

FAQ'S On Widows and Their Place In Hinduism

Many have requested that we at DIPIKA compile a FAQ article on widows like the one on Pitr Paksha we have done previously. We hope that this article will answer many of your questions. These are some of the questions that many have emailed to me. Do note these replies are given according to the current times we live.



Can a widow re-marry?

In Hinduism widows can choose to re-marry or remain single. Widows who intend to stay single dedicate their life to the upbringing of their family, to live for a cause or to live in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. If a widow chooses this path she is respected as a brahmacharini (celibate women dedicated to spiritual pursuits), and is generally enjoined to live a life similar to monastics. One of the signs that they have chosen this path of life is that they wear plain white clothing (though these days many will wear either whitish saris or white saris with designed borders). Widows who choose not to re-marry may also be initiated by a swami to be a sannyasini and may wear yellow or orange saris. These widows follow the tradition of sannyasins, where they do not participate in community functions such as weddings except only to observe and give their blessings. They may however, lead prayer groups during holy festivals, give discourses if they are qualified to, and can certainly perform pujas and perform Arati on such occasions or on any occasion where there is gathering of people for spiritual purposes.

Widows who intend to re-marry will follow the customs of an unmarried girl. Her attire would be what she normally uses, though she is enjoined not to use the red sindhur on her forehead and as, with an unmarried girl, use the black dot or no dot instead. These signify that she is open to marriage proposals. These are the general guidelines for widows in the Hindu culture. Widows do have a choice on how they apply them. For instance, a widow who chooses not to re-marry may still use her usual attire and wear the red Sindhur as a remembrance of a late husband (however this is rarely practised). There is no bad karma in this and the community is enjoined to respect her wishes. There is actually no Hindu

scriptural reference that regulate what a widow should wear and what she should not, or what she can or cannot do. In general Hindu society, widows are given the choice of indicating their status by what they choose to wear. By status, I don't mean whether they are a widow or not, instead it is to indicate whether they intend to re-marry or not. I must also state that these same guidelines also apply to a husband who has lost his wife. However, if you observe our community men are not enjoined by the community to observe the guidelines as much as women which I find to be of double standards.

Many of our shastras, like the Manu Smriti, states that a widow should not marry again. Yet there are other Hindu scriptures which more than imply that a widow can re-marry. The following verse is cited by Shree P. V. Kane, in his History of Dharmashastra: "Another man is ordained for women in five calamities: a) When the husband is missing and is unheard of; b) The husband dies; c) When the husband is impotent; d) When the husband has become an ascetic; e) The husband has become depraved". Agni Purana 154.5; Parashara Smriti IV.30; and Narada Smriti V.97. Atharva Veda IX.5.27-29 includes a verse that translates as "Whatever woman, having first married one husband, marries another, she and the other new husband will not be separated if they offer a goat and five rice dishes illumined with religious fees". Furthermore, the remarriage of widows is advocated in the Vashista Dharmasutra of the Rigveda. These issues impact the most personal and intimate aspects of human life. Yet our Vedic scriptures seems to be totally contradictory in these areas. Is it really right that a human life is played around with in this way, all for the sake of baseless traditions? The Purva Mimamsa Sutras (written by the most respected Jaimini Rishi) rules for the interpretation of scripture clearly state that if two smritis (refers to a specific body of Vedic scripture, and is a codified component of Hindu customary law) clash, the two conflicting viewpoints indicate alternative practices, both being equally valid. Even according to this rule, widow re-marriage is offered as an alternative to the lifelong celibacy of widows in the Smritis. This acknowledgement that the Vedic Shastras can contradict each other, indicates that in Sanatan Dharma (Hinduism) there are various schools of thoughts, and should be respected as such. It all depends on the teaching of those who interpret those scriptures.

What is a widow's curse? How does it affect one's life?

What is a curse? A curse (also called a jinx, hex or execration) is any expressed wish that some form of adversity or misfortune will befall or attach to some other entity—one or more persons, a place, or an object. In particular, "curse" may refer to a wish that harm or hurt will be inflicted by any supernatural powers, such as a spell, a prayer, an imprecation, an execration, magic, witchcraft, a natural force, or a spirit. In many belief systems, the curse itself (or accompanying ritual) is considered to have some causative force in the result. To reverse or eliminate a curse is called removal or breaking, and is often believed to require equally elaborate rituals or prayers. The study of the forms of curses comprise a significant proportion of the study of both folk religion and folklore. The deliberate attempt to levy curses is often part of the practice of magic. In the Hindu culture the Sage or Rishi is believed to have the power to bless and curse. Examples include the curse placed by Rishi Bhrigu on King Nahusha and the one placed by Rishi Devala. Special names for specific types of curses can be found in various cultures. Most of the ancient people like Greeks and pagans are famous for cursing each other. The same is the case with Hinduism. In fact, curses in Hindu kathas give rise to some very interesting facts. They explain some natural phenomenons and tell us why things are the way they are. Here are some of the most famous curses found in Hindu scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas.

