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**(Re)Learning Identities: War and Army Widows,  
Hostel Residents in Urban Rajasthan**

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**Meghan M. Chidsey** (PhD candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University) studies issues of gender, identity, power, trauma, and mythology—the heterogeneous ways in which individuals make and remake the self—with a current focus on Hindu war widows in North India. She previously conducted work on the intersections of schooling and NGOs in Ethiopia while earning an MS Ed at the University of Pennsylvania. A former high school chemistry teacher in Philadelphia, she is presently a fifth- and seventh-grade math tutor in Harlem and has served as a teaching assistant for undergraduate courses on law and society, archaeology, African studies, and social theory.

## Abstract

What does it mean to be a “good Hindu woman,” a widow, a Rajput widow, a war widow? This paper examines the diverse ways in which the widows of Jaipur’s War Memorial Hostel (re)learn, cope with, legitimize, or criticize identities and spaces often circumscribed by caste, religion, family, and the Indian government. As research in the field of education too often focuses on schooling and the classroom, this paper aligns with critical considerations of learning in the everyday, as interaction and work. In their narratives of ritual, violence, and restriction, many widows describe how experiences of loss, mourning, and hardship are managed through the self-embodiment of divine qualities (e.g. Durga’s strength in battle or the *kuldevi*’s bravery). It is argued that individually interpreted myths can create spaces for the reinterpretation of identities in daily life—how constricting identities may become agentive or violence and family betrayal may be mediated. This is an exploration of learning and re-learning to be in the world.

## Introduction

“Ideal womanhood” in Hinduism as represented by the *pativrata*—a woman who has taken a vow (*vrata*) to protect her husband (*pati*), a vow not only of protection but of wifely fidelity and self-sacrifice—problematizes the identity of “the widow” in ideal Hindu society as her mere existence suggests failure in her duty as “husband-protector.” In Rajasthan, such religious paradigms of sacrifice and protection align with the historic caste and gender duties of Kshatriyas (i.e. Rajputs, Jats, etc.), who as rulers and warriors sacrificed themselves in battle for the sake of kingdom and family, becoming ingrained in caste mythology. These paradigms of caste duty and the *pativrata* have largely become mythic stories<sup>1</sup> of the past as there are no more kingdoms to defend. However, for those women widowed by the death of their husbands, serving in the Indian Armed Forces,<sup>2</sup> a similar ethos of *protection*, *sacrifice*, and *duty* still exists.

This paper in part examines the ways in which the women of Jaipur’s War Memorial Hostel engage with religious and caste paradigms to mediate experiences of (everyday) violence and exploitation as they make sense of their new positions and identities within society as widows: ritually inauspicious, socially stigmatized, and traditionally shunned. As research in the field of education too often focuses on schooling and the classroom, this paper aligns with critical considerations of learning in the everyday, as interaction and work (see Varenne 2007, 2009; Cremin 1976, 1978; Garfinkel 2002; Bartlett 2008). I argue that it is through deliberate engagement with the transcendent in the everyday that the struggle to (re)learn, (re)explore, and (re)negotiate the self takes place.

Individually interpreted myths create spaces for the *reinterpretation* of identities, as many widows cope with experiences of intense loss, mourning, and hardship present in narratives of ritual, violence, caste restriction, and social death. Strength for these women was often located not only in the everyday needs of sending children to school or keeping a roof over their heads, but through the self-embodiment of divine qualities (e.g. Durga’s strength in battle or a *kuldevi*’s bravery). This is a paper of voices of struggle—the learning and effort necessary to negotiate experiences of violence and abuse, making “the everyday inhabitable again” (Das 2007:216).

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<sup>1</sup> Myth, in this paper, will be defined as a traditional or legendary story usually involving religious and/or heroic characters and/or events, generally marked by extraordinary circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> Currently, Indian Armed Forces are involved in an armed conflict over territory (Jammu-Kashmir) with Pakistan. Almost all of the hostel war widows’ husbands died in Jammu-Kashmir encounters (including the Kargil War).

### **Research and Methodology**

The research presented here is based on fieldwork in India conducted in June through August of 2011. The majority of this work focuses on a government subsidized War Memorial Hostel located in the northwestern city of Jaipur, housing up to 30 war or Army widows at any given period. I spent the majority of my time as a pseudo-resident at the hostel. I observed daily interactions, discussions, and activities between women and families in and around the grounds of the hostel in addition to intervals at the Army's canteen area. Formal life history interviews, a demographic survey, and lots of chai were also utilized. Unstructured individual or group discussions usually occurred inside one of the participant's flats, with two or three other women frequently joining the conversations from other apartments and children listening or sleeping in adjoining side rooms. Structured life history interviews, which on average lasted between one to three hours, took place either in the women's flats, or more often, in one of the administrative offices in the main building. On the few occasions that I interviewed non-resident widows our meetings would take place at the Army's main canteen area, about a 20-minute drive from the hostel.

All interviews were conducted in varying degrees of Hindi, Rajasthani (a rural dialect of Hindi), and English, audio-recorded and transcribed. While my proficiency in Hindi aided in this process, I was accompanied by a local friend, a 22-year-old female Jaipurite, serving as interpreter during all but two of my formal life history interviews. Beyond her abilities in the regional languages, my assistant's identities as a local, Indian, Hindu woman tended to put my informants more at ease when discussing social and gender norms, religious or caste mythologies, their husbands, their relationships with their in-laws, and their experiences with the Army, among other topics. As a testament to this "theory," there was an occasion where she was not able to accompany me on an interview so an ex-colonel offered to serve as my interpreter. Not only did this prove to be my shortest interview, but I also noticed that most of my informant's answers concerning the Army, her pension, her in-laws, and gender norms, were short and lacking detail. She averted eye contact and shifted in her seat, continuously fixing her sari wrap as it began to slide off of her head. This was the only interview where my informant did not cry. Admittedly, with only this one interview as a comparison point it is impossible to decisively assess the impact of my interpreters' gender on my informants' levels of comfort. However, at the conclusion of an interview two days later, with my friend as

interpreter, I mentioned to my informant how the Colonel had helped me in my previous interview. She responded, “Oh? Really, I would not have told you all these things had he been here...absolutely” (Jat war widow, interview).

The life history interview format was ideal for this research as it created opportunities for comparisons as well as insight into the impacts of education/schooling, caste, government identification, and family on a widow’s life experiences. As I would be asking women to talk about very personal, emotional, and difficult topics, the layout of the life history interview allowed for rapport to be built through warm-up questions concerning their childhood, natal families, education/schooling, religion, marriage, and children, before finally arriving at questions of death and their experiences as widows. Often, our conversations transitioned easily into the difficult topics. As many of my informants were pregnant at the time of their husband’s death, questions about their children often led directly to conversations about widowhood. Alternatively, at other times these questions had to be asked more directly, always proving emotionally to be a more difficult task.

