

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE
WIDOWS IN THE HOLY CITY OF PURI**

-- FINAL REPORT --

Submitted to:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For generations women in India have been regarded as one of the most disadvantaged sections of the society. The low status of the women can be traced back to post-vedic era when women were debarred from many socio-religious functions and depending upon certain circumstances they were regarded as un-pure. Subsequently, more restrictions were put on women. But somehow, this low status of women increased and for women relating to lower castes like sudras there were several taboos placed on them.

Subsequently, widows were started to be seen as evil across all the social classes. Several strict taboos were placed on them relating to food and socio-religious behaviour. Somewhere in the medieval period the heinous practice of sati was started in some parts of Rajputana and later spread to many parts of the country. Appalled by this pathetic situation many socio-religious movements were launched to abolish sati and advocating widow remarriage. But somehow even after more than one and half centuries nothing much has changed for the widows who are shunned at socio-religious functions and taboos on their food and dress still continues.

The condition of the widows in rural areas is even more pathetic. After the death of husbands many times they are driven out of their homes and left to fend for themselves. In many cases these widows who are driven out of their homes often land up in religious places. The condition of widows in Vrindaban, Varanasi, Mathura are well documented and researched upon. They are living in a very difficult condition. Similarly, in Orissa many widows land up in Puri city, one of the most religious places in India. Not much is known about their lives and their socio-economic conditions of these widows. So an attempt was made to make an exploratory study to know the condition of widows in Puri with support from Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India.

This study was conducted based on scientific methods. I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India for giving us an opportunity to make a detailed study on this very important topic. I am also thankful the Collector and District Magistrate of Puri who provided all support in conducting the research project. The District Social Welfare Officer, Puri also provided vital information regarding various schemes and programmes that are being implemented for the widows. I am thankful to him. I also extend my deep sense of gratitude to the Jagannath Temple Administration, Puri for allowing to make observations of the widows in the temple and interact with them. I am thankful to the manager and in-charges of various Ashramas, Mathas, Swadhar and Short-Stay Homes in and around Puri for sharing their experience. Last, but not the least, I am thankful to the project team who have done a wonderful job for bringing out this report.

Lastly, I hope that this report will result in some concrete action for the welfare of the widows who are leading the life of poverty and impoverishment.

**Kuntala Kumari Acharya
Nilachal Nari Seba Samity**

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

In a patriarchal society like India women are one of the most disadvantaged groups who are denied the basic rights by the society. The women belonging to the marginalized communities like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes are doubly disadvantaged. First, they are disadvantaged because they belong to marginalized section of the society and second they are disadvantaged because they are women. The problem gets worse in case of a widow, especially if a women loses her husband at a very young age. In that scenario, the women is looked upon as a burden by the entire family and much worse she is forced to lead a life of a recluse. Even the mourning of the death of a son lasts only a few days or a few months, the widow is condemned to mourn his death for life. Strict social customs and rituals are imposed on them to wash the sins of being a widow. Gone are the days, when a widow was forced to sit on the pyres of her parting husband (except some sporadic instances). Even though there are legal protection for inheritance of property and remarriage these are seem to be on paper rather than on actual practice. The problems of widows is almost identical throughout the South Asian countries with the Hindu society being the most orthodox and very harsh on the widows keeping in mind this wretched condition of the widows, there was a specific declaration for the widows which runs as -

“The declaration of **South Asian Conference Capacity Building of Marginalized Women: Widow**

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We, the delegates and participants of the First South Asian Conference on widows with a South Asian focus, wish to draw the attention of the **Governments and Civil Society of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Srilanka, UN and its systems** to the conditions of widows in the region and the urgent need for action.

We want to focus attention on the large number of widows in the region due to poverty, disease, wars, armed conflicts, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, ethnic strife, natural and man made disasters and the demographic tilt towards aging women.

We want to draw the attention of Government to the impact of these violations that have marginalized widows into an **invisible community**, and ignored their vital contribution to society. Neither Governments nor civil society has created adequate infrastructure for their physical, social and economic dignity.

As a result of their marginalized status widows are subjected to:

Social Exclusion: Manifested through oppressive cultural practices, traditions, so called religious sanctions, and the gulf between precept and practice.

Economic Deprivation: Neglect, extreme poverty, inaccessibility of education and employment opportunities, inability of accessing legal and administrative systems, and rigid patriarchal norms.

Physical and Psychological Victimization: Customary practices of treating widows as objects, commodities, and burdens, and consequentially their poor access to nutrition and health resources, and their subjection to physical, mental and sexual abuse.

We strongly condemn:

- Such social, cultural, traditional and solaced religious practices that systematically oppress widows.
- The patriarchy underpinning the formulation and enforcement of such laws and customs that perpetuate the violation of the human rights of widows and bar them from inheritance, control over property and ownership of land.
- The victimization, exploitation and neglect of widows
- Armed conflict as a means to resolve disputes that lead to high incidence of widowhood in the region.
- We recommend that:
 - Customs, practices and traditions that discriminate against widows be abolished by law
 - Action is taken against any perpetrators of practices that violate the physical, social, and human dignity of widows.
 - Legal reforms and reviews are undertaken to ensure that widows get their just share of inheritance.
 - Government policies mainstream widows through social security and economic empowerment schemes.
 - The human rights of widows are reflected in all international instruments.
 - Governments, civil society organizations and media of the entire region and the UN system work together in a concerted endeavor to ensure that widows are able to live a life of human dignity.
 - All religious leaders make a sensitive call to eliminate all discrimination of widows and to encourage their inclusion in all religious and social rituals.