Famous Curses In Hindu Scriptures:

The Curse to Queen Kunti: When the Pandavas learned that Karna was their half brother (born to their mother before her marriage), they were stricken with grief for having killed Karna wrongly. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas cursed his mother Kunti saying that, "no woman shall be able to hide her pregnancy from now on". That is why a woman's pregnancy always shows.

Lord Krishna's curse of Extermination: Another famous curse from the Mahabharata is the curse cast upon Lord Krishna. After the battle of Kurukshetra when Lord Krishna went to console a distraught Gandhari (mother of the 100 Kauravas), she flinched in pain. She cursed Lord Krishna that the way He had schemed to kill her 100 sons and exterminate her bloodline, His bloodline too will be exterminated. Lord Krishna thus "expired" in an untimely death and His family members killed each other by infighting on the banks of the river Yamuna.

Mother Sita's curse to Gaya: Lord Raam went to perform His father's last rites at Gaya with His brother Lord Lakshman and Sita-devi. When The brothers were bathing in the River Phalguni, Maharaja Dashrath's (Lord Raam's father) spirit appeared and asked Mother Sita for Pinda (the Vedic ritual of offering a rice ball to one's ancestors). As Mother Sita had nothing else, She gave him an offering sand. There were 5 witnesses to this act; a cow, a Tulsi (holy basil) plant, Akshaya Vatam (foot print of Lord Vishnu), a brahmin and the Phalguni river. When Lord Raam came back, all the other witnesses except the Akshaya Vatam backed out. So a distraught Mother Sita cursed the Phalguni river to dry up, banished the Tulsi plant from Gaya, cursed the brahmins of Gaya to be hungry for ever and dictated that the cow shall never be worshipped from the front.

So to come back to answer this question posed, well yes some people seem to have a power of cursing but if a widow or anyone does this then repercussions are always there.

Robbing, stealing is a crime, but when it's intentionally committed to a widow, what is that karma?

Karma is karma - whether you steal from a widow or anyone else, the repercussions are quite horrific depending on the sinful act one has performed...

Why do widows have to maintain a decorum just to please society, when their lives are generally harder than normal?

That's down simply due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense from the general populace.

Does the widow wash off the Sindoor on the funeral day of her husband?

There is no scriptural proof of the expired husband rubbing off the Sindoor off his living wife's centre part (Maang). However, the widow ceases using the Sindoor in the traditional manner.

Why do most mothers not teach their sons to respect widows?

OK, that's something that mothers need to start practising, teaching their sons and daughters to respect all beings including widows, so what to speak of animals?

Why is there such disdain for young widows in the community?

That's due simply due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns

comprehensively.

Do widows really have "a bad shadow" especially on bridal couples or at prayers?

NO!!! That's due simply due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns.

Why are the offered koichas (Halwa Puri) not offered to widows? Is this correct?

NO it is not!!! When a Devi (Mother) prayer is performed, generally halwa puri, etc, are prepared for the Mother (like Ma Durga, Ma Kali, Ma Bandi...), and when that puja is completed, that halwa puri now is prashad, blessed food from the Mother Herself. Is one not going to offer that blessed food to a lady because she is a widow? How inappropriate and disrespectful this seems. Prashad is for all humanity to consume from a young child, to a married person to a widow or widower and prashad should even be fed to your pet animal like your dog. This has been done by great saints and gurus like Sivanada Sena of the Caitanya Lila's. A widow cannot refuse the prashad that is offered to her as that is tantamount to maha-aparadha (great sin), like what King Tungadhwaaja did and lost his kingdom in the Shree Satyanarayan Katha of the Skanda Purana. So that's due simply due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns.

Can a widow observe a graha (planetary) fast and vrats like Lakshmi vratam, or pradoshams?

YES!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense widows are told not to perform a graha fast, or even perform important and powerful vrats like the Vaibhava Lakshmi vrata and Pradoshams. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns in-depth.

Widows are told not give their daughters away at the wedding ceremony (Kanya Daan) as one requests a family member (married) - so isn't this unfair, as they in most probability did nothing to raise that child?

Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are not allowed to perform this scared act. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns. But F.Y.I. I insist a widow or widower give their daughter away in Kanya Daan. I will not accept anything less.