Anthropologists such as Veena Das and E. Valentine Daniel have long engaged with questions of: “What kind of work [does] anthropology do in shaping the object we have come to call violence?” (Das 2007:1), and “What is it to write an ethnography of violence?”, while other researchers of historic trauma and gendered violence have similarly struggled to meditate the ethics of such work (Menon and Bhasin 1998). While all my informants were told that they could skip any questions, or stop the interview altogether if it reached the point where it was just too much, every woman I interviewed insisted that we continue. For some, I believe the experience was in a way cathartic. Many stated that they had never really told anyone their stories in detail, admitting, “It’s better for people to know” (Saroj,<sup>3</sup> Rajput Army widow, interview). I am still struck by the bravery and strength shown as they shared their stories.

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<sup>3</sup> All informants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Where necessary, specific details of their stories have been altered as well (husband’s position in the army, number of children, location of incidents, etc.).

## Conceptual Framework

### “Education, broadly conceived”<sup>4</sup>

Research in education has regularly focused on schooling and the classroom, on pedagogy, curriculum, and assessments as well as the processes of social reproduction, success, and failure. This myopic view of education has been critiqued by anthropologists for missing the everyday instances of learning and teaching which occur outside the classroom, through apprenticeships, practice, or seemingly unremarkable interactions. Hervé Varenne (2007), applying the work of Cremin, Garfinkel, and Lave, has posited that a more “comprehensive” examination of education may be achieved by paying attention to the “informal” spaces of daily learning, interaction, and practice, by defining education as “a total process of human transformations” wherein schooling plays but a small part. It is here that Varenne provides a critique of Bourdieu’s “theory of learning.”

In claiming schooling’s central role in the reproduction of social inequalities, Bourdieu maintains that such power arises out of a certain set of mental dispositions (or habitus) which are continually reproduced over generations causing individuals to “misrecognize” (and subsequently legitimize) schooling’s most violent aspects. While Bourdieu emphasizes the “synchronic ‘arbitrariness’ of schooling,” Varenne argues that his “learning theory” remains unspecified. Contrastingly and perhaps more helpful, he posits, is Lawrence Cremin’s “theory of deliberation,” in which education becomes synonymous with *interaction*, as “effort,” and as “deliberation.” Here, education becomes “the process through which people, everywhere, unceasingly, and always in concert with others, work at changing themselves and their consociates through often difficult deliberations” (Varenne 2007:1565). Echoing Cremin’s notion of education as “effort,” Garfinkel (2002) additionally insists that education is “work.” Learning is therefore *deliberate social work*, pervasive in everyday life. While both Bourdieu and others propose that social orders are maintained through shared understandings, Garfinkel disagrees, stating that social orders are instead sustained due to the persistent instructional work performed by everyone everywhere.

It is within these conceptions of “education, broadly conceived,” that I have attempted to situate this research. As the widows of Jaipur’s War Memorial Hostel (re)learn, cope with, legitimize, or criticize identities and spaces often circumscribed by caste, religion, family, and

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<sup>4</sup> Cremin (1974, 1975/2007, 1976, 1978).

the Indian government, they are continually (re)educating themselves and their consociates, through interaction and deliberate work—how to be in the world. “There is a need for a shift from institutions to spaces, moments, meetings, conversations...the deliberate occurs outside in families, communities, etc.” (Varenne 2007:1578).

### Religion, Myth, and Practice

Louis Althusser (1970, emphasis added) defines ideology as a “system of ideas and representations which *dominate the mind* of an individual or social group” and has a material existence present in “apparatuses” such as family, religion, and actions (rituals). While agreeing with Althusser’s latter notion of the material basis for ideology, I stand by Durkheim’s criticism of attempts to make religion into an intellectual category—the division between the sacred and the profane must be an *observable* fact. In E. Valentine Daniel’s “The Arrogation of Being by the Blind Spot of Religion,” he references this point of Durkheim’s in stating that the “essence of religion [is] to be found not in the intellect that demands explanation but in the heart of *ritual*” (Daniel 2002:31, emphasis added). It is upon this point of Daniel’s that I will take a moment to further expand.

In his article, Daniel argues that “religion as we understand it today (where *belief* is an integral and indispensable part of it) is Christian in origin and by and large remains, even in its reincarnation as secularism, a Christian affair” (Daniel 2002:32, emphasis added). “Belief,” Daniel states, is a product of Western epistemologies and vocabularies utilized in a 17<sup>th</sup> century attempt to define “religion”<sup>5</sup>—“Christianity harbors the triumph of belief over practice, aboutness over is-ness, epistemology over ontology, seeing over being” (Daniel 2002:37). Whereas a Western God may be someone to believe in, he posits, this is not how most Hindus relate to powerful beings:

*Shiva, Vishnu, or Rama was not someone to believe in... One takes their being for granted, an ontological given, requiring no epistemological apperception. One lives among their manifestations... India is more about learning by being in the world, learning ontologically, not seeing the world or learning epistemically. [Daniel 2002:36]*

Less about exegeses (mind/reason) and more about a state of being (mood/feeling) established by an array of *practices*, Hinduism is not about the individual as a “mere observer of representations

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<sup>5</sup> Referencing Talal Asad (1993).

(icons, symbols, etc.) as if they were mirrors of reality, for every participant is a representation, a sign” (Daniel 2002:44-5). While Durkheim defines ritual as a symbol, Daniel (2002:46) conversely claims that “in India, the symbol itself may be experienced as a performative, transforming the symbol into a ritual.” So while the multitude and diversity of Hindu practices is not to be taken for granted, or generalized, it is with a different framework or thoughtfulness about “religion,” one arguably distinct from a more Western (Christian) model based in the centrality of belief and the mind, that I suggest this paper’s arguments be considered.

### **Violence, Power, and Agency**

Returning to Althusser, ideology is “a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” informing individuals about their roles and existence within society, frequently reproducing relations of exploitation, control, and power. Mourning ceremonies and rituals, utilized as rites of passage transforming the wife into a widow, mark the beginning of a new life full of restrictions, penance, inauspiciousness, and violence. Located within caste and/or religious doctrines, ritual acts and restrictions often become detached from their immediate protagonists, the widow’s family, as they are often rationalized and legitimized through accepted, normative ideologies—“Ritualized procedures depersonalize the protagonists so that their conduct is not their own but of the species, society, caste, or profession” (Campbell 1973:57). While some of my informants seemed resigned about the restrictions of widowhood—attributing them to society, religion, or caste as they matter-of-factly recounted the details of their transformations and experiences of everyday violence and regulation—others bitterly questioned the direct actions of and treatment by their kinsmen. With that said, it would be wrong to strictly divide between those who resist and those who acquiesce to the stigmatizing problematics of widowhood.