On this day, we the delegates of the conference "Capacity Building of Marginalized Women: Widows" held in Delhi on 1st to 3rd Feb. 2002 come together in unison of purpose to initiate the **South Asian Alliance for Widows.**"

This Declaration says it all regarding the plight of women in India and especially in the religious places. The widows are subjected

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to all sorts of exploitation beginning at home. More often than not the widows are regarded as a curse on the family and is not welcome. How can one explain that a widowed mother is not expected to go near her son/daughter during his/her marriage lest it bring ill luck to the newly wed!

Social Stigma:

The problem of widowhood starts with gender itself. A daughter in India is not for keeps, she is what is called '*Paraya Dhan*', or someone else's property. As she marries, she becomes the property of her in-laws family and when the husband dies, it is them who can decide what to do with her. "If the husband dies and there is property, the family in law will be inclined to throw her out because of it. If she is young, because she poses a sexual threat", says Deepali Bhunot, co-author of a study on the widows of Vindravan.

There are 33 million widows in India, it being the country with the largest recorded number of widows in the world. 54% of women over 60 are widows, as are 12% of women aged 35-39*.

"According to the Hindu religious texts, the father is the head of the household," says Jyotsna Chatterji, Director of the Joint's Women's Programme (JWP), an NGO working on the empowerment of women. "The woman is a wife, a sister, a daughter and mother and is dependent on the man in the family. Without a man, she is nothing. Widows just don't have a place in this society."

A widow, in fact, is seen as a woman who failed to safeguard her husband's life. As her presence is thought to bring bad luck, she is kept away from all important ceremonies and festivities. Often her head will be shaven, her bangles [bracelets] removed and

must she go dressed in white garments. These stringent social customs are especially observed among the upper castes.

But as times change, and India moves towards modernity, Puri is no longer only attracting widows. The charitable institutions in Puri also start to attract many destitute women and single mothers. Moreover, the present rise of Hindu fundamentalism in society is pushing society further back into the traditional Brahmanic [the highest caste in India] caste structure. This in combination with new Western values coming into the country makes that a lot of women do not want to comply with this traditional gender role any longer.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Being one of the most important religious places of Hindus, many widows flock to this holy city of Puri for 'solace'. But the fact is that most of these women are driven out of their homes or made to leave their homes after the death of their husbands. As in the Indian social systems there is no rights of woman after the death of her husband. This is one of the main reasons why many widows, especially belonging to the poorer section of the society are driven out of homes. But, this is too simplistic a view. The stigma attached to widowhood is extremely acute. However, there is no systematic study to know the reasons for widows flocking to the religious place of Puri and what is their living condition in this holy city.

From some sketchy details which appear as news items in the local newspapers, it seems that the actual life pattern and livelihood system of the widows remain as a mystery to many. They do not want to share their details regarding their social exclusion or how they spend their time. But there is near unanimity among those working for these widows regarding their

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poor socio-economic condition even though there was no specific data to prove their existing condition.

As a Puri city-based organization, **NNSS** has certain idea regarding their work and time spending pattern. Many of these widows depend upon *khei*, a system of free meal to widows registered with the Sri Jagannath Temple Administration. However, they get only one meal during the day. For other meals either they have to work to earn their bread or they have to go hungry. The inmates who live in *Ashramas/Mathas* are supposed to work including cleaning the compound, utensils, preparing food etc. for their survival. These widows live in about 130 *Ashramas/Mathas* spread over the district. But this stay is limited to only one month of Kartika which is a very holy month for the widows of Orissa. Not much is known what transpires inside these institutions. But from time to time there are allegations of exploitation by the owners of these *Ashramas/Mathas* in the form of physical labour.

Many women are found to be staying in Swadhar Homes, Short-Stay Homes run by voluntary organisations. **NNSS** is also running a Swadhar as well as Short-Stay Home at Puri city and its vicinity. The widows who come for shelter in these centers tell their harrowing stories after the death of their husbands. Most of the time they accuse their relatives for their ills and sufferings.

Many a times there are many widows who cannot find enough space in these homes or sometimes they are not willing to stay in these homes due to various reasons which are not exactly known. Though in Puri City several voluntary organisations are running homes specifically designed for a comfortable and secure stay of the widows, still these homes are not filled to the capacity. So it is pertinent to know the exact reason why many of these widows are not willing to stay in these homes.

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1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of the proposed study is to undertake an extensive investigation regarding the socio-economic condition of the widows living in Puri City. The specific objectives are -

- To undertake an in-depth study of the socio-economic background of the widows of the Puri City
- To know regarding the push or pull factors forcing them to come to the temple city.
- To investigate regarding the pattern of journey including their demographic profile.
- To ascertain their pattern of work and engagement pattern
- To investigate the living condition of these widows
- To ascertain the job opportunities available for their absorption or rehabilitation.
- To ascertain the response of the local authority and business houses to improve the rehabilitation avenues.
- To explore opportunities where they can spend a more honorable life
- To recommend actions for their suitable rehabilitation.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR HYPOTHESES:

The specific research questions that were addressed are –

- ☞ Most of these widows are pushed out of their homes due to social stigma and to devoid her of her property rights.
- ☞ Social stigma force these widows to lead a life of exclusion.
- ☞ Given a chance most of these women will opt for a more normal life as opposed to the strict adherence to social rules and obligations of a life of a widow.
- ☞ There are ample opportunity available for suitable rehabilitation of these women.

