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## **Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio- legal Examination**

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### **Summary**

Sati (Su-thi or Suttee) is the traditional Indian (Hindu) practice of a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre. The sati tradition was prevalent among certain sects of the society in ancient India, who either took the vow or deemed it a great honour to die on the funeral pyres of their husbands. The ritual of sati was banned by the British Government in 1829 by Lord Bentinck, the Governor -General of India (1828 to 1835) and later the Sati (Prevention) Act 1987.

In the modern times, there have been a few instances of sati in Rajasthan (1987), Utter Pradesh (2006) Madhya Pradesh (2002 and 2006) and in Chattisgarh (2008). The practice of Sati mostly happens in parts of northern and central India. Isolated incidents may be more but not reported officially that caused a lot of controversy and social turmoil in the country over and over again.

What does India's legal system have to say about this? The government of India has dropped its move to toughen the law against sati (The Times of India, April 23, 2008)

This paper will examine the relevant provisions of law and as well as socio legal tangle of this issue.

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## Introduction

Indian society might have progressed and move forward but the social evil of sati continues to hang around in Indian society. The recent shocking incident of a seventy one year old woman performing sati in Chattisgarh (13th October 2008) is an eye opener. The practice of sati has been a part of Indian society for ages with its inception being traced to the time of the Gupta period. Though sati is illegal and is highly condemned in Indian society, the act of sati being performed in the 21st century has shocked people. Lalmati aged seventy one, resident of Chechar village in the Raipur district in Chattisgarh, had come to the funeral pyre of her husband Shivnandan Verma, dressed in a new sari. When the husband's body had been almost burnt and the villagers were about to leave, Lalmati jumped into the pyre and was reduced to ashes in moments (The Hindustan ,newspaper ,Lucknow, India, editorial ,17 October 2008 p12). It is yet not known whether Lalmati chose to do this voluntarily or was pushed by someone. A police case has been registered and investigation is ongoing. But the incident is a glaring example of how such incidents continue to occur in rural India.

Sati was never widespread, and it has been illegal since 1829, but a few cases of sati still occur in India every year. In choosing to die with her husband, a woman gains great merit and power and is thought to bring kudos to her husband's patrilineage and to others who honour her. Thus, through her meritorious death, a widow avoids disdain and achieves glory, not only for herself, but for all of her kin as well.

In September 1987, 18-year-old Roop Kanwar, a young widow (she was married for just 8 months ) of Rajasthan was forced to commit sati after the death of her husband. Many litres of ghee (cooking butter) were poured on her as she burnt to death on her husband's funeral pyre. People who assisted her in suicide were arrested. But Roop Kanwar is idolized and has attained the status of a deity; a temple was built for her. In October 1996, the Indian Court upholds the suicide as a social tradition and acquitted all 38 defendants who assisted Roop Kanwar. Another incident was the case of Kuttu Bai, a 65 year widow committed sati in the state of Madhya Pradesh in August 2002 , another was Vidyawati a 35-year-old woman committed Sati by jumping into the blazing funeral pyre of her husband in the year 2006 in Utter Pradesh, Janakrani (40years old) was burnt to death on the funeral pyre of her husband in Sager District of Madhya Pradesh in August 2006 and very recently one Lalmati (71 years old) of Chatisgarh has committed sati in October 2008.

Today, the status of women in India can be gauged quite closely from the fact that a practice such as sati is still possible, and publicly supported and glorified. The anniversary of Roop Kanwar's sati (who has committed sati on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1987 in the village of Deorala in the Sikar district in Rajasthan) has come and gone, but it appears that nobody is keen to eradicate or remove this social evil prevalent in the country including Indian Government (The Times of India, April 23, 2008). More and more cases are being reported in daily news papers. All the accused were acquitted in the case of Roop Kanwar's sati by the trial court of Rajasthan in the absence of in adequate evidence against them. Many police officials who turned hostile witnesses in the court. Not only this, the Additional District and Sessions Judge acquitted even a government doctor, Mr. Magan Singh, who was accused of fraudulently showing Mr. Sumer Singh admitted in the Government Hospital in Ajitgarh ( India )at the time of the incident to provide an alibi (The Pioneer, "Sati Killers acquitted", dated 13-10-1996).