As suggested by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998:46) in their work on gendered violence and Partition, “to acquiesce is not to consent, and to submit is not necessarily to agree.” In their investigation of the gendered violence, dislocation, and displacement experienced by women during (and after) India’s Partition they argue that, “women occupy a special place—and space—in such enactments of violence” (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 41). While theirs is a look at violence in terms of a specific historical moment in the context of a communal conflict, they emphasize their work’s greater ability to provide insight into the more mundane violence and



abuse that form a part of the everyday experience of many women. As women and their bodies are made into objects and symbols of male constructions of their own honor, public anxieties around sexuality and purity require the daily control and ordering of gender:

*Women's sexuality symbolises "manhood"; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence. [Menon and Bhasin 1998:43, emphasis in original]*

Das (2007:48) in her own examination of the violence against women in 1947, not only argues that the shaping of the nation as a *masculine* nation constructs gendered violence as a discourse of national honor, but that there is a "gendered division of labor in the work of mourning." Citing the mourning laments of Gandhari in the Mahabharata and Mandodari in the Ramayana, she claims that "in the mythic imagination in India, victory or defeat in war was ultimately inscribed on the bodies of women" (Das 2007:52). So while it may be the task of men to carry the body to the funeral pyre, "it is the special role of women to 'witness' death and to convert silence into speech" (Das 2007:48). Grief, therefore, is carried and symbolized by the body of the widow, a "container of the poisonous knowledge" of death.

Imagined as occupying a liminal space between death and death-in-life, widows have traditionally been separated from society as inauspicious, polluting, or burdensome. Silenced and marginalized, they occupy a position of subalternity. As envisioned by Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies Group* (whose original objective in the 1980s was to write the peasant back into Indian history), "subaltern" in the context of colonial production comprises those who have "no history and cannot speak." Pushing this idea further, Gayatri Spivak (1988:28) notes that "the subaltern as *female* is even more deeply in shadow," positing that the "essential" subaltern is hard to find in South Asian historiography because their histories have only been written by others. It is not so much that the subaltern as female cannot speak, but that we do not yet have the theoretical or methodological capacity for such voices to be heard. As such, Spivak claims a need to analyze the deep *structures* underlying relations of power. Instead of conflating the "individual" with "subject" in the subaltern discourse following Foucault and Deleuze, she asserts that Derrida offers a more radical model by recognizing "constraint" (Spivak 1988:87).

It is thus through a gloss of Derrida and Spivak's use of "constraint" that I argue for the existence of the female voice as widow. While often arguably bound by patriarchal norms

located within the government, the Army, caste, and the family, the stories of (re)learning, violence, transformation, and struggle narrated by the widows of Jaipur's War Memorial Hostel also indicated possible reimaginings of such norms. As stated by Das (2007:63):

*...to be vulnerable is not the same as to be a victim, and those who are inclined to assume that social norms or expectations of widowhood are automatically translated into oppression need to pay attention to the gap between a norm and its actualization.*

## General Setting and Context

### Widowhood in India

Within the patriarchal kinship system which governs most of India, there are regional variations in marriage rules, inheritance rules, and other cultural norms involving female behavior.

Scholars (see Agarwal 1994; Wadley 1992; Chen and Drèze 1992) have found that “social norms in north-east and south India are the most favorable to women (and widows) whereas those in the north, especially the northwest, are least favorable” (Chen 2000:176). Granted, the 1991 Indian Census showed the proportion of widows in the female population to be much higher than average in southern states and much lower than average in the northern region, especially in the northwest (Government of India 1991). Yet, Jean Drèze (1990) has posited that such data does not prove widowhood to be more prevalent in the south, but suggests that widows in north India, especially those living in the rural northwest, have particularly low survival chances. At large, it has been estimated that there is one widow in every four to five households in India (Chen 2000:2), and that the number of widows in Rajasthan has steadily risen from 913,112 in 1961 to 1,589,729 (Dutta 2007).

The northwestern state of Rajasthan, the macro-site of this research project, is one of the few areas where the practice of *suttee*<sup>6</sup> continues, albeit in relatively limited numbers, as well as child marriage (Chen 2000:51). In September 1987 in eastern Rajasthan, 18-year-old Roop Kanwar was burned to death on the cremation pyre of her husband just eight months after her marriage. Her death subsequently led to “protracted and heated debates in public meetings, in parliamentary sessions, in academic seminars, and in the media” (Chen 2000:41). Thousands of anti-*suttee* protestors and counter-demonstrations of tens of thousands of pro-*suttee* advocates

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<sup>6</sup> This paper follows Chen's (2000) notation by differentiating between *suttee* as the act of self-immolation and *sati* as the individual.

marched down the streets of Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan (Oldenburg 1994:159). A few years later, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) joined thousands of women from all over India, once again, in an anti-*suttee* procession in Jaipur city where they presented a memorandum of protest to the Chief Minister of Rajasthan (Rose 1992). Throughout Rajasthan, memorial stones, tablets, temples, and shrines can be seen to commemorate *satimatas* (*satis* that are deified) and *sati* fairs are often held in honor of all *satis* (Chen 2000:66). Additionally, the 1993 census conducted by the national government of more than 5,000 women in Rajasthan, showed that 56 percent had married before they were 15 (Government of India 1993). As the majority of these women were married to older men, it is projected that most will be widowed at least once during their lifetime.

State support of women identified as “war widows” was originally established due to the mass scale and incidence of widowhood during Partition in 1947-48. The rehabilitation of widows (“widowed by history” and referred to by the Indian government as “unattached” women) and other displaced women resulted in the first major welfare activity of the newly independent state (Menon and Bhasin 1998:149). As a responsibility of the state, classified war widows were looked upon not as individual women (which would have invited traditional social stigmatization), but as a community of hapless survivors to be accorded the same status as refugees (1998:154). Liberated from the traditional stigma of widowhood and its consequent social death, war widows therefore become engulfed in a national task of “social reconstruction.” The care and maintenance of widows seen in the wake of Partition was used to recreate them as economic beings, contributors to the processes of “nation building.” Ashrams were established to house the nation’s “unattached” women, financial assistance was initiated in the amount of Rs. 12 per month in 1955, and educational opportunities were developed. Such loosening of the “oppressive bind of conventional widowhood [in order] to enable women to emerge into, and assume, citizenship with all its rights and responsibilities” (1998:161) marks a “contrast to the prevailing practice today, for instance, when they [widows] are considered a ‘liability’” (1998:156).

In 1974 the widow pension scheme was established.<sup>7</sup> Currently, under the widow pension scheme, an “eligible widow” is entitled to receive Rs. 250 per month, but in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Originally, the widow pension scheme was on a combined form with the old-age pension scheme. Later the government made them two separate schemes.

apply for pension the widow must not have son(s) over the age of 18 (which assumes the patriarchal ideal that sons support their widowed mothers economically). Such logic, however, assumes that all adult sons will be able to find employment and support their widowed mothers, and are willing. Indeed, a 1996 study of Jaipur showed that only 8.9 percent of widows actually receive support from their sons (Dutta 2007). Additionally, the Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre found that only 72 out of 200 widows were found to be receiving widow pension, meaning 62 percent of the sample were “non-widow pensioners” (Dutta 2007). While there are 1,600,000 widows in Rajasthan state, the government has budgeted to provide widow pension to a little more than 200,000 widows (Dutta 2007). Granted not all widows require economic assistance, “a substantial number are living in destitute conditions” (Dutta 2007).