1.4 METHODOLOGY:

As it was intended to be an exploratory study, the methodology used was an investigative one using a number or research tools

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including desk research, administering open-ended questionnaires, observation schedules and Focus Group Discussions etc.

Secondary Source:

Data for the study was collected both from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources of data included mainly in the form of desk research. The research executives scanned the books and journals which dealt extensively on the widows in general and the newspaper articles published on the widows. Besides, there are certain other passing references found in some writings in Oriya literary works. These were researched comprehensively to understand the co-relation between the widows and their stringent religious practices. An effort was also made to find any reference regarding the importance of Puri for the widows who prefer to spend their lives in this city rather than in their own home. This desk research provided with valuable inputs on the condition of widows in various era of Orissan history and how the practices have evolved over the period of time.

Primary Source:

Data from primary sources was collected through interview schedule for the widows living in different places. For interviewing purposes inmates living in *Ashramas/Mathas*, *Swadhar/Short Stay Homes* and those living independently were sampled. As part of this exercise 947 widows were interviewed through the semi-structured schedules. To plug the gaps in findings six Focus Groups Discussions were held with the widows at different places including the *Swadhar Homes*, *Ashramas* etc. These group discussions were very useful in getting valuable inputs on various aspects of widowhood and how they are coping with the stress.

Another very important tool which was used was the observation schedule. Some of these widows were the target audience for observing their daily activities at their living place as well as their place of work. This in depth observation was helpful in qualifying the data gathered from primary sources as well as helped in gathering unbiased data regarding their daily routine and time-spending pattern.

1. *Universe of study*

The universe of the study is fairly large. According to estimation there are at least 6,000 widows living in the Puri city spread across 130 *ashramas/mathas*, around six Homes for destitute women and more than 50 private facilities (mainly residing in common mess).

2. *Sampling frame/Sampling Procedure*

As it is not possible to cover all the widows. So an attempt was made to cover at least 15% of the estimated number of widows living in and around Puri. The sampling plan was changed due to the fact that most of the widows are found not to stay at any particular places during the course of study. So a random methodology was used in which 947 widows were interviewed consisting of those widows coming to the temple in the month of Kartika for observance of Kartika rituals. About one third of the widows were interviewed after the month of Kartika who stay back even after this holy month. So during the course of the study 947 widows belonging to various age groups and various socio-economic background were interviewed. Consciously an attempt was made to exclude those widows who come to Puri exclusively to observe the *Kartika Vrata*

for one month because they were not peculiar to the problems faced by the widows in Puri city who stay for fairly longer period of time. (The interview schedule is attached at the annexures).

3. Apart from administering these questionnaires Focus Group Discussions were also held. Ten such FGDs were conducted spread over all these dwelling places.

Units of observation and sample-size.

As pointed out the time spending pattern and their socio-economic is still not clear as they are not very forthcoming in sharing their experience. So the observation tool was used to gather data more elaborately and in an empirical way. During this process 12 target widows were made the units of observation.

1.5 Data processing:

From the primary data collection process a huge number of data was gathered which was both qualitative as well as quantitative. The quantitative data were back-checked for authentication, validated and then entered in the computer. For easy analysis quantitative data will be entered in Excel Forms. Similarly, the qualitative data generated from observation schedule and FGD were transcribed. An advanced software package, SPSS package was used for analyzing the data. To make the report user-friendly various tables, charts and photographs has been provided extensively.

1.6 PRESENTATION:

After extensive research and analysis the data, the report has been prepared with utmost care and every attempt has been made to make it reader-friendly and self-explanatory. Maximum

possible number of charts, tables and photographs have been provided commensurate with the data to make the report a readable one. The entire report has been divided into various chapters and sub-chapters keeping in mind the need for elaboration.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW:

There are various scholars and academicians who have done some pioneering work in the field of Widows in general. But not much work is done in the condition of widows in religious places in particular. During our desk research we only came across a couple of research papers done on the condition of widows in holy places of Vrindaban, Mathura and Varanasi, but none in the holy city of Puri. A few prominent works done by acclaimed authors are reviewed below which served as the base for the present study.

1.7.1 Living Death : Trauma of Widowhood in India/edited by V. Mohini Giri.

New Delhi, Gyan, 2002, 263 p., tables, ISBN 81-212-0794-0.

This is a masterpiece on the present condition of widows which has deep bearing on the socio-economic condition of widows in Indian sub-continent where the discrimination against them is still rife.

"This marginalisation cuts across religion, caste and class barriers to make it an almost universal phenomenon in India, though the dimension and the degree may vary in rigidity. The book while giving an overview of the status of widows, focusses on the marginalisation peculiar to individual regions and specific kind of widows.