Why must widows dress in light or white colours? How long must a widow dress like this?

We all make choices on a daily basis with regard to colour. Through spiritual research, we have found that depending on the colour we choose (be it clothes or our surroundings), we will be affected accordingly at a spiritual level. The entire Universe, at a subtle intangible level, is made up of three subtle-components of Sattva, Raja and Tama (The modes of goodness, passion and ignorance). Colours are also categorised as sattvik, rajasik or tamasik depending on their predominant subtle-components. Sattva stands for 'spiritual

purity' while Raja and Tama stand for 'action' and 'spiritual ignorance' respectively. When we wear clothes that are of sattvik colours, it helps us with our spiritual practice, while colours that are Raja-Tama in nature are detrimental towards making spiritual progress. Wearing clothes that have a Raja-Tama predominance increases the negative spiritual vibrations around us. Hence we are also more likely to attract negative energies as they too are Raja-Tama predominant. The following is a list of colours and their effect on our spiritual state. When a colour is described as being 'helpful', as mentioned in the chart below, it means that the colour helps to attract spiritually positive vibrations and repel negative vibrations. 'Harmful' indicates the ability to attract negative vibrations whilst simultaneously alienating us from spiritually positive vibrations. Widows traditionally dress in white for one year to show respect and honour of her late husband.

How colours affect us spiritually

Colour	Predominant Subtle Component	Effect On Us
 White	Beyond <i>Sattva</i>	Most helpful
 Yellow	<i>Sattva</i>	More helpful
 Pale Blue	<i>Sattva</i>	More helpful
 Blue	<i>Sattva</i>	More helpful
 Pink	<i>Sattva</i>	Helpful
 Orange	<i>Sattva-Raja</i>	Helpful
 Fresh Green	<i>Sattva-Raja</i>	Helpful
 Red	<i>Raja</i>	Medium helpful / Harmful ¹
 Dark Green	<i>Raja-Tama</i>	Medium harmful
 Purple	<i>Raja-Tama</i>	Medium harmful
 Violet	<i>Tama-Raja</i>	Medium harmful
 Brown	<i>Tama</i>	Medium harmful
 Grey	<i>Tama</i>	Medium harmful
 Black	<i>Tama</i>	Most harmful

Footnotes:

1. Whatever the basic personality i.e. *sāttvik* or *tāmasik*, the colour red stimulates it more

Does a widow apply Hurdi (Turmeric) at a Hurdi Puja for her daughter/son?

YES!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense widows are not allowed to perform this scared act. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns.

Can a Widow pray to Shree Hanumanji?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders not to perform Shree Hanumanji's puja. This is sad as Shree

Hanumanji himself is a Mother worshipper (worships Mother Sita) hence you are quite upsetting him by disrespecting a widow. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns.

Can a widow turn salt to remove the "Evil Eye" (Dristhi Dosha)?

YES!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense widows are told not to turn salt (together with dried red chillies and black mustard seeds) to nullify a Dristhi Dosha or the "Evil-Eye". Dipika's article on "How to nullify a Dristhi Dosha (a.k.a Evil eyes, Nazar-Najar, etc)" has identified and address these concerns in-depth.

Can a widow perform pujas at their homes like raising a Jhanda (flag) for both Lord Hanuman and Lord Shiva?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders not to perform Shree Hanumanji's and Lord Shiva's puja. This is sad as Shree Hanumanji himself is a Mother worshipper and Lord Shiva's "Widow Wife" is called Mother Dhumavati hence you are quite upsetting them both by disrespecting a widow. Dipika's article on "Widows and their place in Hinduism" has identified and address these concerns.

Can a widow carry Kavady?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by many priests and elders not to carry Kavady. This is indeed sad and unfortunate as Lord Muruga's mother is Shree Dhumavati Devi herself. The "Widow Wife" is called Mother Dhumavati hence you are quite upsetting Lord Muruga who loves his mother dearly by disrespecting a widow.

Can a widow dot her Lakshmi Lamp with Sindhoor?

Yes most definitely she should and can!!! Do note Mother Lakshmi is such an amazing and loving mother, how can such a loving mother be so cruel or is it due to mindless and Neanderthal minded traditions that's based on lack of intellect? Hmmm.

Can a widow reapply her Sindhoor, Mangal Sutra or Thali after her second marriage?

Well there isn't any shastric backing that one cannot, but Sindhoor once applied by her first husband cannot be applied by her second husband as it's a once-off ritual. When (if) she does re-marry then just a Sindhoor dot is applied on her forehead by her second husband. Thereafter she can then apply Sindhoor daily in her maang (centre part), and a Kungu dot is applied on the forehead and thali is then place by her second husband.

