

## **Widows: Social asset to Humanity**

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**Abstract:** Widows are the most oppressed, ostracized, violated, invisible and the poorest of the poor. Patriarchy has played the biggest role in the total marginalization of widows. The patriarchal nature of societies world over vests all economic and social powers in a man. The situation is worse in the developing nations where they are denied their fundamental rights. Even in America, it is often reported that they are being discriminated against simply because they are widows. Despite United Nations World Conferences in Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), widows continue to be excluded from the progress made in raising the status of millions of women in the world. It is analysed in this article that how the government policies like Swadhar, widows pension etc., and the landmark judgements of the Supreme Court and NGOs have come a long way for the rescue of widows.

**Key words:** Widow, patriarchy, marginalization, humiliation, child marriage, dignity, public interest litigation, empowerment.

### **I. Introduction**

#### **Hindu widow a treasure to humanity**

In India, where women are worshipped as mother goddess, society has remained apathetic to glaring inequalities, and total marginalisation of widows. On the one hand, worshipping the mother and on the other hand the callous manner in which India has treated and neglected unfortunate widows is horrifying. Former Chairperson of National Commission for Women and crusader against injustice, Dr. Mohini Giri, while depicting the inexhaustible range of disabilities and deprivations of Indian widows has observed:

In India a woman is respected only if she is a mother, daughter and wife, while we have come to accept death we have unfortunately not learned to accept widows. Since the past several centuries, she has been trapped within a cultural framework of patriarchy. She is reduced to a non-entity and has no access to either resources or opportunities. Marginalised by society, and unwanted at home, she faces living death a million times in her lifetime (Giri:2002).

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, saw voluntary enlightened widowhood as a great social asset and believed that a Hindu widow was a treasure, one of the gifts of Hinduism to humanity, because a Hindu widow had learnt to find happiness in suffering, and had accepted suffering as sacred. He even enjoined men to emulate the ideal of widowhood and withdraw their interest from the pleasures of their life (Gandhi: 1922/1927). There are examples where widows made an imprint of their presence in all walks of public life as outstanding queens, administrators, social reformers, and leaders, the top among them being Meera Bai, Rani Laxmi Bai, Ahilya Bai Holker, Chand Bibi, Padmini, Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade and Indira Gandhi. They left a legacy of selfless devotion, bhakti, bravery, sacrifice and statesmanship in the country. They are a source of inspiration to millions of women.

## **II. Widows: symbol of Hindu patriarchal oppression**

Widows are the most oppressed, ostracized, violated, invisible and the poorest of the poor. Patriarchy, patrilineal and patrilocal have played the biggest role in the total marginalization of widows. For ages, the life of widows had been a story of life-long subjection, humiliation and deprivation. In her celebrated book 'The High-Caste Hindu Women' (1887). Pandit Ramabai, a social reformer and militant feminist called widowhood the worst and most dreaded period of a high-caste woman's life. She challenged the patriarchal ideology considering it as one of the main factors degrading widows. She observed;

Throughout India, widowhood is regarded as the punishment for a horrible crime or crimes committed by the woman in her former existence upon earth. It is the child-widow or a childless young widow who faced abuse and hatred of the community as the greatest criminal (Ramabai: 2000).

The widows have to face many kinds of deprivation: economic, social, cultural and emotional. Of all the deprivation the economic deprivation is the most harmful. Among basic causes of their vulnerability are restrictions on the residence, inheritance, remarriage and employment opportunities of widows that 'reduce many widows to a pathetic, lonely existence' (Kant/Guild of Service: 2002). Cherie Booth, Britain's former first lady, announced June 23 as International Widows' Day. Backing the widows' campaign, she pointed out that the traditional patriarchal structures do not allow gender equality to be a priority in India. "Discrimination stems from socio-cultural norms and hence struggle for equality becomes a challenge." She advocated education and employment especially for young widows.