The book deals with some very thought provoking articles edited by one of the best known activists on women issues Ms. Mohini Giri. Some of the important articles which are compiled into this book are Trauma of Taboos and Tribulations of widowhood in India by Meera Khanna, Widows in India: Today and Yesterday by R.K. Upadhyay, Implementation of Widow's Rights by Leila Seth, Widows in India: a Psycho-Social Analysis by Vasantha R. Patri, Indian Widowhood: The Silent Cry by Mohini Giri, Broken Bangles by Mohini Giri, Widows: The Discriminated Victims by Mohini Giri, The Plight of Brahmin Widows in Kerala by Usha Venkitakrishnan, Widows of Vrindavan: A Study Ishita Majumdar, Deprivation of widow's property rights by Seema Sakhre and The Rigour of Tradition for Widows by Sarala Gopilar.

It is indeed a rich and comprehensive compilation of contributions by eminent social scientists who have made even an academic assessment of impact of recent armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and Kargil on those who bore the brunt of endless mental and physical agony.

Undoubtedly the assessment of each author is unique and scholarly. The whole book is very thought provoking and is very useful for teachers, scholars, students and social activists, intellectuals and social scientists both in India and abroad.

**1.7.2 Empowerment of Widows : A Three Generation Study
By K. Malathi.**

New Delhi, Serials Publications, 2008, ISBN 81-8387-131-0.

The widows are the neglected and the voiceless segment of the society. The oppressive traditional society has been booking down upon the widows after the demise of their husbands. They are denied even the basic human rights like attending ceremonies, writing letters to the friends and relatives. They are

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provided low protein food and they have to be confined to backyards of the house and they are forbidden from appearing in public.

Several crusaders have fought for the rights of widows. Social reform movements started in various parts of India. Such social uprisings have led to the adoption of various legislative measures including the Abolition of Sati Act, the Hindu widows Re-Marriage Act etc. Various Welfare Schemes for the betterment of widows have been introduced in Tamil Nadu since the launching of the Five Year Plans. Several Welfare Organisations have been working for the uplift of widows. How far have these legislations, reforms, social activism and welfare schemes brought about the transformation away the Naidu widows, is the topic of the research.

The major findings of the study are quite revealing. Less than half of the respondents alone could take independent decisions. The rest of the respondents had to depend on others to take decisions. The attitude of widows to various factors like remarriage, employment, participation in politics, education after widowhood, child adoption etc. are positive. The attitude of others towards widows particularly the parents in law, brothers-in-law and other women towards them was negative.

Some of the recommendations like compulsory education for women, employment to widows, issue of land rates in the name of widows, formation of SHG for widows will bring about drastic change in the life of the widows. The study concludes that empowerment of widows depends on education and employment.

1.7.3 Problems of Widows in India by P. Adinarayana Reddy

New Delhi, Sarup, 2004.

In India widowhood is not just transition from one marital status to another after the death of the husband. Entering into widowhood is more hazardous, painful and humiliating to women than to a widower because of the discrimination, ritual sanctions of the society against widows. With the result, widows in India not only suffer with social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological consequences, loneliness and in many cases deprivation causing emotional disturbances and imbalance. This book is the result of the first seminar organised by the Institute of Development Research Alternatives, Tirupati. In this book several scholars have voiced their opinion on issues related to widowhood and stigma attached to it. Some of the more notable papers in the book are Status of Indian widows : Historical Account and Contemporary Scenario by Vignesh N. Bhat, Empowerment of the Deprived--the Role of Legislations and NGO's by Anil G. Mudbidri, Status of Widowhood by K. Parthasarathy and S. Jayalakshmi, Empowering Widows for development by A. Sivagami and M. Thamilrasan, Problems of Widows-- A study by D. Uma Devi. Each of these research papers tries to have deep insight regarding the problems of widows in the contemporary world and how they can be addressed in the proper perspective.

1.7.4 Socio-Economic Status of Widows by K. Padmanabhan

New Delhi, Serials, 2006.

Women, half of the world population, have been subjected to various kinds of harassment. Traditional society looked at women as a prey, motivator, temptor, therefore, they were secluded, excluded and attached social stigma. The society has been very harsh towards women particularly widows, who lost

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their husbands and live with out re-marriage. They have been ill-treated, insulted, molested and considered them as 'amangalis' and bad woman. The cruelty to widows has been very severe if they belong to socially and economically well-off.

This is book is an in-depth study is about the socio-economic status of widows of the Hindu Mudaliar community of Tamil Nadu, the so called socially and economically advanced community, declared by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Mudaliar is an umbrella name for various sub-castes like Agamudaiar, Tuluva Vellala and Chengunthar Mudali. Though the Mudaliar community spreads all over Tamil Nadu and in other states, they are concentrated in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, Vellore district has been chosen for the present study. The new approach, three generation study, has helped to understand the change in the status of widows over three generations. The classification of widows into rural urban, has brought out the spatial difference in their socio-economic status.