Further complexity comes with the fact that within India, there is no single system of law. Among the diverse systems of law are the statutory laws of modern India, the personal laws of various religious communities, and customary norms (Chen 2000:13). Thus, rights in principle often differ greatly from rights in practice. While gender equality is guaranteed under the Indian constitution, “the founding fathers of modern independent India followed the practice of allowing each religious community to be governed by its own personal law in regard to marriage, inheritance, and other personal matters,” giving rise to a number of civil codes (Agarwal 1994:199). While lobbying by women’s groups eventually led to the unification of Hindu personal laws into a single personal code called the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, there is no civil code which covers all communities in India (Agarwal 1994).

In considering the rights of widows under Hindu law, Chen (2000:261), advises that it is necessary “to distinguish between modern legal rights (those guaranteed under modern statutory Hindu law), traditional legal rights (those guaranteed in traditional Hindu texts), customary rights (those recognized under prevailing local norms), and actual practice.” During her fieldwork, Chen discovered that in contemporary rural India modern Hindu law is not widely enforced and local customary norms still govern practice across most regions and social groups (Chen 2000:261). Accordingly, how these diverse laws operate and interact in *urban* India must be examined, as well as how they ultimately impact the identities, behaviors, rights, and perspectives of women (and widows) in contemporary Jaipur.

Jaipur, as the site of such historic protests for and against *suttee*, serves as a prime location for the study of widowhood. According to the 2001 Indian Census, the population of

widows in Jaipur is around 133,703 or 8.41 percent of the population. Popularly known as the “Pink City,”<sup>8</sup> Jaipur has a population of more than 2.3 million with an annual growth rate of 4.5 percent, which accounts for the ever-growing urban sprawl on the outskirts of the city (NIPFP 2006). Often called *Choti Kashi*<sup>9</sup> because of the religiosity of its people and its numerous temples, Jaipur’s major religion is Hinduism; however, there is also a large number of Jains and Muslims, especially within the city’s poorer areas. During my time in the field, Jaipur was receiving national attention thanks to the daily rallies and heated protests occurring at its local university. The mobilized student body was primarily concerned with the upcoming student union elections (many candidates receiving backing from national political parties), seat reservations,<sup>10</sup> and sexual harassment on campus.

### **War and Army Widows**

Rajasthan state has one of the largest numbers of war widows in the country at 1,322, including those women widowed by the 440 martyrs of the Kargil War,<sup>11</sup> an armed conflict between India and Pakistan which took place between May and July 1999 (Times of India 2009). Within the Government of India, the Kendriya Sainik Board (KSB)<sup>12</sup> under the Chairmanship of the Defense Minister lays down policies for the welfare of Ex-Servicemen (ESM), widows, and their dependents, providing concessions, benefits, and pensions, along with other resettlement schemes and facilities. The national Kendriya Sainik Board administers welfare funds and also coordinates the work of other Sainik Boards across the country, including the Rajya Sainik Boards (RSBs) at the state-level and Zila Sainik Boards (ZSBs) at the district-level.

Located towards the northwest, Jaipur’s “Army Area” in Bani Park is about a 30-minute auto-ride from the center of the city. As described by the ex-colonel, now in charge of Jaipur’s Army Welfare Branch:

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<sup>8</sup> In 1876, Maharaja Ram Singh had the entire old city painted pink (a color associated with hospitality) to welcome the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) to Jaipur city. The tradition has been maintained since then.

<sup>9</sup> “Little Kashi.” Kashi (*lit.* shining), a city more commonly known as Varanasi (Banaras), is considered the holiest place in the world in Hinduism. It is also regarded as a holy city by Buddhists and Jains.

<sup>10</sup> Reservations, in India, are a form of affirmative action designed to improve the standing of “socially backward” and underrepresented communities of citizens—Other Backwards Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Scheduled Castes (SCs).

<sup>11</sup> Leena Parmar (2003) has conducted extensive fieldwork on the rural situation of Kargil war widows in North India.

<sup>12</sup> The KSB is often staffed by ex-servicemen.

*What it is that we do here is...basically, when there is a martyr, when a man loses his life for his country, his wife and children, they are called 'war widows' and their 'dependents'... well, interventions are given by the Government of India. Now, when we say 'dependents,' this can mean son or daughter, mother and father—it includes parents also. The son remains a dependent until the time that he turns 23 and the daughter until the time she is married. (Interview)*

According to the Fifth Central Pay Commission of 1997, categorized cases for determining pensionary benefits include (Military of Defense Doc):

*CATEGORY A: Death or disability due to natural causes*

*CATEGORY B: Death or disability due to causes attributable to or aggravated by military services*

*CATEGORY C: Death or disability due to accidents while performing duties*

*CATEGORY D: Death or disability due to acts of violence/attacks by terrorists whether or not on duty*

*CATEGORY E: Death or disability due to war or war-like situations*

Within the government of India, he explained that there are three main forms of intervention: the Liberalised Family Pension (LFP), the Special Family Pension (SFP), and the Ordinary Family Pension (OFP). The Ordinary Family Pension (OFP) is awarded to families of servicemen who die during service, not necessarily during duty, or after retirement (Category A). OFP awards families 50% of the serviceman's "last drawn pay" for 10 years from date of death, followed by a reduction to 30% of the "last drawn pay" for the rest of the widow's life. The Special Family Pension (SFP) is awarded to families of servicemen falling under Categories B and C. Currently, the SFP is calculated at the uniform rate of 60% of the serviceman's "last drawn pay." The Liberalised Family Pension (LFP) applies to martyrs (Categories D and E). The LFP grants families (widows, parents, and children) the serviceman's full "last drawn pay" as a lifetime pension amount. Those eligible for the SFP and the LFP also receive what is called an "Ex-gratia" payment, a one-time lump sum payment of between Rs.5 lakhs and Rs.10 lakhs<sup>13</sup> depending on the nature of death, and "Death gratuity," a granted amount dependent on the number of years the ex-serviceman worked for the Army.

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<sup>13</sup> Rs.5 lakh = Rs. 500,000 = approx. 10,205 USD; Rs.10 lakh = Rs. 10,000,000 = approx. 20,408 USD

Until relatively recently, the LFP was taken away from war widows if they were to remarry outside of the deceased husband's family. After several recommendations made by military welfare offices, who were concerned that widows were feeling forced to marry their brothers-in-law so that the pension and compensation remained within the families, the law was changed. Under the 1997 Fifth Central Pay Commission, *war widows* (Categories D and E) may now remarry and continue to receive full LFP as long as she continues to support her children or has no children. In comparison, however, *Army widows* (Categories A, B, and C) still lose their pensions if they remarry outside their *sasural* (husband's family).