More than 1,000 devotees staged a major festival at the Roop Kanwar Sati temple in Jhunjhunu Rajasthan, in contravention of the 1987 Act, which prohibits glorification of sati. The court refused to stop the nine-day event but ruled there must be no direct reference to sati, and that the rituals must be held outside rather than within the temple. Protesters violated this order, and a contempt petition was filed (Muku; Sharma,1997, Vikas Publication N.Delhi p32). However, the incident aroused considerable upheaval throughout India and forced the country to re-evaluate the status of women. In the matter of glorifying sati, the special court in Jaipur acquitted all the 11 accused in four of the 22 cases on glorification of sati that were filed 16 years ago in 1987 (T.K. Raj Lakshmi ,Sati' and the verdict Frontline Vol.21 -Issue 05, 2004). Those acquitted included a former minister of the state of Rajasthan, the vice president of the ruling party of the state of Rajasthan and the nephew of then vice president of India.

However the present government of India has dropped attempts to strengthen the anti-sati law (The Times of India, April 23, 2008), more than 20 years after it was first enacted. Last year, the government had proposed changes to India's existing sati law - the Commission of Sati Prevention Act of 1987. The amendments to the Commission of Sati

Prevention Act, 1987, had met with resistance in the Cabinet over some clauses. Some cabinet members had objected to the amendments. The proposed legislation recommended that coercing a woman to commit sati be made a non-bailable offence. The ruling party as well as politicians from certain states had actually been actively campaigning and lobbying against tougher laws for those inciting sati.

Traditionally the unfortunate women who could not commit or were prevented from committing sati were doomed to lead the most austere life. As a widow, a woman is devoid of reason to adorn herself. If she follows tradition, she may shave her head, shed her jewelry, wear only plain white or dark clothing and eat a single meal and are sent to live the rest of their lives in economic, familial and romantic deprivation following their husbands' deaths (Pramila Dandvate, *Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women in India*, New Delhi, 1989 p.163). Their presence at family public functions was totally forbidden. The widows lived in joint families, died unwept and unsung. Vrindavan, a town in northern part of India, is a pilgrimage town which is now home to thousands of destitute widows; they have been driven by poverty to this holy town. There, the lives of some of them are reduced to begging, prostitution and, in some cases, chanting hymns for eight hours in order to earn a mere handful of lentils and rice. But situation today is improved significantly and not as bad as it was in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In some regions of India, women are still treated as appendages to their husbands, and are expected to either follow their husbands into death or to remain chaste throughout their widowhood. Social pressures to commit sati remain strong in certain areas of India.

Traditionally, Hinduism frowned on widows remarrying and many have their social and economic power eroded, although in recent years many widows have benefited from moves to enhance their status. By restricting widow's remarriage, high-status groups limit restructuring of the lineage on the death of a male member. An unmarried widow remains a member of her husband's lineage, with no competing ties to other groups of in-laws. Her rights to her husband's property, traditionally limited though they are to management rather than outright inheritance, remain uncomplicated by remarriage to a man from another lineage. It is among lower-ranking groups with lesser amounts of property and prestige that widow remarriage is most frequent. Whereas a widower can remarry as many times as he likes, a widow marriage in India is still a restricted practice. It is not easy for a widow to remarry irrespective of her age (Jill McGivering, BBC South Asia correspondent, 2 February, 2002).

The position of women in modern India has changed considerably. Her position in modern Indian society is equal to that of men, socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally. Sati, child marriage, and the institution of temple prostitution longer exist to the same degree as earlier. The changing status of women in the context of the changing face of society when most people are yet to come to terms with changes taking place in all spheres of life. In the fast-changing Indian society the old institution of joint family is facing a crisis and the number of single women including widows, divorcees or separated women, in both urban and rural areas is increasing. Yet most women are still oppressed by the conventions and expectations belonging to bygone eras.

For this change in the status of women several factors like women's education, reform movements by many social reformers, women participation in politics and many social legislation are held responsible.