The findings of the study are revealing and exhilarating. The mean age of marriage of the young widows was higher compared to the middle aged and old generations widows. The literacy was found to be higher among young widows compared to middle and old widows. Therefore, the young widows were literate and skilled compared to the old widow. Marriage among kinship and with in the community was very common. More than half of the respondents were with our any occupation, as a result, with out any source of income and their dependency ratio was very high. Only those who are literate are able to take decisions. The only benefit received by the widows from the welfare programmes of the government was the old age pension, which was received by 50 percent of the widows. The stark reality is

that the widows were not aware of the various welfare programmes of the government.

The study has made few recommendations with a view to empower the widows in particular and women in general. Universal education, training in specified trade, extension of information to all the widows and women through mass media, women's associations, schools and post-offices. These measures would relieve the pain of widows, who are subjected to social, economic physical, psychological and mental agony. It would empower the widows, change their attitude social norms as well as transform the attitude of others towards widows.

**1.7.5 Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action
Edited by Martha Alter Chen. 1998.**

"There are more than 33 million widows in India, comprising about 8 per cent of the total female population of the country. Despite this, little is known about the actual living conditions of widows, about the quiet deprivations they experience on a daily basis. They are rarely mentioned in the literature on poverty, in public debates on social policy or even by the women's movement. This important volume of original essays and case studies is aimed at bringing about a better understanding of the social and economic conditions of widows, to focus attention on widowhood as a social problem and to promote public action and policies in support of widows in India.

"The first three papers explore the dominant ideological construction of widowhood in India as well as variations in local customary norms. The next section, on the demographics of widowhood, includes a significant paper by P.N. Mari Bhat which eloquently demonstrates that mortality rates among widows in the 45 plus age group are 85% higher than those for married women in the same age group.

"The volume then turns to four key areas for public policy and action in support of widows: property rights, social security, employment and social identity. The contributors highlight how customary law and institutionalized gender inequality combine to drastically restrict the human, physical and financial resources available to widows, thus making them economically vulnerable. They also discuss governmental and non-governmental efforts to 'rehabilitate' widows.

"Weaving together analytic essays, hard data and poignant case studies, this comprehensive and pioneering volume on the social and economic status of widows in India will be of interest to those in the fields of gender studies, sociology, demography and social policy, as well as NGOs and policy-makers."

**1.7.6 Status And Migration Pattern of Widows In
Vrindavan
SikhSpectrum.com Monthly
Issue No.8, January 2003
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According to the 1991 Census of India, there are 33 million widows in India. This is 8 per cent of the total female population, or one out of every 13 women. Large section of these widows are living in religious point like Vrindavan, Varanasi, Mathura, Hardwar, Puri and mobility to these religious point is a on going process. These places are not only having a high population of widows but also accommodate many destitute women.

Different justifications have been given for the exodus like "dedication to the almighty" and search of *Moksha*. These widows/destitute women are living in very oppressive conditions, depending mainly on begging, singing *bhajans* and prostitution for survival. It is observed that West Bengal has earned the

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dubious status of having the highest rate in the exodus of old and helpless women.

The present study was aimed at understanding the different factors causing the migration of widows/destitute women from West Bengal to Vrindavan and the adjacent area of Gokul, Barsana, Goverdhan and Radhakund collectively called Brijbhumi. Based on scientific sampling the present study offers some very interesting findings.

The report highlights that the previous assumption that women migrate to a place like Vrindavan primarily because it is perceived to be a religious place giving religious solace is incorrect. The findings reveal that only 25% of the women migrating to Brijbhumi were doing so with the desire to become a devotee. For the rest of the migrants the reasons for migration they are mainly related to the family dynamics and social and economic factors. - Large section of the respondents said they had moved here because they were not able to adjust with members of their family like daughter-in-law or parents-in-laws. Large section of the respondents said they had moved here because they were not able to adjust with members of their family like daughter-in-law or parents-in-laws.

The study goes on to point out that most of the migrants had come to Vrindavan alone. There are many women staying here alone and without any familial support in any form. Nearly 80% women had no contact with their family. Many of the women staying alone are under the mercy of the all-powerful *pandas*.

Another interesting aspect of the study is that in Vrindavan nearly 80% of the widows have come from West Bengal, (especially the district of Nadia -- nearly 22%). Other districts are Murshidbad, North and South 24 Pargana and Purulia. Many Bengali women

migrating to Vrindavan come from Vaishnav families. Historically bengalis from the Vaishnav tradition have had strong ties with Vrindavan. After W Bengal migration from states like Orissa and Bihar is prominent.

Bhajanashrams like the Bhagvan Bhajanashram are playing a lead role in the lives of the widows and destitute women. The findings of the study show that nearly 78% of the women relied on *Bhagwan bhajanashram* either entirely or partially for their survival.

Another disturbing observation from this study was sexual exploitation is widely prevalent. This is due to the general phenomenon of insecurity of women who have to stay alone and without any support. The *sevadasi* system, very much a part of institutional religion has been mentioned by many studies in the past. According to this system the women are expected to serve God, the priests and the pilgrims in every way possible, so as to attain salvation. Not many respondents directly referred to this being their prime religious belief actuating sexual subjugation.

Apart from *Sewadasi* phenomenon, to whatever extent, other forms of sexual exploitation also exist. Sex trade in Vrindavan is flourishing. Interview with local gynecologist and doctors reveal that there are frequent cases of abortions and STD amongst destitute women or widows.

The study also points out that an entire network of traffickers is based here. They traffic girls from West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar and sell them in Haryana, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh.