When registering with the Army's welfare branch, widows are required to fill out an identification card labeling them as either "War Widow" or "Army Widow"—blue for war widow and red for Army widow. The identification cards I examined were made of sturdy, laminated card-stock, about the size of a four-by-six note card. The front of the ID card contained personal identification information, filled out by the applicant, with a serial number stamped in the upper-right hand side in blue ink, just below the color-coded label. On the reverse-side were several holographic stickers and a place for the widow's picture. Information located on these cards are then entered into Microsoft Excel files, stored and updated at the Army's Welfare office, indicating the name of the widow, home address, telephone number, reason for death, location of death, and date of death. Additional files are kept on all children of deceased servicemen as well—their ages, their class level in school, where they are studying, etc. As stated by the Colonel in an interview, "This is how you monitor people. These records are updated daily... This is how they tabulate the data for the census when it comes and they have to figure out how many widows there are. For example, today Rajasthan has about 30,000 war widows."

The Colonel further elaborated on the differentiation which occurs between war and Army widows, explaining, "There is a slight difference. We look after widows, but in the case of the war widow, the duties are slightly that much more honored." In addition to their pensions, war widows receive additional facilities including: free education for their children (percentage of reserved seating in Army schools, professional/ technical colleges, and other universities); travel concessions (75% on air travel, free bus and rail travel); Rs. 1 lakh cash and/or 25 bighas of land for agriculture granted; guaranteed jobs within the state government for the widow and/or children; access to over 252 Sainik Rest Houses around the country; 50% cost sharing for the

repair of houses; medical facilities, insurance, and prescription forgiveness; subsidized canteen; and guaranteed housing in one of the War Memorial Hostels (each with vacancies for 125 male students, 125 female students, and 33 families).

*Colonel: Normal widows, you see, do not receive these things.*

*MMC: You mean widows not affiliated with the Indian Army at all?*

*Colonel: No, no. Normal widows meaning those whose husbands are not martyrs, who did not die in battle. They are still Army widows, but not war widows. OK, this is different, I guess you can say, from 'normal widows,' which would be those not connected to the Army in any way, as you say.*

Rhetoric concerning “the martyr” was continually used by Army personnel and the widows living in the government hostel to identify the husbands of war widows (both in English and Hindi/Urdu- *shahiid*). For me, such usage was intriguing considering the term’s origins in Christianity during the later Middle Ages (13<sup>th</sup> century). Beni (2008:63) in her research on the embodiment of emotional nationalism in elementary education in western India, however, has opined that “the notion of patriotism involves the transposition of a notion of ‘defense of Holy Land’ to that of national soil...in the world of nation-states, especially India.”

### **War Memorial Hostel**

*All the social stigmas that are attached to widowhood are not really felt by the women who live here, in the Army hostels. You see...by nature of their design, we are not really in society anymore. (Assistant warden, Jat war widow, interview)*

From the Army canteen area, the War Memorial Hostel is about a 20-minute auto ride to the northwest of the city, hidden away down neighborhood side-streets, situated at a dead-end. Upon arriving at the gated compound, all visitors are required to sign-in with the guard stationed directly behind the gate in a ten by ten watch station. The compound consists of four three- and four-story buildings, each painted pink as per Jaipur’s building code, and clothing can be seen hanging from balcony railings, drying in the sun.

Built in 2006, the War Memorial Hostel in Jaipur was one of the first of its kind in the region. Costing approximately Rs. 3 crore to build, the hostel has facilities to accommodate 33 families in its “Family Hostel,” as well as 125 boys in the “Boys Hostel” and 125 girls in the



“Girls Hostel.”<sup>14</sup> Originally, only widows and children of “war martyrs” were eligible to live within the compound, however, “considering the lower number of war widows ready to use the facilities, the government of Rajasthan decided to relax the eligibility criteria of the hostel, allowing widows of ex-servicemen to stay as well” (Assistant warden, Jat war widow, interview). For accommodation in the Family Hostel, families pay a nominal charge of Rs. 350 per month for lodging, plus their individual expenses for electricity and food, which they make on their own. Each flat is designed to have a common room, a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. A few of my informants, those with three or four children, had turned their common rooms into another bedroom. “If the widow dies, however, the rest of the family must move out... They can either move into the boys or girls hostel or the Army works to rehabilitate the children, putting them up in other forms of housing” (Assistant warden, Jat war widow, interview). In the boys and girls hostels, there is a mess hall, where food is provided for Rs. 1,300 per month. From the compound, special transportation is also provided to the hospitals and schools.

The administrative building consists of approximately two common areas, a few offices for the warden and assistant warden, and two vocational training rooms. The common areas, as large open spaces with about 20 or so chairs stacked in each, are adorned with photographs documenting the visits of several high ranking officers to the hostel and the ceremonies commemorating the donation of the computer room. These rooms, it was explained, are used for monthly hostel meetings. As stated by the newly appointed assistant warden of the Family Hostel, a 26-year old war widow, priorities for posts like hers are usually given to war widows, especially those who have their degrees. The head warden is an ex-Army serviceman, as “there are so few women in the Army, especially in higher ranking positions, so usually it is a man who must fill these positions” (Assistant warden, Jat war widow, interview). The vocational center consists of two separate rooms where tailoring/sewing equipment and computers have been donated by various branches of the armed forces. Trainers are hired to direct classes for the women on the compound; however, all of my informants stated that they had never used either of the rooms.

Since 2006, two more hostels have been established in the Sikar and Jhunjhuno districts of Rajasthan (areas which account for the largest number of martyrs in the state), with a fourth

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<sup>14</sup> Children are allowed to stay in the hostels until the age of 25 or marriage.

currently under construction in Jodhpur. “In terms of placement, women in the Jaipur area are given preference for this hostel while other widows around Rajasthan are usually placed in one of the two other hostels closer to their location” (Assistant warden, interview). During the time of my fieldwork, 21 widows and their children were living in the War Memorial Family Hostel, self-admittedly “separated,” “gated-off,” and “protected,” from the social stigmas frequently felt outside of their compound walls (Assistant warden, interview).

### Scenes from the Hostel

#### The Problems that Come With(out) Money

Hostel residents asserted that much of their hardship stemmed from financial insecurity as many had experienced incidences of familial exploitation. While monetary support from the Army helps widowed women and their families to subsist in society, making them more financially independent, it also creates opportunities for exploitation and violence. As stated by the hostel’s assistant warden, “You see...things have changed. In the past, widows were seen as a threat to society. Now, society is a threat to them. People are taking advantage of widows; she is being exploited.”

For a number of my informants, whose jobs during marriage had solely been within the home, their pensions were the first time they had ever been in charge of such large sums of money. In emotionally and mentally vulnerable states, suffering from various degrees of self-diagnosed depressions, many put their faith in the knowledge of elder males (usually an in-law) to deal with their newly acquired finances. Throughout the widows’ life narratives experiences of physical and mental abuse abounded. While there were a few that cited occasions of physical violence, many experienced violence in the forms of exploitation and familial betrayal.