### **Sufferings and austerities of the widows**

Among the maladies which preyed on the lot of Indian women, they were invisible and though physically alive, all their material, social and human dignity was annihilated. A stringent code of

conduct was laid down against them. There were severe restrictions on their diet, attire and movements. The widows in all communities carried the stigma of inauspiciousness and were thus required not to participate in religious or auspicious social functions such as marriage or other celebrations. A widow was not even allowed to perform the ritual ceremony to welcome her own daughter-in-law (Beth:2002). Her very presence would be considered evil omen (Dubois;1897).

### **III. Campaign by Social Reformers: in 19<sup>TH</sup> Century and Onward**

During nineteenth century, social reformers, all over India raised their voice against miseries of widows, who were denied their essential human dignity and were treated as sinners, chattels and slaves. Their unhappy plight was seen as a symptom of the backwardness of the society. The problem was so acute that social reformers made efforts to improve their lot by persuading people to change their attitude towards widows and campaigned for the rehabilitation and remarriage of widows and stressed the importance of their education.

#### **Sati: as barbarous custom**

The custom of sati or burning of a widow at the pyre of her husband was prevalent in the society. Sati or cremation of a widow with her husband though never universally practiced or approved, was still considered the highest ideal a widow could achieve. If she did not become a sati, she was condemned to life-long widowhood. Raja Ram Mohan Roy roused the sentiments of the sensible people against the gruesome practice of burning widows. He proved from the authoritative standards of Hinduism, that sati was not a religious duty. He showed that not religious devotion, but the avaricious desire of relatives to avoid the cost of supporting the widows, had a great deal to do with the preparation of sati (Collet: 1900/1962).

He launched a systematic campaign and mobilized public opinion against its removal, aware of the pervasive tide of prejudice in its favour, but undaunted by it (Tagore: 1973). In Dec.1829, Lord William Bentick passed the famous Sati Regulation Act, 1829 making the custom illegal in British India. Bentick, the real architect of the policy, emphasized that in arriving at his decision to abolish sati he was not acting as a complete innovator but as one who merely followed public opinion (Dutta: 1988).

#### **Efforts for widow remarriage**

Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar was termed a great apostle to liberate women from the clutch of this wild custom. He determined to put an end to the inhumanity to which the women in India in general and widows in particular were subjected. In his monumental book 'Marriage of Hindu Widows', he tried to

legitimize the remarriage of Hindu widows on the basis of spiritual authority (Vidyasagara: 1855/1976). It was largely due to his effort that the Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 was passed. Realizing the immensity of a widow's ordeal he continued his efforts to make widow remarriage acceptable to society. He justified marriage of widows on the ground that it would remove the insupportable torments of life-long widowhood, diminish the crimes of prostitution and foeticide, and secure all families from disgrace and infancy.

Widowhood was perceived by social reformers to be a most injurious grievance and to be contrary to true interpretation of Hindu laws. Dayanand Saraswati believed in the equality of both sexes and criticized the practices of child marriage, widowhood, sati and female infanticide. He advocated remarriage of the widows as the correct remedy. Since his time, the Arya Samaj has been promoting and performing widow remarriage throughout the country.

Vivekananda emphasized that the principal object of religion must be to wipe the tears of helpless widows and unfortunate orphans. He was firmly of the view that "Liberty is the first condition of growth". He continued, "It is wrong, a thousand time wrong, if any of you dares to say, 'I will work out the salvation of this woman or child. ...Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off. They will solve their own problems'. Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world" (Vivekananda:1954). Pandit Ramabai in her Indian feminist manifesto '*The Cry of Indian women*' (1883) highlighted Indian women's oppression through early marriage, marital harassment, desertion by the husband and widowhood. She urged in 1883 to improve the widows' status in India. Poor helpless females, instead of resorting to an immoral life for their subsistence, could retire into a home for destitute. The men could not marry a second time while the first wife was living and society did not treat widows in the same disrespectful way as in India (Ramabai: 2000).

Under the leadership of Gandhi ji, the widows occupied a special place in nationalist discourse. He observed that 'If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood' (Gandhi: 1947/1959). He passionately desired utmost freedom for women. He detested child marriages and named child widows as "suppressed humanity." To quote him;

I shudder to see a child widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed with brutal indifference contracts another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate... Women must have votes and equal legal status. (Gandhi: 1922/1927)

British Government modified certain practices by enacting legislation such as Sati Regulation Act, 1829, and Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856. With nationalist fervour, important enactments were

passed such as Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 popularly known as Sarda Act, 1929, which prohibited the marriages of girls under 14 and of boys under 18. Widow's estate was granted to women under The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937.