For the widows the sources of sustenance and income are singing *bhajans*, begging for alms and prostitution. The most prevalent form of income is begging. Singing bhajans in the

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bhajanashrams for eight hours each day results in some food or money. The average monthly income varies between Rs 350 and Rs 400. Government help in the form of pensions or grants is very meager and available to a very few.

Based on the findings of the study, one can say that the overall status of the widows in Vrindavan is far from satisfactory. Only 30 % are living in free accommodation and their living conditions at best are very inadequate. They fall ill frequently and have to visit the Government hospital or the local Rama Krishna Mission hospitals because medicines are free.

After analyzing the various problems that the widows are facing it goes on to suggest a few steps to improve the overall socio-economic conditions of the widows in Vrindaban. It says any strategy to rehabilitate the widows in Vrindavan has to be two pronged.

One is to improve their living conditions within Vrindavan as most widows have shown reluctance in moving out from Vrindavan. It was observed that 90% had no desire to go back to their native place. Due to apathy there is an air of surrender amongst the widows. Their present condition is sublimed to be the wishes of Radha rani - a common response is *Radha Rani ki yahi iccha hai to ayisa hi hoga*. (If it is Radha Rani's desire then so be it.)

Bhagvan Bhajan ashrams should become more sensitive to the condition of the widows and destitute and take steps to improve their lot -- nearly 70% of them showed a willingness to improve their situation provided workable options become available. Nearly 40% of the widows had some vocational skill, which have to be utilized in income generation.

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Secondly if this issue needs to be addressed in its totality, one has to strike at the root of the problem. A situation has to be created in which women will not be forced to leave their homes and move miles away just for survival. This will involve intensive social intervention by GO's, NGO's, welfare organisations and involvement of even enlightened religious heads a vital factor will be to disseminate in the areas from where migration originates the pathetic conditions of the widows/destitute women who move to Brijbhumi.

These important books, articles and the local dailies gave important insight for the present study to look at the problems of the widows in the religious city of Puri in a more holistic manner and come up with a practical solution.

CHAPTER - II

MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL SYSTEM IN ORISSA

2.0 IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY:

In any social analysis it is extremely important to understand the family system and its basic characteristics. The family forms the basic unit of social organization and it is difficult to imagine how human society could function without it. The family has been seen as a universal social institution an inevitable part of human society. According to Burgess and Lock the family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting with each other in their respective social role of husband and wife, mother and father, brother and sister creating a common culture. G. P. Murdock defines the family *as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children own or adopted of the sexually co-habiting adults.*

Nimkoff says that *family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child or of a man or woman alone with children.* According to Maclver, *family is a group defined by sex relationships sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.* Kingsley Davis describes *family as a group of persons whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another.* Malinowski opined that *the family is the institution within which the cultural traditions of a society is handed over to a newer generation.* This indispensable function could not be filled unless the relations to parents and children

were relations reciprocally of authority and respect. According to Talcott Parsons *families are factories which produce human personalities.*

2.1 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY:

Universality: There is no human society in which some form of the family does not appear. Malinowski writes the typical family a group consisting of mother, father and their progeny is found in all communities, savage, barbarians and civilized. The irresistible sex need, the urge for reproduction and the common economic needs have contributed to this universality.

Emotional basis: The family is grounded in emotions and sentiments. It is based on our impulses of mating, procreation, maternal devotion, fraternal love and parental care. It is built upon sentiments of love, affection, sympathy, cooperation and friendship.

Limited size: The family is smaller in size. As a primary group its size is necessarily limited. It is a smallest social unit.

Formative influence: The family welds an environment which surrounds trains and educates the child. It shapes the personality and moulds the character of its members. It emotionally conditions the child.

Nuclear position in the social structure: The family is the nucleus of all other social organizations. The whole social structure is built of family units.

Responsibility of the members: The members of the family has certain responsibilities, duties and obligations. Maclver points out that in times of crisis men may work and fight and die for their country but they toil for their families all their lives.

Social regulation: The family is guarded both by social taboos and by legal regulations. The society takes precaution to safeguard this organization from any possible breakdown.

2.2 FAMILY SYSTEM IN ORISSA:

In the state of Orissa the family system is very much emotionally tied and even today there is an emotional cord that binds the members of the family. Over the past few years the joint family system has given way to a nuclear family system. But even in such fragmentation the bond between the members remain intact in most cases.

2.3 MARRIAGE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT:

In India there is no greater event in a family than a wedding, dramatically evoking every possible social obligation, kinship bond, traditional value, impassioned sentiment, and economic resource. In the arranging and conducting of weddings, the complex permutations of Indian social systems best display themselves.

Marriage is deemed essential for virtually everyone in India. For the individual, marriage is the great watershed in life, marking the transition to adulthood. Generally, this transition, like everything else in India, depends little upon individual volition but instead occurs as a result of the efforts of many people. Even as one is born into a particular family without the exercise of any personal choice, so is one given a spouse without any personal preference involved. Arranging a marriage is a critical responsibility for parents and other relatives of both bride and groom. Marriage alliances entail some redistribution of wealth as well as building and restructuring social realignments, and, of course, result in the biological reproduction of families.