*Before my husband’s death, I was living in the Army quarters in Matara. I had all my household things and my clothing in that house. During the two-day ceremony where I stayed at my parents’ house, my mother-in-law, father-in-law, and jeth...these three people went out to Matara, and broke into my home, stealing some documents and jewelry out of my house. They had used a hammer to break the lock. My neighbor had called me, saying that something had happened, that there were people in my house. I went over with my mother, brother, and some of his friends. Everything was a mess. But, you see, my in-laws are not bad people. The only reason they hated me was because I*

*was not having a boy child... I already had two daughters you see, and that is why there was some distance between us. ...I never got any of my things back. Afterwards, I packed all my remaining things up to move back into my parents' home in the village. I went back to my in-laws only once. When I arrived, I went to give my mother-in-law pranaam, and my jeth pushed me back...I fell down the stairs. He was really greedy. Then my mother-in-law and jeth started beating me. There was an Army officer just downstairs, listening to what was happening! He was the one who had driven me, but he did nothing....saying it was a family issue. I was bleeding. ...It was the only time I went back. I didn't want anything, you see, but my daughter...she kept insisting that I get her bicycle, which was purchased by her father. That was the only thing she wanted, so I went. ...I had a miscarriage afterwards, a son. (Jat war widow; interview)*

Cognizant of the exploitation of widows as a frequent problem, the Army has attempted to put systems in place to avoid the “impacts of greed on society’s most-vulnerable” (Colonel, interview). This primarily means that insurance monies, coming as annuities, are being put in the names of the ex-serviceman’s children. It was described how Army officials personally intervene in cases to get monies placed in the children’s name, monitoring and supervising payments to make sure large amounts are not being suspiciously withdrawn. Pension payments, similarly, are not given in lump-sum amounts, but are directly deposited into a bank account, in the widow’s name, on a monthly basis. However, while these government interventions and systems may stymie general pension theft on a macro-level, exploitation on the ground, outside of the bank accounts, is still occurring:

*After going into a deep depression, I was tricked into signing over my pension money to my jeth who acquired my signature. He took all of my money. I have filed the case, but am still waiting for it to be resolved. Widows are in a very vulnerable position no matter what assistance is put into place, emotionally, physically, socially. (Assistant warden, Jat war widow, interview)*

*My devar still treats me very badly. My relationship with my in-laws has become slightly worse. No one helped me, not even my sister-in-laws...after everything I did for them, paying for all their marriage ceremonies. I was all alone, no one helped me. I had no support. My devar knows my in-laws are financially very weak, but still he disturbs them. When I give my in-laws money, he steals it from them. He continually asks me for*

*money; making phone calls, disturbing me and my children. Even through all of this, though, what can I do? He is my husband's family. I must do my duty. I must give him the money. (Rajput Army widow, interview)*

*After the pension money started coming, my jeth became very selfish and greedy. He would demand Rs. 50,000 to one lakh. I would deny him, of course. But afterwards he would abuse me. Finally, my brother took me away from my sasural, bringing me here. (Jat war widow, interview)*

Out of all my informants at the War Memorial Hostel, more than half stated that they had experienced some form of successful exploitation during their years as a widow, with two others stating that while they were victims of physical or mental abuse, their money remained untouched by others. For example, one Rajput Army widow stated that while her in-laws never tried to take any of her money, they also did not give her any money either:

*They basically stabbed me in the back. It was as if they didn't consider me part of their family anymore. Because they would have to give me money, there was a huge change in their nature and our relationship. Even though I used to live with them; we would cry together, laugh together...after my husband's death, all this changed. They did not give me any sort of help. ...It's not an awful relationship, but it's not good.*

The remaining women either did not talk much about their relationships with their in-laws during our interviews, or stated that their relationships remained positive. It was during these conversations concerning violence and exploitation that my informants most prominently voiced the need for strength. Such strength was often located through the learned embodiment of caste attributes or the Goddess in her many forms.

### **(Re)Learning Identities**

As previously stated, during my fieldwork in Jaipur, the War Memorial Hostel contained 21 widows, some with their children, as residents—12 Jat and nine Rajput widows. Within Rajasthan, Rajputs (Kshatriyas) still claim high-caste status while Jats (formerly Kshatriyas) are now considered lower castes (given “Other Backwards Classes” (OBC) status for political and education seat reservations<sup>15</sup>). Whether my informants identified as a Rajput or Jat, strongly determined not only mourning rituals, practices, and daily restrictions as well as future

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote 10 on page 11 for more information about seat reservations in India.

opportunities for remarriage, schooling, or work, but also the ways in which these women separately understood and described their identities and places within society.

Dumont (1988:34, 35) suggests that “far more than a ‘group’ in the ordinary sense, the caste is a *state of mind*...above all a system of ideas and values.” However, I would argue along the lines of E. Valentine Daniel that the embodiment of caste attributes and the divine is more a “state of *being*.” Though some informants stated that they prayed *to* their gods (*puja karna*), more often than not there was a reoccurring usage of the verb “to be,” *hona*. For example:

Jab sab kuch mushkil gaya tha, mujhe laga ki main marnevali hun...main Durga ji jaisi mazbuut thi -

*When things were difficult, I thought I would die...I was strong as Durga. (Puja, Rajput Army widow)*

The *pativrata* serves as the iconic model of a Rajput woman’s gender duties, which determines her foremost ambitions to be a good wife and husband protector. As previously discussed, the *pativrata*’s ideological nature not only implies how a wife should behave but also the consequences her behavior will bring. *Pativrata* duties include the performance of *vrats* (fasting vows), regular religious devotion to household deities, serving and remaining loyal to one’s husband and his family, and retaining personal honor through the practice of *parda* (Chen 2000:19). It is through such actions that the *pativrata* is able to safeguard her husband’s longevity. However, as a Rajput, a woman’s caste duty is also to make sure that her husband retains his honor and does not shy away from his own protective and sacrificial duties. By ensuring that her husband fulfills his caste duty by sending him to battle, where injury or death is imminent, a Rajput woman defies her duties as a *pativrata*, or “husband protector.” She thus sacrifices her own gender duties in order to make certain the honor of her husband and his family.