#### **IV. Post Independence Era: Widows at Par with Men**

After the dawn of Independence the concept of building up a new India took shape in which the Constitution of India conferred equal rights on women. They are equal members of the society having equal opportunity to take up any career or profession on par with men. The upward trend in female education and the rapid movements in general, technical and professional accomplishments have enabled Indian women, including widows to acquire a broader outlook and qualify themselves to enter into public life in spite of the disabilities resulting from religious restrictions, social customs and economic disparities.

#### **Widows Estate: A Limited Estate vis a vis. Absolute Owner**

The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937, gave better right to a Hindu Widow in respect of property, but she was entitled to limited estate which could be held by her during her life time which then reverted to her husband's heirs. With the enactment of *Hindu Succession Act, 1956*, she acquired absolute right to her property under section 14 of the said Act. Ms. Nirupma Vyas speaking in a National Seminar on widowhood in India held in Trivendrum stated that an important change has been found in the economic life of the present day urban widows in comparison to traditional widows. In a study conducted by her on 225 upper caste widows in the city of Ahmedabad it has been found that 3/4 (72.44%) of the respondents were self reliant and the number of the respondents dependent upon parental relatives was found to be negligible. Among the main reasons for these positive changes are the marriage at the age of maturity, women's education and availability of job opportunities in cities (Vyas:2006).

#### **V. Child Marriage: Widowhood as one of the baneful effects**

Child marriages continue unabated and to prevent them is a big challenge in India. National Commission for Women in its report to UN on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms Discrimination against Women 2005, has confirmed early widowhood as one of the baneful effects of child marriage in India along with early motherhood and weak children etc. (NCW:2005). Kitchlu in his study 'Widows in India' has also observed that there is a direct correlation between the age of marriage and the age of widowhood. The custom of marrying daughters at a young age is one of the root causes of high incidence of widowhood in India (Kitchlu: 1993). Today, thousands of child marriages are solemnised

during AkshayaTritya, AkheTeej, Ram Navami, BasantPanchami festivals in open defiance of the law. Tribals and minorities have similar customs.

The early marriage deprived women of their right to equality guaranteed in the Constitution. It is a breach of Article 16(2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which lays down that *“the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect.”* It is also breach of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which requires that *“marriages shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties.”* The report of United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) 2005, on the State of the World Population highlights the enormity of the problem by stating that India occupies fourth place after Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan.

**The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929** as amended in 1978, raises the permissible age of marriage of a boy from 18 to 21 and a girl from 14 to 18. However, it stipulates only a mild punishment for offenders. The punishment for marriage in violation of age requirement is simple imprisonment which may extend to 15 days or fine upto Rs.1000 or both. Such a mild punishment for a social evil which is so largely prevalent having serious implications is making a mockery of the policy and law.

**The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** defines legal age of marriage for women is 18 but it also provides under age marriages are neither void nor voidable. Thus it does not authorize the Court to declare a marriage void on the ground that either of the party is underage. **Sec. 375 of Indian Penal Code** which deals with rape holds that sexual intercourse between a man and his wife is not rape even if the wife is below 15. This makes it possible for a girl of fifteen to be a wife and bear a child though it runs contrary to the spirit of Child Marriage Restraint Act.

**The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** has been enacted to punish those who promote, perform and abet child marriages.

## **VI. Pathetic conditions of Vrindavan widows**

Abandoned by their families and marginalised by society, there are nearly 20,000 widows in Vrindavan, Varanasi, Mathura and Haridwar. They live in pitiable and pathetic conditions having no financial, social or emotional support (Girish Uma:2005). Vrindavan, a place to worship the Lord Krishna, is known as the “city of widows.” The holy city has attracted thousands of Bengali widows who have chosen to stay there for the rest of their lives with the sole desire of serving Lord Krishna. About 80 percent of widows come from Bengal and are mostly upper caste Brahmins. Many people have brought the widowed women from their families, leaving them in hapless condition in Vrindavan under the

pretext of pilgrimage. Many are thrown out of family homes by their children or by their in-laws as evil women who caused the death of their husband. Majority of the widows are ignorant of their basic rights because they come from rural areas where little has changed for centuries.