Can a Widow wear a Mangal sutra?

Mangal means auspicious and sutra is a necklace. Hence an auspicious necklace. The mangal sutra is used in west India by the Gujarati and Maharashtra Hindus to signify a female is married. So by the information above a widow should not wear a Mangal sutra. But then again some females wear the Mangal sutra as a remembrance of a late husband (however this is rarely practised). If a widow does choose to remarry she of course uses her Mangal sutra once again.

Are Widows allowed to use coloured dots on their forehead?

A widow who chooses not to remarry may still use her usual attire and wear the red

Sindhur as a remembrance of a late husband (however this is rarely practised). But is a widow does choose to remarry she of course uses her red dot once again.

Can a widow prepare Rhot, Halwa Puri and the rest of the prayer offerings?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders and others not to prepare prayer offerings which is sad and disrespectful.

Can a widow turn Aarti at the end of a puja like for the Vishnu or Devi Aarti?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders and others not to, as her shadow is “not auspicious” which I find sad and disrespectful.

Can a widow attend a funeral?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, some widows are TOLD not to attend a funeral. But fortunately this occurrence is rare these days.

Are widows allowed to give her blessings (Ashirbaad) to anyone?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders and others not to as her shadow is “not auspicious” which I find sad and disrespectful.

Are widows supposed to keep a night vigil at the death of her husband?

No. There is no such shastric proof of this.

Can a widow offer Dhaar during a puja or at a public puja?

YES she should!!! Due to ignorance, lack of knowledge and lack of common sense, widows are TOLD by the elders not to offer Dhaar to Mother Durga. Lord Shiva's “Widow Wife” is called Mother Dhumavati hence you are quite upsetting Mata by disrespecting a widow. Dipika's article on “Widows and their place in Hinduism” has identified and address these concerns.

What are the do's and dont's for a widow in the 1 year period following the expiration of her husband?

Widows traditionally dress in white attire for one year to show respect and honour of her late husband, so I would humbly suggest that for the first year the widow should wear white clothes or a sari or punjabi. Her late husband, if the final rites and rituals was performed in accordance to shastras, arrives in Yamaloka 361 days after the cremations of the body. After the one year ceremony she can (if she wants to) re-marry and wear different coloured clothes thereafter. Many are under the belief that because the deceased is still travelling for a year that out of respect they don't perform any prayers. This can't be further from the truth. After 12th/13th day puja you can perform any prayers you like. Life carries on and should not stop after a person dies. Actually the more prayers you perform the better for the deceased. So basically from the information given not much restrictions are followed by the widow. Just many widows follow the traditions of the family, but are not backed by Vedic shastras.

What's the role of a manglik dosha or yoga in a birth horoscope?

Manglik Dosha, also called Mangal Dosha, is one of the most fearsome Dosha of Vedic astrology which is responsible for early death of partner if both the partners are not at the same level of Dosha. Mangal Dosha or Kuja = mind and body. Dosha is an astrological combination that occurs if Mars is in the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 7th, 8th, or 12th house of one's Birth astrology chart. A person born in the presence of this condition is termed a manglik. This condition is Vedic astrologically believed to be devastating for marriage, causing discomfort and tension in relationship, leading to separation and divorce, and in some cases, it is believed to cause untimely death of one spouse. This is attributed to the "fiery" nature of this planet. Also, if two mangliks marry, the negative effects are believed to cancel each other out. One should seek the advice of an expert astrologer for check if one is manglik or not.

So basically from the above given answers we can thus deduce that widows are certainly given the proverbial "short end of the stick" in the Hindu society. Widows should do as a married woman does. As Hindus we should not remain thinking in a match box, we must, as awesome Hindus, see and live the broader way of life, otherwise one shall find a Hindu only in a museum in the near future. Scary thought, isn't it? Please, my fellow Hindus let us rise from this Neanderthal mindset and be forward-thinking, uber awesome Hindus.

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Thank you so much for taking the time to read this article. We pray that this article will assist you in some way and we also pray that it helps you to appreciate the beauty and remarkable foresight of our ancient Hindu culture. We wish to educate all readers and demystify the path of Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma). Please feel free to share these articles with friends and family who do not have direct access to our website or articles. If you use the articles in any form including blogs and/or as part of other articles kindly credit our website as a source. We hope that the articles serve as a reference to you and your family when you need clarification of certain topics. Jai Hind... Jai Shree Radha Krsna.

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