*As a Rajput woman, it is important to maintain your own dignity. You have to live up to the expectations that are there for you. The defined roles of a woman, as a small child, as a daughter, as a mother, these roles have become kind of mixed-up. The expectations and what exists on the ground are somewhat different. I believe the role of a woman is in the household. She should look after the children, bring them up the right way, and the husband should look after the earnings. I pray and fast every Friday, holding puja, and try to live the way and path as shown by the kuldevi. I still perform the vrat, on*

*particular days as defined by my religion, but not as regularly as when my husband was alive. (Neelam, Rajput War widow, interview)*

As exemplified by the above quote, one of the foremost models of *pativrata* duty is the *kuldevi* (or *kuldevta*). A divine guardian of Rajput men and women's fortune and honor, the *kuldevi* goddess is implicit in the foundation myths of Rajput kingdoms. Often conceived as an avatar of Durga, a specific Rajput family's *kuldevi* often involves stories of how she utilized her power (*shakti*) to rescue royal heirs, revive dying soldiers, and establish Rajput kingdoms. The *kuldevi* goddess is imagined as both a warrior on the battlefield (sometimes in animal form—snake, cow, green fly) and as a *pativrata* (often in the form of a beautiful wife and mother). In describing her family's *kuldevi*, one Rajput widow, Neelam, from the Nagaur district of Rajasthan, stated that the *kuldevi* ultimately “represents strength, sacrifice, honor, and wifely duty.”

*Within my family, we have a specific story of Nagnech, our kuldevi. This particular kuldevi came as a darshan and was seen by a pandit. She told this pandit, Brahman, to carry her in the form of a stone. So he was carrying the kuldevi stone in his hands. She was directing him to reach a particular place. So while traveling along this route, he stopped for a nap. While taking the nap, he put the stone down. As it fell to the earth... that is where the stone turned into a black snake. This is where the pandit told the king to build his kingdom. And this has become the kuldevi for my family. (Neelam, Rajput war widow, interview)*

After recounting this story, she carefully lifted a long, thin, red string, which was being worn as a necklace, out from under her vest. At the bottom of the necklace's swag hung a small gold pendant. Pointing to an etched line on one side of the pendant she said, “Nagnech Mata.” I later heard this *kuldevi* myth recounted by another Rajput widow, whose version of story described Nagnech as being carried in the form of a pendant (*pala*) by the Brahman, instead of a stone. In both of the stories of Nagnech, the *kuldevi* helps the Rajput king establish his kingdom; henceforth serving as the protector of his family line (*kul*). It was later described to me that these red-thread necklaces are often worn by Hindu women in order to protect their husbands:

*Every year the old thread is replaced by a new one...As long as the string remains intact, her vrat to preserve her husband's health will remain strong. (Rajput war widow, interview)*

Through engagement with the transcendent in the form of a *kuldevi*, the struggle to (re)learn, (re)explore, and (re)negotiate the self in the everyday often takes place. Thus, strength for Neha (quoted below), another Rajput war widow, was to be located in the self-embodiment of her father's family's protective goddess, the *kuldevi* Jamwai Mata.

*Jamwai Mata appeared as a cow during a battle between families. She stood over dying soldiers and poured out her milk to save them...the kuldevi, you see, was strong and helped achieve victory...this is why I give puja to the Mata, for strength. I give puja, then, I am strong. (Neha, Rajput war widow, interview)*

Even as these women remembered specific stories of their families' *kuldevi*, many of the other Rajput widows that I interviewed, as well as women of other castes, stated that they "[could] not remember the stories that went along with them" (Saroj, Rajput Army widow; interview). Three of these women, simply stated that "Lord Goddess Durga" served as their families' *kuldevi*.

*Rajputs value Durga. ...Rajput women are absolutely strong. They do not surrender in front of others; they are way above the others. We say that we have 'angry blood.' In my family there was a strict system of parda, certain limitations. When no one would help me after my husband's death, I just kept thinking to myself, 'I am strong, like the Goddess. I am going to keep my self-respect; I am not going to beg.' (Saroj, Rajput Army widow, interview)*

Durga, the Divine Mother's warrior aspect, known by many names such as Devi, Shakti, or Kali, is often considered the fierce form of Shiva's wife, Parvati. Depicted with eight arms, holding a variety of weapons (conch shell, bow and arrow, thunderbolt, lotus flower, trident, discus, and sword) and riding a lion, Durga as warrior goddess fights and kills the buffalo demon, *Mahisha*, in Puranic Hindu mythology. As a woman-warrior and protector, Durga serves as a model of strength and power.

For widows like Saroj, Neha, and Neelam, Durga as well as her alternate *kuldevi* forms are not just images or figures, outside representations to be looked upon as mirrors of reality, but qualities to learn and work towards, to embody, as they (re)learn what it is to be a "good Hindu woman" and a widow in an often violent and exploitative society—a need to be strong, retain pride and honor, to protect, and to sacrifice. While women whose husbands have died in the Army still voice the impacts of learned caste and gender duties on their lives (of sacrifice, honor, and chastity), I argue that space is created through work—an engagement with the transcendent

in the everyday wherein the (re)learning of self as widow in contemporary society is practiced. Learning to negotiate experiences of hardship through reinterpretations of identity allows many widows to refigure an inhabitable world, not as victims but as strength.

Mere paas koi paise nahiin, koi madad nahiin... Aur ab meri haalat itni bhi acchi nahiin hai... Lekin, kabhi kabhi main sochti hun kuldevi taakat hoti hain... to main taakat hun - *I had no money, no help... Even now things are not so good... But, sometimes I think, the kuldevi is strength... so I am strength. (Kriti, Jat war widow, interview)*

### Concerning “Formal” Education

As a momentary nod to the world of schooling, this section analyzes the manner in which widows of Jaipur’s War Memorial Hostel imbue “formal” education with a certain amount of power, not only in determining specific outcomes in their own lives but in their children’s as well. I begin by examining the effects of gender and caste on schooling opportunities as voiced by my informants. Issues of (il)literacy and school class level were frequently pointed to as the ultimate culprits, the reasons for financial troubles (e.g. inability to obtain a paying job) and individual experiences of exploitation. The stated effects of gender, caste, and widowhood on these women’s everyday understandings of opportunity and self, prove telling in the ubiquitous weight placed on schooling when considering their children’s futures. Several of the hostel widows asserted that there was a need to take advantage of the openings afforded them by their pensions and association with the Army. This section therefore concludes with scenes detailing how impressions of schooling merit ultimately inform the intentionality of daily struggle, to provide children (especially daughters) with a “good education” available only in the city.

Pratash, a 39-year-old Rajput Army widow, has one son and one daughter. She has been a widow for only two years, having lived in the hostel for less than six months. Originally from a village in Haryana, she moved around a lot as her father was also in the military. When her father died of cancer, she experienced the restrictions placed on her mother as a Rajput widow.

*She was in such a deep depression. I could not understand at the time. She changed her clothes. From that point on, she only wore plain clothes. She carried on all the restrictions, only eating cold food and such, for two years. She did not come from the house, she was not supposed to. Because I now had to do all the work around the house,*



*take care of my younger siblings. I had to leave school. (Pratash, Rajput Army widow, interview)*

Up till that point, Pratash had been an excellent student. While she had to change schools a great deal due to her father's rotating assignments within the Army, she reached 10<sup>th</sup> Standard. Soon after her father's death, at the age of 18, she was married to a Rajput soldier from Rajasthan's Sikar district. After 19 years of marriage, right when her husband was up for a promotion, he suffered from a heart attack on a train from Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh to Delhi.