They continue to live there amidst the indignities and insults devoid of basic amenities of life. Generally, they are found with disillusioned faces and wearing a single piece of coarse white sari, wearing rosary beads round their necks and putting a long 'tilak' on their head. It is not easy for widows to get rooms on rent as landlords ask for money in advance and the widows can then be seen begging on the streets or outside the temples and ghats. As many of the women have no place to live. They receive meager rations of rice lentil only if they spend six hours singing devotional songs at the ashram.

Young widows are often lured into sex in exchange for more food or money. They undergo harrowing experience of sexual harassment, molestation and physical assault. These widows have no access to any kind of medical facilities or health care. Many of them suffer from diseases such as T.B., asthma, various skin diseases and there are serious cases of sexually transmitted diseases (N.C.W.:1996). Their children are not admitted to school and they work as child labourers. They are constantly exploited by their employers. As a result of facing constant abuse, disrespect and humiliation from local people their esteem has become very low. They also face such abuse from tourists who have no time to listen to their tales of woe.

### **The study 'Widows of Vrindavan:**

Rehabilitation Plan, sponsored by National Commission for Women in 1996 revealed that the common complaint of many widows is that though the social Welfare Board has many welfare schemes but they do not know what is available and how to attain it. In 1985, under the national Pension Scheme the Government sanctioned pension on monthly basis for the aged widows and the handicapped but obtaining their rightful pension becomes an ordeal for the applicants as most of them are illiterate, too old or sick. A few social workers help them but authorities are very hostile towards such social workers. Many time the relief comes long after the beneficiary is dead and gone (NCW: 1996).

### **Right to vote: new route to social recognition**

Now, the destitute widows of Vrindavan are becoming more conscious of their right to vote and this is becoming for them a new route to social recognition. It is now being realized that they have become a vote bank that cannot be ignored. Their 30-35000 votes can make a difference in Assembly polls. They are getting more ambitious, daring and very often bargain with election campaigners. They generally make demands which range from general i.e. better health care in Ashrams to specifics viz. A fan etc.

They are learning to negotiate their situation by what may be termed 'politics of experience' (Priya: 2003).

### **Aamar Bari: the road for economic empowerment**

Under the dynamic and benevolent leadership of Dr. MohiniGiri in 1998 the Guild of Service established Aamar Bari, a large housing complex in Vrindavan, to rehabilitate each and every widow. Justice Venkatchelliah, chairman, Human Rights Commission inaugurated the home for destitute widows of Vrindavan. Most of the widows in Aamar Bari are from West Bengal. Many of them are illiterate or barely educated, abandoned by their grown up children. Here the women live in the comfort of companionship and care (Guild of Service: 2002). They learn skills such as weaving, embroidery, beadwork, spinning and nursing that help them gain economic independence and confidence. Today they produce smart quilted jackets, leather pouches, cloth bags, beadwork and embroidery sold through special fundraising bazars. Proactive measures include legal literacy. A programme to train auxiliary nurses in the age group of 20 to 25 was begun and thus far 3 batches of 60 young women have been trained.

### **VII. Government Efforts: 'Swadhar'**

The Government is also beginning to try to help widows who are cast out by their families by adopting a scheme known as Swadhar. The scheme was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) during the year 2001-2002 to benefit women in difficult circumstances. Destitute widows deserted by their families in religious places like Vrindavan, Kashi, etc., they still are victims of exploitation (DWCD; 2002). The implementing agencies of the scheme can be the social welfare/women and child welfare department or State Governments, Women's development corporations, Urban local bodies, Reputed public/private trusts or voluntary organization that are willing to take up the responsibilities of rehabilitating such women on a project basis. The organization must have adequate experience and expertise in taking up such works of rehabilitation (DWCD, 2004-2005).