## Religious Aspects

In ancient Hindu law, stridharma (dharma signifies one's duty, responsibility, or moral responsibility) is the dharma of women. Stridharma for women entails devotion to one's husband, a woman's husband is a sort of God and, in fact, the Sanskrit word for "husband" - "Swaami" - literally means "Lord and Master". He is essentially her "lord" for the very meaning of the word husband (Pati) means both husband and lord. In view of that, what chance does a woman have? The ideal wife is one whose sole joy in life is to satisfy her husband. Her only concern is to perform properly any of the services demanded by her husband. Such a woman is attached to her husband even after he has died. Total subservience is enjoined and the ultimate expression of such complete marital devotion was expressed in sati. Although many widows are treated less harshly today they still face discrimination and neglect. In some corners of this strange and complex land, that act of murdering widows is a tradition.

## Economic and Political Aspects

Insofar as the community is concerned, there is an economic gain to be made from the commercialisation of a sati and the worship surrounding her death (Jethmalani, Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women, 46; ILHR Mar. 1991; p72). The latter practice is illustrated by Roop Kanwar's story. The proponents of sati glorified her sacrifice by having town celebrations and by constructing a temple in her honour, without interference from the authorities. In 1990, 400 people attended a celebration of her death, even though the celebration was banned. An article in Women, Law and Development-Action for Change, points out that the region where this incident occurred is a fairly "modern" one, where the literacy rate is relatively high.

The Indian government has dropped attempts to strengthen the anti-Sati law, more than 20 years after it was first enacted (The Times of India, 23 April 2008). The proposed legislation recommended that coercing a woman to commit sati be made a non-bailable offence. The women and child development ministry said the amendments have been dropped following political pressure. Some influential persons in the ruling party as well as politicians from certain states had actually been actively campaigning and lobbying against tougher laws for those inciting sati. One of the persons who has opposed the law is a minister in the present UPA government, is not keen on stopping or deterring the practice of sati. That may be because Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan), his constituency, is famous for its Rani Sati temple, a big tourist attraction for hundreds of thousands of devotees, and obviously an important economic engine for his constituency.

Other ancillary reasons also went into making immolation a prevalent practice. The near impossibility of widow re-marriage arising from the taboos and prejudices that sanctified

the virginity of a bride was an important reason. Another reason could be the non-recognition of the individuality of a woman who was considered part and parcel of her husband, without whom she was a nullity.

The bride is looked upon as a burden as she represented a drain on the family's income while not contributing anything towards it. If this is her status as a bride, it is not surprising that if she had the misfortune to become a widow, her presence in the family was dreaded. And apart from being considered an object of ill omen, her presence after her husband's demise was a dead weight to her in-laws' family. Thus without her husband a woman's existence has become intolerable and an extreme but logical outcome of this was immolation.

## The Historical Background

Ibn Batuta, an Arab traveler (1333 A.D.) observed that sati was considered praiseworthy by the Hindus, without however being obligatory. Historically, efforts to prevent sati by formal means existed even before the Moghul rulers came to power. Under the Delhi Sultanates (Alauddin Khilji, 1294-1316 and Muhammad bin Tughlaq, 1325-1351) permission had to be sought prior for sati to be committed. In time this check against compulsion became a mere formality. In any case Hindu women from royal families continued to burn unchecked (Mahajan, V.D, History of Medieval India, S.Chand, N.Delhi). Humayun (1530-1540) tried to prevent sati, but eventually withdrew a royal fiat against it. Akbar (1556-1606) insisted that no woman could commit sati without the specific permission of his Kotwals (police officers in charge of police station). They were instructed to delay the woman's decision for as long as possible. Pensions, gifts and rehabilitative help were offered to the potential someone who might commit sati to wean her away from committing the Act. Children were strictly forbidden from the practice. The later Moghuls continued to put obstacles in the way but the practice carried on in the areas outside Agra. In their own sphere of influence the Portuguese, Dutch and French banned sati but efforts to stamp out sati were formalised only under Lord William Bentinck after 1829 (Anne E. Carr, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Religion, Feminism, and the Family, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

## British Regulation

The British were by no means certain of their approach to the custom no matter how abhorrent they found it. Following Moghal example, for a while they tried to regulate it by requiring that it be carried out in the presence of their officials and strictly according to custom. Perhaps Bentinck was spurred on to legislation by the unacceptable rise in sati in his province, Bengal (Sarkar, Jadunath, A History of Jaipur, Orient Longman 1984). In the 10 years between 1815 and 1825, the figure had doubled to 639 deaths by burning (Binita Mehta, Widows, Pariahs, and Bayadères: India As Spectacle Published by Bucknell University Press 2002). He was certainly under pressure from the constant entreaties of missionaries and encouraged to action by the sea change being wrought amongst an influential section of Hindus led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy's Brahmo Samaj.