*When I heard the news, I fainted. My son is still in a very deep depression. It has been two years. ...We are living, but we don't want to. We have to. There is no option...so many restrictions now. ... I am literate. I could have a job with these skills. But because I am a Rajput this is not allowed. A woman is not allowed to have a job outside the house. Too many people will talk, saying she is not a respectable woman. People will pinpoint me, 'You are a Rajput; you should not be doing this.' Caste is a big problem. I want to do work, but I cannot. ...I always wanted to be a police officer....As a Rajput; however, I cannot have a job. I have to be strong. (Pratash, Rajput Army widow, interview)*

Pratash continued in frustration about how the Army even guarantees some widows a government job as one of their welfare facilities:

*Well, I guess those positions are only for War widows, so I wouldn't be eligible anyways...which is another whole problem. But, I am educated. I was a good student, very smart. I was even monitor of my class at a very good school in Jaipur. Think what I could be doing. (Pratash, Rajput Army widow, interview)*

Pratash's lamentations echo what is available to widows like the assistant warden of the Family Hostel.

As a member of the Jat caste, the assistant warden comparably has fewer restrictions placed upon her than Pratash, a Rajput. She is able to use her education, and her identity as a war widow, to acquire posts such as the warden position, mentioning in a later interview that she was also applying for a government job, even though it is very competitive, involving a written exam and interview, and can take at least one year for the whole process to go through. In contrast, Tulsi Devi, who is also a Jat war widow, has never attended school:

*I am a Jat, so there are no rules that a woman cannot work at a job or anything. I am illiterate; otherwise, I would have a job, do some kind of work. As a Rajput, I would have faced more problems because of the parda system and all these things. (Tulsi, Jat war widow, interview)*

Being a specific caste, therefore, is not enough to improve your occupational outlook in life. My informants continually voiced that the “lucky” women were those who fell into the category of “educated, non-Rajput war widow”—“Those are the ones you won’t find here [in the hostel]” (Saroj, Rajput Army widow). According to this, then, the presence of the assistant warden at the War Memorial Hostel serves as a paradox, as she meets all of these projected ideals. The impacts of exploitation outlined in the previous section, however, nullified some of her “luck.”

Jeffrey, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey (2008) have suggested the contemporary irrelevance of caste as a social marker and the much greater importance of *education* and *class* as a sign of social distinction in India in the “modern” age. While caste still proves to be a potent factor in widows’ schooling experiences (as displayed above), such sentiments hold true for the children of my informants as several stated that if it were not for the sake of their children’s education, they would go back to their parent’s villages, where life would be *easier*. This idea of sacrifice for the sake of education continued to come up time and time again. One afternoon, sitting in Saroj’s flat on her king-size bed, placed in the middle of her common room in order to accommodate her four children, with Tulsi Devi and Kriti, our conversation diverted into one of education and schooling as Saroj’s eldest daughter, now in 12<sup>th</sup> Standard, walked in from the kitchen carrying glasses of orange Fanta.

**Saroj:** *You know, even though I have a five-roomed house in my parent’s village, and I only have two rooms and a kitchen here in the hostel, it is fine, we are adjusting. For the sake of my children, their education, jobs, I stay in Jaipur. ...These apartments are for war widows. If they come in plenty, I will have to leave. If this happens, I am ready to take the bad conditions. I will be ready to accept it because I will only be in Jaipur. This is where I need to be for my children. Otherwise, I have a huge home in my village, but I’d rather live in conditions of poverty for my children. I will never lose my strong mentality or self-respect. I could never break my children’s hearts. This is a promise I have made. I will never lose any kind of hope.*

**Kriti:** (nodding) *If we were to stay in the villages, in the rural areas, we would not have these opportunities, especially for the girls, our daughters. Ordinarily, widows do not receive free education for their children, so we need to take advantage of this opportunity.* (Saroj's son walks in the flat door)

**Saroj:** *Ah, yes. This is my son, the one I was telling you about...the one who is in BCom.* (He smiles, leaning against the nearest wall to the door)

**MMC:** *Are you liking your courses? What do you want to do afterwards...for a job?*

**Son:** (Nodding) *Ma'am, join the Army...probably.* (Leaves for bathroom)

**MMC:** (To Saroj) *Are you happy he wants to join the Army?*

**Son:** *Of course.*

This dialogue was followed by a discussion regarding how the Army is one of the few job options available for their children, since there is “no money for specialized higher education and the fees are expensive” (Tulsi Devi, Jat war widow). Even though they agreed that the Army looks after them, making them economically better-off than they would be otherwise, they collectively sighed over worries such as, “Who will help them get jobs?”; while nevertheless agreeing on the fact that, no matter what the conditions or hardships, the city offers their children the most opportunities for their futures. As stated by one informant, “I am suffering so much, bearing so much pain, so my children can study. No matter where we are living, my children will study; I will sacrifice for my children” (Rajput Army widow, interview).

### Conclusion

This paper has argued for expanding research in the field of education by examining processes of learning within quotidian interactions and deliberate work. It is through such efforts and interactions that many of the residents of Jaipur's War Memorial Hostel struggle to (re)learn, (re)explore, and (re)negotiate the self through engagement with the transcendent in daily life. Individually interpreted myths create spaces for the reinterpretation of identities as many widows cope with experiences of loss, mourning, and hardship present in their narratives of ritual, violence, caste restriction, and social death. Strength for my informants was located not only in the everyday needs of sending children to school, but through the self-embodiment of divine qualities (e.g. Durga's strength in battle or a *kuldevi's* bravery).

The economic independence of many hostel widows was impacted by caste, family, and also by an additional actor—the government itself. Though all my informants concurred that they were far better-off having being affiliated with the Army as they received more facilities than “civilian widows,” the Indian government’s identification system which hierarchically labels widows as “War” or “Army” consequently classifies some as more worthy of “honor.” Not only are many widows being exploited, but higher pension payments, additional facilities (such as ensured housing), and a shorter time-till-pension received increases the likelihood that some widows will become economically independent faster. Ironically, however, with this “independence” often comes a new form of dependency, one on the government.

Whether in the village or the city, countless widows still experience life as a gendered subaltern. Navigating spaces of gender, caste, and mourning, they work to (re)mold the self, learning how to be in a world of frequent contradictions. Through paradigms of protection, duty, and sacrifice, the war and Army widows of Jaipur’s War Memorial Hostel endeavor to make sense of their new positions and identities within society—determining how they cope with, how they legitimize, how they rationalize, or how they criticize those factors that impact their lives. It is through such deliberate effort that these women find strength, informing the sacrifices they continue to make as family protectors.

*My heart has become stone. I feel nothing. I just know the strength that I must keep.  
The sacrifices I must make...to protect my children. I made a promise to my husband.  
(Rajput Army widow, interview)*

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