### **Shelter Home for Widows**

It is the largest ever such facility being established or funded by the government, the Home, which will have a capacity to house 1000 women being constructed on 1.424 hectare of land at Vrindavan. The design of the Home prepared in consultation with Help Age India and is old age friendly. Measures are taken under this scheme for social and economic rehabilitation through education.



In 1985, under the National Pension Scheme the Government sanctioned pension on monthly basis for the aged, widows and the handicapped. However, obtaining their rightful pension becomes an ordeal for the applicants as most of them are illiterate, too old or sick. A few social worker are helping them but authorities are very hostile towards such social workers. Many times the relief comes long after the beneficiary is dead and gone. Many welfare schemes have been initiated by the Central Social Welfare Board for their welfare

### **Mandatory Mention of Widows' Name on Death Certificates**

To ensure that a widow is facilitated to get all her entitlements after death of her husband, WCD Ministry is working with the office of General of India as well as the state governments to ensure that the name of the widow is compulsorily mentioned in the death certificate of her husband.

### **VIII. Persistent gender differences in America**

Widows in western society:For a woman, the loss of a mate results in a distinctive status which causes major financial and personal discontinuities accompanied by her bereavement. 'American women,' Lopata noted, 'often report that they are being discriminated against simply because they are widows (Lopata: 1996). Widows are often set apart from the mainstream of social life. A widow who has dependent children faces more economic problems along with other responsibilities. She has to play new roles of breadwinner and care taker. She has to undergo a period of strain and stress in bringing up her children (Christenson: 1950).

### **The Social Security Act of 1935**

One of the most significant pieces of legislation for the family ever passed by the Congress, is the Social Security Act of 1935 which assisted widows (Achenbaum: 1986). While enacting the said Social Security Act President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared its objectives as the security of home, the security of livelihood, and the security of social insurance 'to take care of human needs' and to bolster the New Deals"threeRs"-*Recovery, Relief and Reconstruction* (Podell:2001). In 1939, amendments to the Social Security Act provided pensions for those aged widows and widows with children who were survivors of men in covered occupations. The pension of widows was based upon their late husband's contributions. In 1983 there were 2 million widows under the age of 60; 1.25 million of them could not qualify for Social Security benefits because they were not caring for a child under age 16.

## **Image of Widowhood: Emerging Trends**

The modern wife is becoming less economically dependent on her husband and more likely to be involved in a multidimensional life, much of which is also socially and economically independent of that partner, than was true to her ancestress. Lopata however concluded that all in all, the image of widowhood that is emerging from current research is of a resilient widowed woman, able to work through her grief, cutting ties with the deceased, accepting life without him, modifying existing social relationships and roles, building new ones and reconstructing the self into an independent, whole human being. Younger widows often remarry, the frequency decreasing with age for various demographic and personal reasons. Generally, widows maintain a social lifestyle that is basically similar to the one they led in marriage, modifying it in response to self-defined needs within a variety of social roles (Lopata: 1996).

## **IX. International Ramifications**

The International Women's Movement has come a long way since United Nations World Conferences in Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995, and ratification of the convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there has been widespread support for the elimination of violence against women, and endorsement of the Security Council Resolution, 1325,2000, but widows continue to be excluded from the progress made in raising the status of millions of women in the world. In Beijing Platform for Action, Beijing +5 Women 2000(Further Actions 2000) and Beijing +10 Women 2005, widows are barely mentioned. Lack of opportunities negates the future for them and their children, depriving them of their human rights and their potential to contribute to development and peace.

## **X. Constitutional duty of the Supreme Court to give voice to the 'White Shadows of Vrindavan'**

In **Environment and Consumer Protection v. Union of India (2017)** case, the Supreme Court observed that there can be no doubt that widows in some parts of the country are socially deprived and to an extent ostracized. Perhaps this is the reason why many of them choose to come to Vrindavan and other ashrams. Where, unfortunately, they are not treated with the dignity they deserve. It is to give voice to these hapless widows that it became necessary for the Court to intervene as a part of its constitutional duty and for reasons of social justice to issue appropriate directions.