Lord William Bentinck passed the Sati Regulation, XVII of 1827 on 4 December after assuming the governorship of Bengal. The regulation was clear, concise and unequivocal in its condemnation of Sati, declaring it illegal and punishable by the criminal courts (C. A. Bayly, General Editor, *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*. London: National Portrait Gallery Publications 1990). It made zamindars (landlords), petty land owners, local agents and officers in charge of revenue collection especially accountable for immediate communication to the officers of their nearest police station of any intended sacrifice of the nature described. In case of willful neglect the responsible officer was liable to a fine of Rs.200 or 6 months in jail for default (Andrea Major, *Sati: a Historical Anthology*, Oxford University Press, 2007).

### Opposition from Orthodoxy

Even before the regulation was promulgated, some three hundred orthodox Hindus petitioned Lord Bentinck to stop the abolition. They pleaded that the practice of "self immolation", was not merely a sacred duty but a "privilege" of believers. Bentinck however would not relent. Orthodox Bengali Brahmins formed themselves into the Dharma Sabha (Religion Council) and collected a huge sum to fight the Regulation all the way up to the highest court, Privy Council in England. In 1832 the appeal was heard by the Privy Council. The petitioners argued that it went against the basic assurance given in George III Statute 37 whereby the Hindus were assured complete noninterference with their religion. The abolitionists argued that there was really no freedom of religion that could go beyond what was "compatible with the paramount claims of humanity and justice." Of 7 privy councilors, three finally voted against Bentinck's regulation but finally it was upheld (John Stratton Hawley, *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, Oxford University Press US ,1994). Madras and then Bombay followed suit with their own legislation banning Sati. Slowly local rulers who came under the yoke of the British also conceded legislation against Sati in conformity with the British regulations. The rulers of Jaipur banned it in 1846.

### The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987

The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987, substituted the various legislation that had been operative in different parts of the country with a central law that sought not only to prevent and punish the commission of the act itself, but also to make any glorification of the act of sati an offence. There are provisions in the Act to take action against exploitation of such criminal occurrences either for financial or political purposes. Specifically, the Act makes a criminal offence, equivalent to murder, the abetment or encouragement of a Sati or an attempted Sati. Such action is liable to sentence of death or life imprisonment, with an appropriate fine (s 4 (1)).

Sati means the burning or burying alive of  
any widow along with the body of her deceased husband or any other  
relative or with anything or article associated with husband or such  
relative, or

any woman along with the body of any of her relatives.

Such burning or burying may either be voluntary or otherwise. (s 2 (1) (c))

The person committing sati is herself is liable to prosecution for attempted suicide, the penalty being a year's imprisonment with a fine(s 3). Glorification of sati is defined as the observation of any ceremonies or the taking out of processions in connection with the incidence or practice of sati; the support, justification or propagation of the practice; or the arrangement of or participation of any function to eulogies a person committing sati; the creation of a trust or fund or collection of donations for the purpose of a temple or any other structure with a view to perpetuate or honour the memory of a person committing sati; or the performance of any ceremony for the same purpose (s 2 (1) (b)).

Under the Act, all temples dedicated to such practice or persons are to be removed (s 7). The penalty for glorification of Sati is imprisonment from 1 to 7 years, a fine of Rs. 5,0007- to Rs.30,0001-and the confiscation of all assets collected in the name of Sati (s 5).

Special Courts, equivalent to sessions courts, are to be convened for the trial of offences under this Act with judges of equal powers (s 9).

All such cases are to be tried without delay, there being required reasons to be furnished if trials are adjourned beyond the next day (s 12 (3)).

