family in terms of breadwinner, cooking, child care, washing and cleaning.
2. **To study the economic** condition of widows in the Hindu Naidu community. The economic status is related to the personal income, family income, source of income, expenditure on food, non-food items like clothes, education, medical care, electricity, transport, entertainment, cosmetics and repayment of debts.

3. **To compare the status** of Hindu Naidu widows in three generations particularly to compare their social, economic status, capacity to take decisions and their attitude towards social customs, the knowledge of social change.

4. **To probe the impact** of socio-economic change on the widows particularly on their capacity to take decisions. The decision-making relates to buying and selling of daily requirements, marriage of sons and daughters, celebration of festivals, ceremonies, whom to approach for assistance.

5. **To suggest measures** to improve the well-being of the widows.

1.14. **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses of the study are given below:

1. **In spite of the various social movements and social legislations, protecting the rights of widows,** the Hindu Naidu widows continue to face social exclusion and social stigma.

2. **The Hindu Naidu widows continue to depend on the earnings of other members of their family.**

3. **The decision-making power of the Hindu Naidu widows has not shown any improvement** over three generations.
1.15. Scope of the Study

A widow is a person, but she is subjected to innumerable miseries not due to her fault but due to ignorance, superstition and the social custom followed by the male dominated society. Her agony and nightmare have not been reduced even after the passage of time.

The problem of widowhood has elicited considerable interest in the minds of researchers in recent times. In the Indian context, the problem assumes considerable importance, as the age difference between husband and wife is higher, and widow re-marriage is highly restricted. The widowhood is a combination of the problems of the women and the widow. Hence, in order to understand the complex phenomenon of widowhood, a systematic study of various problems faced by widows, the causes, the consequences and the effects on the personality of widows, the difficulties in adapting to widowhood and how they manage to overcome the problems, becomes essential.

Several legislative and social programmes have been launched during the last five to six decades with a view to liberate widows from their predicament. The present study of widows of Hindu Naidu community, Walajapet Taluk will give sufficient insight into the changes brought to the status of widows.

The study will be useful to the policy makers, sociologists, women's organizations, administrators, academicians and social scientists. It will help
them to frame a proper perspective planning for the empowerment of widows. This study will awaken the conscience of the orthodox and blind community and it will persuade them to accept the widow as a person and recognize her facilities and utilize her energy for development and acknowledge her as a partner in all the ventures which will be planned for the 21st century.

1.16. Limitations of the Study

The problems the widows face, the treatment they receive from the family and the society and such other issues vary from religion to religion, and within castes in a religion. Therefore, it has been decided to focus attention on widows from a single religion and also from a single caste. Though the study might not have universal applicability, it is useful in several ways. It might encourage the scholars to conduct studies on widows from a different religion or caste. It would also help to improve on the methods for studying the problems relating to the widows. The researcher had no such study to guide and to decide in the matter of selecting the sample, tabulating and analyzing the data, particularly the data relating to three generations.

The widows, belonging to three generations, are not drawn from the same family. Such families were not found among the 340 Hindu Naidu households in the study area. Since all the widow households from the selected villages in Walajapet Taluk were interviewed, they were stratified into three age groups via., between 15 to 35, 36 to 50 and above 51 years.
stratification of widows according to age would enable the researcher to collect enormous data and to find out the change in their status over three generations.

The information furnished by the respondents were not from written records but from their memory. The recall-bias is unavoidable in this study. But, by several visits to the widows households and by developing rapport with them and through cross checks, errors were minimized to a very great extent.

The study is confined to the widows belonging to Kamma Naidus and Baliya Naidus, residing in Walajapet Taluk. There are other Naidu subcastes spread over to other parts of Tamil Nadu and the state of Andhra Pradesh. Since the present study is location specific, the findings of the study is applicable only to the widows of the Naidu caste and Hindu religion.

1.17. Plan of the Thesis


The second chapter Review of Literature deals with important concepts used in the study and a brief review of the past studies.

The third chapter Naidu Community Origin and Spread outlines the characteristics of the Naidu community.
The fourth chapter Description of the Study Area gives a brief account of the Walajapet Taluk.

The fifth chapter Research Methodology presents the methods used in this study.

The sixth chapter deals with the Analysis and Interpretation of the Collected Data.

The final chapter provides the Summary of Findings, and Conclusion.
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