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## Widows: The Dark Side of Life

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### **Abstract:**

*A bloody partition, seventy two years of hostilities, three wars and innumerable border skirmishes between India and Pakistan were occurrences which people of both countries had learnt to bear with patience in the hope that the next year or next month will bring this nightmare to an end. But the nuclearization of both countries, each claiming to have out done the other, has brought this proverbial patience to an end. There are many people on both sides of the border who would like to see progress in Indo-Pak relations that would make the peace process really irreversible. India fought four wars after independence. Among which first in 1962 with China and remaining three i.e. in 1965, 1971 and 1999 at Kargil with Pakistan. The present study is focused on Kargil war widows of Punjab because Kargil war is the recent one and widows of this war can more easily available. In this Paper we discuss the dark side of Widow.*

**Keywords:** Widows, Kargil War, Women,

### **Introduction:**

A bloody partition, seventy two years of hostilities, three wars and innumerable border skirmishes between India and Pakistan were occurrences which people of both countries had learnt to bear with patience in the hope that the next year or next month will bring this nightmare to an end. But the nuclearization of both countries, each claiming to have out done the other, has brought this proverbial patience to an end. There are many people on both sides of the border who would like to see progress in Indo-Pak relations that would make the peace process really irreversible. India fought four wars after independence. Among which first in 1962 with China and remaining three i.e. in 1965, 1971 and 1999 at Kargil with Pakistan. The present study is focused on Kargil war widows of Punjab because Kargil war is the recent one and widows of this war can more easily

available.

In August-September 1998, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Jehangir Karamat had developed serious differences with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif over the requirement for a National Security Council in Pakistan. On being criticized by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif publically, he decided to resign before his term ended. Nawaz Sharif nominated General Parvez Musharraf as the Chief of Army Staff, thereby superseding two of his senior colleagues. After taking over, Parvez Musharraf made some quick changes in the top echelons of the Army. One of them is 'Operation Badr' i.e. the Pakistan Army's Codename for the Kargil War. Just when the preparations for the Lahore meeting were going on, the Pakistan Army was busy in planning and carrying out reconnaissance and logistic preparations from November 1998 onwards for 'Operation Badr' (Operation Vijay). The entire planning for this operation was typical of the commando spirit of the new Pakistan Army Chief. It was also an opportunity to prove his military leadership as well as tactical and strategic competence to the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and to the people of his Country. 29 October 1998, General Parvez Musharraf declared while addressing troops of Pakistan, "Don't be carried away by the rhetoric of the Indians whose armed forces are totally exhausted and whose morale is at its lowest." The main objectives of the Pakistan Army for the Kargil War were:

- Altering the alignment of the LOC east of Zojila (Pass) and denying the use of the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh highway in this area to India.
- Reviving Jehadi terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Highlighting the India-Pak dispute over Jammu and Kashmir to the International community.
- Capturing Turtuk, a strategically important village located on the southern bank of the Shyok River in Ladakh through which an ancient trade route cuts through the Ladakh Range into the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

The Kargil war was an armed conflict between India and Pakistan that took place between 3<sup>rd</sup> May to 26<sup>th</sup> July 1999 in the Kargil sector of Kashmir. Kargil, a small district headquarter town situated between the remote Zaskar and the Ladakh ranges, extends to about 150 km. with Drass at one end and Batalik at the other. The Pakistani intrusions cover over 100 km of the Kargil sector. The intruders have occupied areas that were not held by Indian troops. The choice of the Kargil sector for the major intrusion requires some explaining. This is the only sector on the Line of Control (LOC) where Pakistani posts have an advantage of higher positions. Elsewhere on the LOC, they are at a disadvantage since the dominating heights are held by the Indian army. When Indian army observed that some of the miscreants along with Pakistani army crossed over the LOC in Indian Territory. A army squad was sent to take account of the situation but they did not return, either they were killed or captured, then the armed conflict started. The ensuing Kargil war ended

with a victory for India which was later on named "Operation Vijay".

In the summers of 1999, when the guns boomed in the Kargil sector and war rhetoric was at its highest pitch, many women at their native places found themselves increasingly feared and disturbed. The naked aggression and untold suffering on both sides was unnerving. Through the lens of television cameras, they watched it all; smoking guns, body bags, grieving mothers and wives foregrounding the drum-roles and bugles of valour and victory. It was the first battle in India fought under the electronic media eye, the detailed reports on the casualties of the Kargil war evoked greater sympathy and emotional reverence for the heroic sacrifice of the brave soldiers of Indian army. It was the declaration of the Indian Government that every martyr will be airlifted from the place of his causality to Delhi and then to the capital of his state and his native place. If not possible by air then the 'Caskets'- carrying bodies were sent to their villages by road in army vehicles. They were given state level respect by sounding bugles and firing shots in the air at the time of their funeral. Hundreds of people from different walks of the society attended the last rites of their brave sons of the country.

It was televised that Operation Vijay is over. The guns from both the sides became silent. It was a great victory for Indian army. But actually in war there are no winners. There are only losers – loss of property, resources and precious human lives. The soldiers have made their ultimate sacrifices leaving behind their bereaved families. The war was just begun for them- war against deprivation, poverty and loneliness. They are the unseeing brave.

War can only bring death and destruction. By no means can it create happiness nor solve problems. History tells us that those who instigate war will eat their own evil fruits. Unfortunately India had to face three drastic attacks by her neighbor, Pakistan. In these three wars, no doubt, India, the great country has conducted herself admirably in bringing new international values into being. But at the same time, there is no denying that these wars have left thousands of women weeping and screaming whose husbands have sacrificed their lives in the defense of the country.