The onus of proof of innocence rests with the accused (s 16). No person who had abetted the commission of sati may inherit the estate, either whole or even in part, of the deceased woman (s 18).

The enactment of the law is a good step taken by the Government but mere enactment of the law is not enough. The acquittal of all accused involved in Roop Kunwar Sati case by a trial court of Rajasthan in spite of clear evidences has made a question mark on the success of the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act,1987. Not only this; the trial court took a very long period of 9 years approximate in spite of clear provisions for early proceedings under Section 12 (3) of the Act.

The Act unfortunately does not take into consideration two important facts:

The first is that the widow is a victim of her social environment and pressures, treating her instead as a criminal.

The second is that funds for the glorification of sati are often donated not by individuals but by corporate entities for publicity purposes or tax evasions.

However, prior to the enactment of this Act, in similar cases of sati, the accused were held liable for the offence of abetment of suicide under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.

According to Ninad D. Seth, instead of outlawing sati, the Government should try and bring about a social transformation so that people abhor such acts. He has observed: "To root out the evil practice of Sati, it is necessary to understand the sentiments behind it.



Alas, the state has chosen the easy way out by legislating instead of creating conditions for social transformation.”

Actually, the society should change mental attitudes towards widows. Even in contemporary society, mostly, widows give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments, dyed clothes, eating two meals a day and applying collyrium to her eyes. They wear white clothes, curb their anger and sleep on the ground. A conference of widows, held in April, 1994 in Bangalore organised jointly by Marty Chen of the Harvard Institute for International Development and Jean Dreze of the London School of Economics shows some consciousness among widows about their rights. The one recurrent demand from the widows at the conference was a house of their own, either natal or marital. They wanted absolute rights over productive resources land, water and as importantly agricultural implements. Many of the participants in conference said that if shelter and social security were assured, they could live without a man. Now, we have stepped in twenty first century. There is a need of more and more consciousness in this regard if we want to save the lives of innocent females at least in the coming age.

In *Gaurav Jain v. Union of India* (AIR 1997 SC3021), the Supreme Court has given comprehensive instructions to the government for the rescue and rehabilitation of the fallen women and their children. For better rehabilitation, it is necessary to provide them with dignity of person, means of livelihood and socio-economic empowerment. Economic rehabilitation is one of the most important factors that can prevent such practice. It is also necessary to enroll all these persons in re-socialization programmes that provide vocational training and psychotherapy.

It is a testimony to an orthodox society's inhumanity that more than 16000 Bengali widows have been forced into lonely exile and lives of utter destitution in the Hindu pilgrimage centres of Mathura, Vrindavan and Varanasi. The irony is that this mass banishment, which started during the British period, continues even today, particularly from the State of West Bengal. A large number of Hindu women, both young and old, have been forced to leave their homes and neighbourhoods for reasons which are not always related to the search for God. The Calcutta-based Women's Development Undertaking is right in asserting that following the death of their husbands, widows are often ousted from their homes by male relatives conspiring to grab land and property rightfully belonging to them by inheritance. Instances of even sons and sons-in-law doing this to their mothers and mothers-in-law are not as rare as one would like to think. And the entire brutal exercise is sought to be camouflaged by the utterly cynical and revolting rationalization that most women "want" to live the last years of their lives in search of spiritual peace and salvation. The argument that women can find salvation only in starvation, homelessness and bitter solitude, that too in old age, is, to say the least, utterly specious. Besides, which religious doctrine prescribes that young girls, some merely in their teens when widowed, be pushed into begging or prostitution while waiting for death in lanes of these famous religious towns?

Despite legislation to safeguard Hindu women's inheritance rights, many of them continue to be deprived of latter because of their ignorance or inability to stand up to

pressure from male members of their families. Exile and deprivation of property are just one part of the wider deprivation to which widows continue to be subjected in many parts. Though the obnoxious practice of sati has been prohibited by law, widows are still made to wear white dress in many homes, as they are made to shun all enjoyment and pleasure, stay away from social life and festivities and, of course, observe abstinence. Even when they are not banished, they are often compelled to live isolated lives and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by male members of their families. In fact the women, whose husbands have died, have the right to live full lives. It needs to be driven home with greater emphasis than hitherto and simultaneously; governments and women's organisations must ensure that women are able to assert their rights. Only then will the exiling of widows and other atrocities perpetrated on women end.

## Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Violence against women is a global problem. Violence against women manifests itself as rape, molestation, stripping, kidnapping and abduction, domestic violence including wife battery, dowry harassment, dowry death, cruelty to women driving them to commit suicide or other forms of murder like female foeticide and sati. A Convention on the Elimination Of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 18, 1979. The Convention came into force in the year 1981. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. India has ratified the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) a few years ago.

### Definition of "Discrimination against Women"

Although the International Bill of Human Rights laid down a comprehensive set of rights to which all persons, including women are entitled, additional means for protecting the human rights of women were considered as necessary because the mere fact of their 'humanity' has not been sufficient to guarantee women the protection of their rights. The preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women explains that, despite the existence of other instruments, women still do not have equal rights with men. Discrimination against Women continues to exist in every society. Article 1 of the CEDAW defines the term 'Discrimination Against Women' as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of humans rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

State parties to the Convention condemned discrimination against women in all forms (Article 2 ,CEDAW) and agreed to pursue by all appropriate means to eliminate discrimination against women and, to this end they undertook:

To embody the principle of equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein;  
To adopt appropriate legislative and other-measures prohibiting all discrimination against women;  
To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men;  
To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women;  
To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise;  
To repeal all national penal provisions which contribute discrimination against women.

### Implementation procedure

Article 17 of the Convention made a provision for the establishment of a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the purpose of considering the progress made in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. Thus, the Committee acts as a monitoring system to oversee the implementation of the CEDAW. The Committee shall report annually to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council on its activities and may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of reports and information received from the State Parties (Article 18 CEDAW).

A Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was established in the year 1981 when the Convention entered into force (Article 18 CEDAW).

### Optional Protocol to Convention on Women

CEDAW did not provide for an individual complaint system. In order to fulfill this deficiency the General Assembly on October 7, 1999 adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The 21 Articles Protocol shall come into force when it has been ratified by ten States. On September 7, 2000, the Protocol had 9 State Parties.

In addition to the above Convention (CEDAW) three conferences have been held during the U.N. sponsored International Women's Decade (1976-1985) Mexico City, 1975, Copenhagen, 1980, and Nairobi, 1985; and the Beijing Conference, 1995. 39<sup>th</sup> session of CEDAW 23 July 2007. These Conferences and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) could not achieve the desired result in view of the fact that women's human rights are still disregarded and violated worldwide, in different ways and varying degrees.

### Conclusion

It is most unfortunate the present Indian Government has dropped the move for a stringent sati laws under the pressure of her own cabinet ministers. In any other civilized society, this would be called murder but still in India the act of murdering widows is

traditional rituals. It is astonished that country's inability to cross political and fundamentalist barriers in straightforward and non-confusing matters of human rights such as dowry and Sati.

India is a signatory of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, meaning that, along with other issues, slavery is prohibited by law, and yet, in the form of widows, there are millions of slaves existing in India today - innocent victims who have no way of defending themselves - and no longer an "escape" through "sati" - because society has come to accept their miserable plight as -- "all part of our Tradition and Culture ". For those who abuse widows, it is a Vulture's culture. It would seem that males have not only used their extra physical strength to dominate women, but also their use of religion as a very powerful weapon.

Though, the provisions of the Sati Act, CEDAW, and Optional Protocol must be enforced in its true spirit, it appears that certain amendments in Sati Act are also required as already discussed above .Social awakening is need of the hour. Literacy among the women is necessary. Not only this, the women also must come forward to achieve the goal. Only then, ray of hope to save the lives of the innocent women can be seen.

The Indian Constitution is actually far more liberal than those of many nations which have been governed by "democratic" systems for many years. India has produced a present female President, a female Prime Minister, female Governors, female Chief Ministers, High Court judges, university professors, surgeons, airline and Air-Force fighter pilots, to name only a few areas where women have been able to claim an equal place with the male species, however, in general, and especially when it comes to women of "lower" (yet with equal potential ) rank in society - those of "low" caste communities - women have a long way to go to reach the full human potential for which they were ordained.

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