Some parents begin marriage arrangements on the birth of a child, but most wait until later. In the past, the age of marriage was quite young, and in a few small groups, especially in Rajasthan, children under the age of five are still united in marriage. In rural communities, prepuberty marriage for girls traditionally was the rule. In the late twentieth century, the age of marriage is rising in villages, almost to the levels that obtain in cities. Legislation mandating minimum marriage ages has been passed in various forms over the past decades, but such laws have little effect on actual marriage practices.

Essentially, India is divided into two large regions with regard to Hindu kinship and marriage practices, the north and the south. Additionally, various ethnic and tribal groups of the central, mountainous north, and eastern regions follow a variety of other practices. These variations have been extensively described and analyzed by anthropologists, especially Irawati Karve, David G. Mandelbaum, and Clarence Maloney.

Broadly, in the Indo-Aryan-speaking north, a family seeks marriage alliances with people to whom it is not already linked by ties of blood. Marriage arrangements often involve looking far afield. In the Dravidian-speaking south, a family seeks to strengthen existing kin ties through marriage, preferably with blood relatives. Kinship terminology reflects this basic pattern. In the north, every kinship term clearly indicates whether the person referred to is a blood relation or an affinal relation; all blood relatives are forbidden as marriage mates to a person or a person's children. In the south, there is no clear-cut distinction between the family of birth and the family of marriage. Because marriage in the south commonly involves a continuing exchange of daughters among a few families, for the married couple all relatives are ultimately blood kin. Dravidian terminology stresses

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the principle of relative age: all relatives are arranged according to whether they are older or younger than each other without reference to generation.

On the Indo-Gangetic Plain, marriages are contracted outside the village; sometimes even outside of large groups of villages, with members of the same caste beyond any traceable consanguineal ties. In much of the area, daughters should not be given into villages where daughters of the family or even of the natal village have previously been given. In most of the region, brother-sister exchange marriages (marriages linking a brother and sister of one household with the sister and brother of another) are shunned. The entire emphasis is on casting the marriage net ever-wider, creating new alliances. The residents of a single village may have in-laws in hundreds of other villages.

In most of North India, the Hindu bride goes to live with strangers in a home she has never visited. There she is sequestered and veiled, an outsider who must learn to conform to new ways. Her natal family is often geographically distant, and her ties with her consanguine kin undergo attenuation to varying degrees.

In central India, the basic North Indian pattern prevails, with some modifications. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, village exogamy is preferred, but marriages within a village are not uncommon. Marriages between caste-fellows in neighboring villages are frequent. Brother-sister exchange marriages are sometimes arranged, and daughters are often given in marriage to lineages where other daughters of their lineage or village have previously been wed.

In South India, in sharp contrast, marriages are preferred between cousins (especially cross-cousins, that is, the children of a brother and sister) and even between uncles and nieces

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(especially a man and his elder sister's daughter). The principle involved is that of return--the family that gives a daughter expects one in return, if not now, then in the next generation. The effect of such marriages is to bind people together in relatively small, tight-knit kin groups. A bride moves to her in-laws' home--the home of her grandmother or aunt--and is often comfortable among these familiar faces. Her husband may well be the cousin she has known all her life that she would marry.

Many South Indian marriages are contracted outside of such close kin groups when no suitable mates exist among close relatives, or when other options appear more advantageous. Some sophisticated South Indians, for example, consider cousin marriage and uncle-niece marriage outmoded.

Rules for the remarriage of widows differ from one group to another. Generally, lower-ranking groups allow widow remarriage, particularly if the woman is relatively young, but the highest-ranking castes discourage or forbid such remarriage. The most strict adherents to the nonremarriage of widows are Brahmans. Almost all groups allow widowers to remarry. Many groups encourage a widower to marry his deceased wife's younger sister (but never her older sister).

Almost all Indian children are raised with the expectation that their parents will arrange their marriages, but an increasing number of young people, especially among the college-educated, are finding their own spouses. So-called love marriages are deemed a slightly scandalous alternative to properly arranged marriages. Some young people convince their parents to "arrange" their marriages to people with whom they have fallen in love. This process has long been possible for Indians from the south and for Muslims who want to marry a particular cousin of the appropriate marriageable category. In the

upper classes, these semi-arranged love marriages increasingly occur between young people who are from castes of slightly different rank but who are educationally or professionally equal. If there are vast differences to overcome, such as is the case with love marriages between Hindus and Muslims or between Hindus of very different caste status, parents are usually much less agreeable, and serious family disruptions can result.

In much of India, especially in the north, a marriage establishes a structural opposition between the kin groups of the bride and groom--bride-givers and bride-takers. Within this relationship, bride-givers are considered inferior to bride-takers and are forever expected to give gifts to the bride-takers. The one-way flow of gifts begins at engagement and continues for a generation or two. The most dramatic aspect of this asymmetrical relationship is the giving of dowry.

