

## PITY THE HINDU WIDOWS.

TOLD BY ONE OF THEMSELVES.



HERE are four principal castes among Hindus, and of them all I think the third class, the Kaites to which I belong, make their widows suffer most.

Nearly all widows are treated badly enough, but our customs are much worse than those of others. In the Punjab they are not always strict in enforcing their customs with widows ; but though we live in the Punjab, our family comes from the North-West, and as we are rich and well-to-do, our customs are kept up scrupulously.

When a husband dies his wife suffers as much as if the death angel had come to her also. She must not be approached by any of her relations, but several women, from three to six, (wives of barbers, a class who are kept up for this object), are in waiting, and as soon as the husband's last breath is drawn they rush at the new-made widow and tear off her ornaments.

Ear and nose-rings are drawn off, often tearing the cartilage ; ornaments plaited in with the hair are torn away, and if the arms are covered with gold and silver bracelets they do not take the time to draw them off one by one, but holding her arm on the ground they hammer with a stone until the metal, often solid and heavy, breaks in two.

It matters not to them how many wounds they inflict ; they have no pity, not even if the widow is but a child of six or seven, who does not know what a husband means.

## GOING TO THE BURNING PLACE.

At that time two sorrows come upon every widow, one from God, and one from her own people, who should cherish and support her, but who desert and execrate her. If the husband dies away from home, then, on the arrival of the fatal news, all this is done.

At the funeral all the relatives, men as well as women, have to accompany the corpse to the burning ghat. If they are rich and have carriages they must not use them, but all go on foot. The men follow the corpse, the women (all the ladies well covered from sight) come after, and last the widow, led along by the barbers' wives.

They take care that at least two hundred feet

intervene between her and any other women, for it is supposed that if her shadow fell on any (her tormentors excepted), she also would become a widow ; therefore, no relative, however much sympathy she may feel in secret, dare look on her face.

One of the rough women goes in front and shouts aloud to any passer-by to get out of the way of the accursed thing, as if the poor widow were a wild beast ; and others drag her along.

Arrived at the river, tank, or well, where the body is to be burned, they push her into the water, and as she falls so she must lie, with her clothes on, until the body has been burned, and all the company have bathed, washed their clothes and dried them.

When they are all ready to start for home, but not before, they drag her out, and in her wet clothes she must trudge home. It matters not what the weather is, in a burning sun, or with an icy wind blowing from the Himalays. They care not if she dies. Oh, I would rather choose the suttee with the husband !

Many are happy enough to die in consequence of these sorrows, for however ill they may become no care is taken of them, or medicine given.

## DYING WITH THIRST.

I once went to a funeral (before I was myself a widow), where the burning-place was three kos (about six miles) from the city. It was the hottest month of the year, and though we started at sunrise, we did not reach the house again till 3 p.m.

I shall never forget how much the woman suffered from the hot blasting wind that blew on us like fire, and the blazing sun. We were almost worn out with heat and thirst, though we had stopped often to rest and drink.

The poor widow dared not ask for a drink, or she would have lost her character ; the women with her might have given her water if they had liked, but they would not.

At last she fell, but they pulled her up again and dragged her on, told her not to give way, she was not the only widow, and taunted her when she wept, with wanting a husband. When she had no strength left even to crawl, they dragged her along like a bundle of clothes.

On arrival at the house she was flung on the floor in the little room ; still, though they knew she was almost dead with thirst, they did not give her a drop of water, and she dared not ask for any.