Expressing its concern over the poor plight of Vrindavan widows, the court reiterated its duty as the judicial constituent of the State like its political and executive constituents to protect the rights of every citizen and every individual and ensure that everyone is able to live with dignity. The court placed the

widows in the socially underprivileged groups and added this group to the marginalized groups which were the cause of concern during the first phase of public interest litigation. The Court cited its judgement with approval in State of Uttaranchal v. Balwant Singh Chaufal. To quote:

Placing empowerment in perspective, this Court noted that the first phase of public interest litigation concerned itself primarily with the protection of the fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution of “the marginalized groups and sections of the society who because of extreme poverty, illiteracy and ignorance cannot approach this Court or the High Courts.” We may add – the socially underprivileged groups. These are the people who have no real access to justice and in that sense are voiceless, and these are the people who need to be empowered and whose cause needs to be championed by those who advocate social justice for the disadvantaged

The petitioner, Environment and Consumer Protection filed a PIL petition for an appropriate writ requiring the Union of India and the State of Uttar Pradesh to take all steps to rehabilitate the widows of Vrindavan so as they can live with dignity. The petition was filed on the basis of an article ‘*White Shadows of Vrindavan*’ written by Atul Sethi and published in Times of India of 25th March, 2007. The article painted a tragic and dismal picture of the living conditions of the widows in Vrindavan. No one knows since when these widows have been coming to Vrindavan but most of them are from West Bengal and their life stories often follow a similar pattern which is the death of the husband, relatives leaving them in Vrindavan, days spent singing prayers and begging at temples where they live on a day to day basis. Most widows refuse to go back to their village or home, even if they are given a chance to do so, saying that now “this is our home”.

The Court passed certain directions, for example, on 14th November, 2008 the National Commission for Women and thereafter the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the State of Uttar Pradesh were directed to take effective steps for identification and enumeration of the destitute in Vrindavan - both those having shelter and those wandering in the streets without any shelter. The Social Justice Bench was constituted. The Court constituted a Committee to ensure proper rehabilitation and vocational training for the Vrindavan widows, suggest steps and measures that could be taken to rehabilitate, compensate and make lives of the widows residing in Vrindavan better.

The Supreme Court in one of its directions asked the temples in Mathura and Vrindavan to donate all flowers offered to them to shelter homes which can be used to make perfumes, incense sticks (agarbattis) and so on, thereby providing a means of livelihood for them. The Supreme Court further sought consideration from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) to extend this

scheme to all major temple towns such as Varanasi, Tirupati, and others, keeping in mind the welfare of widows and destitute women. (Indian Express:2018)

**To conclude**, ours is a welfare democracy where justice is a right of all. Progress, therefore, is in moving forward and not backward and so far widows are oppressed, ostracized, violated and poorest of the poor. Despite several achievements made in this direction still majority of widows are forced to endure intolerable conditions, social stigma, financial and social insecurity. Old age anxieties and iniquitous conventions compound their problems and compel many windows to lead a pathetic and lonely existence. Rabindranath Tagore in his novel *Chokhar Bali (1903)* addressed the problem of young and beautiful widow Binodini, who did not want to fade into oblivion like other widows of her time. Yet Tagore sent her off to Kashi because he could not ignore the Hindu conservative critique and forced an ending that was consistent with the Hindu idea of widowhood. Binodini's passion for life and apparent ruthlessness continue to haunt us. Even after 100 years, Binodini can hardly be ignored. There is a need that mindset of the people should be changed so that Binodini's of today who are essentially reasserting their rights may have power to make their own choices, which they long deserved and not compelled to go to kashi.

There should be emphasis on creating awareness in public, religious institutions, govt. agencies for the upliftment of this marginalized group. There is a need to restore their dignity as human being by adopting effective social and economic programmes for their upliftment and rehabilitation so that they can be made central actors for reconstruction and development. The welfare of the widows can no longer be left to charity alone. Though they are covered under the pension and other social security schemes, but the amount of the pension is meager which should be increased. An enactment may be made in India on the line of the enactment prevalent in USA, so as to provide a permanent and uniform basis as to right of pension of widows throughout India.

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