Thus to conclude the above discussion the social life style of widows which came out, shows that how much a woman is humiliated and tortured, just being a widow. The state of widowhood is not due to their own fault, but it is just a natural phenomenon. As it is well said that birth can be checked but death can't be. Any of the life partners can die anytime, but it is the woman only who is always blamed and has to undergo through various types of social, economical, physical and psychological harassments (Ranjan: 1989).

### **Significance of the Paper:**

Widowhood is an issue which needs to be looked into from multidimensional perspectives. The present condition of the widows need to be considered from the social, economic and psychological points of view which are often indistinguishable from one another on account of a sharp contrast in the social attitude towards widows among the people of different socio-economic

strata. Studies on widows carried out within an empirical framework are not many. There is a dearth of studies on widows in general and Kargil war widows in particular.

In the present Paper the social, economic and psychological plight of the war widows were analyzed. Hence to delimit the study only Kargil war widows were included as respondents because Kargil war is the recent one and the widows of this war can be easily available. The war widows can broadly be classified into two categories, one belonging to the officer's class and other belonging to the lower ranks. In the present Paper the widows from lower ranks i.e. up to Junior Commissioned Officers (J.C.O's) has taken into consideration, because the widows belonging to the J.C.O's and other lower ranks who are mainly from lower income strata, mostly less educated and living in the rural areas and having small land holdings. The problems of the widows of lower ranks are presumed to be more difficult to tackle due to the above mentioned factors and therefore needs greater attention. On the other hand the widows belonging to the officer class and upper ranks may not have that much problems because of their higher economic level. The widows of the officers are invariably well educated, smart, intelligent and living in urban areas. These widows are able to stand on their own in course of time.

#### **Aims and Objectives of the Paper:**

1. To trace out the role of various social institutions such as education, religion, caste and family on the Kargil war widows.
2. To examine the family life of the Kargil war widows. The family life relates to head of the family, type of the family, relationship with family members and children and change in rations.

#### **Sample of the Paper:**

For the present Paper, Punjab state of India has been selected purposely because the researcher herself belongs to the same state and secondly in the context of present studies Punjabies in general and Sikhs in particular have strongest feeling of patriotism. If we go through the historical records, it is the well known fact that Sikhs have contributed a lot in different wars for the sake of the nation.

#### **Summary:**

Traditionally, in Indian families widows were seen as liability. Indian society is more dynamic in religious superstitions and cultural practices where in a widow is deemed as a bad omen and forced to live a lonely, isolated and depressed life. In India, there is often an elaborated ceremony during the funeral of a widow's husband, which includes smashing the bangles, removing of the kumkum (bindi), colourful attire and widows are made to wear white clothes which are the indication of mourning. Traditionally in Indian society sati was a popular practice, where the widowed woman would throw herself on burning funeral pyre of her husband to immolate herself. A woman's existence was marked merely by her husband's physical presence. Widow Remarriage was

simply out of question.

However, in modern culture the norms for clothing have gradually changed and given way to coloured clothing in a widow's life. Practice of sati has been banned in India for more than a century ago. The ban began under British rule and is much owed to the efforts of the social reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who asserted that sati was a means of showing status rather than a ritual in Indian society, and said that there are other ways of doing it than by burning the widows. Consequently, with this traditional mindset in India, entering into widowhood is more hazardous, humiliating and painful.

While widowhood is always a trauma for a woman. India ranks highest in the world, in the incidence of widowhood. Every fourth household in India has a widow. In spite of natural deaths, manmade factors like wars and terrorism increased the population of widows in the society. The impact of these wars is more on the women because more men are killed in these kinds of events and their wives are left without male support. But if it includes the above mentioned conditions and problems the life could become unbearable. Keeping this situation in the view the present study has been planned to assess the social, economic and psychological conditions of the Kargil war widows of Punjab.

This Paper is latest and different than the studies of other war widows. The widows of Kargil were treated differently by the Government by providing them many types of compensation package. As mentioned in the introductory Chapter they were provided a special status of "*Veer Naries*". So that they may feel proud in the society that they were the widows of brave sons of mother India, who martyred their lives by fighting with the enemy to protect their mother land. By depositing the Kargil package such as pension and compensation money on the name of widows Government enhanced their economic status, because nobody else can withdraw that amount without their consent. But problems do not stop here. By giving authority to control the finances the widows became the prey of their own family members and other relatives which created a bundle of problems to face for the widows. The Greed of money among the other family members and their strategies of grabbing the money from widows created many types of conflicts among the family members which made their sweet relations bitter. In some of the cases their own kids opposed them under the influence of their uncles and even grandparents which made their life hell. Even if they were remarried they were compelled to go for levirate marriage. The idea behind that was the same. Except few options their status remained humiliating as the other widows. Hence to conclude, though they have gas stations, petrol pumps, flats, compensation money and other benefits but that is not the substitute of their great husbands, majority of them said. They further stated that Government of India honored them by giving the status of '*Veer Naries*' but that is only at the time of Independence day and Republic day. That looks good only on the stage but it immediately ends whenever they come back home. All of

them were from the lower ranks of their husbands, which shows their social, economic and educational background. So with such a back ground the great noble idea of '*Veer Naries*' founds its sheen. Nobody bothers for their status because society is society which has very dynamic system.

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