In many communities throughout India, a dowry has traditionally been given by a bride's kin at the time of her marriage. In ancient times, the dowry was considered a woman's wealth--property due a beloved daughter who had no claim on her natal family's real estate--and typically included portable valuables such as jewelry and household goods that a bride could control throughout her life. However, over time, the larger proportion of the dowry has come to consist of goods and cash payments that go straight into the hands of the groom's family. In the late twentieth century, throughout much of India, dowry payments have escalated, and a groom's parents sometimes insist on compensation for their son's higher education and even for his future earnings, to which the bride will presumably have access. Some of the dowries demanded are quite oppressive, amounting to several years' salary in cash as well as items such as motorcycles, air conditioners, and fancy cars. Among some

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lower-status groups, large dowries are currently replacing traditional bride-price payments. Even among Muslims, previously not given to demanding large dowries, reports of exorbitant dowries are increasing.

The dowry is becoming an increasingly onerous burden for the bride's family. Ant-dowry laws exist but are largely ignored, and a bride's treatment in her marital home is often affected by the value of her dowry. Increasingly frequent are horrible incidents, particularly in urban areas, where a groom's family makes excessive demands on the bride's family--even after marriage--and when the demands are not met, murder the bride, typically by setting her clothes on fire in a cooking "accident." The groom is then free to remarry and collect another sumptuous dowry. The male and female in-laws implicated in these murders have seldom been punished.

Such dowry deaths have been the subject of numerous media reports in India and other countries and have mobilized feminist groups to action. In some of the worst areas, such as the National Capital Territory of Delhi, where hundreds of such deaths are reported annually and the numbers are increasing yearly, the law now requires that all suspicious deaths of new brides be investigated. Official government figures report 1,786 registered dowry deaths nationwide in 1987; there is also an estimate of some 5,000 dowry deaths in 1991. Women's groups sometimes picket the homes of the in-laws of burned brides. Some analysts have related the growth of this phenomenon to the growth of consumerism in Indian society.

Fears of impoverishing their parents have led some urban middle-class young women, married and unmarried, to commit suicide. However, through the giving of large dowries, the newly

wealthy are often able to marry their treasured daughters up the status hierarchy so reified in Indian society.

After marriage arrangements are completed, a rich panoply of wedding rituals begins. Each religious group, region, and caste has a slightly different set of rites. Generally, all weddings involve as many kin and associates of the bride and groom as possible. The bride's family usually hosts most of the ceremonies and pays for all the arrangements for large numbers of guests for several days, including accommodation, feasting, decorations, and gifts for the groom's party. These arrangements are often extremely elaborate and expensive and are intended to enhance the status of the bride's family. The groom's party usually hires a band and brings fine gifts for the bride, such as jewelry and clothing, but these are typically far outweighed in value by the presents received from the bride's side.

After the bride and groom are united in sacred rites attended by colorful ceremony, the new bride may be carried away to her in-laws' home, or, if she is very young, she may remain with her parents until they deem her old enough to depart. A prepubescent bride usually stays in her natal home until puberty, after which a separate consummation ceremony is held to mark her departure for her conjugal home and married life. The poignancy of the bride's weeping departure for her new home is prominent in personal memory, folklore, literature, song, and drama throughout India.

2.4 TYPES OF MARRIAGE:

The Hindu community has been giving great importance for marriage since time immemorial. From a sociological point of view there are different forms of marriage prevailing in the Hindu society. These are -

- **Brahma Vivaha** is where a father marries his daughter to a learned man of good moral character.
- **Asura Vivaha** is marriage by paying bride price.
- **Rakshasa Vivaha** is by capture or abduction without obtaining the consent of a girl or her parents.
- **Gandharva Vivaha** is based on mutual love.
- **Prajapatya Vivaha** is where no ceremony is performed but the groom is honoured.
- **Arsh Vivaha** is where the groom gives a pair of cattle or bull to the bride's father before the marriage.
- **Daiva Vivaha** is where the girl is given in marriage to a priest instead of dakshina or a gift.

2.5 MARRIAGE IN ORISSA

Even though the state of Orissa has a mixed population where there are Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward castes as well as upper caste Hindus live the marriage system is more or less uniform. Strictly speaking in sociological terms Brahma and Gandharva Vivaha are more prevalent. In some tribal societies there are a few other forms of marriage are found which are not different from the mainstream system. Even though there are similar form of marriage the rituals differ to a varied degree between regions, between communities and between castes as well. In the state of Orissa the women are looked with respect speaking in general terms. But over the period of time cases of women atrocities like dowry torture, wife beating, oppression of widows have been reported. But these cases of violence can be termed as exception, not rule.

2.6 THE HINDU MARRIAGE ACT, 1955

The marriages in India is governed by Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. The excerpt of the act is given below.

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This Act came into force from May 18, 1955 and applies to whole of India, except Jammu and Kashmir. The word Hindu in the Act includes Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and the Scheduled Castes.

The conditions for marriage between any two Hindus as provided in the Act are: (i) neither party has a spouse living; (ii) neither party is an idiot or lunatic; (iii) the groom must have completed eighteen years age and the bride fifteen years age. The amendment in the Act made in 1978 has raised this age to twenty-one years for boys and eighteen years for girls (iv) the parties should not be within the degrees of prohibited relationships, unless the custom permits the marriage between the two; (v) the parties should not be sapindas of each other unless the custom permits the marriage between the two; (vi) where the bride is under eighteen years of age and the groom is under twenty-one years of age the consent of her/his guardian in marriage must have been obtained.

The persons whose consent may be obtained in order of preference are: father, mother, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, brother paternal uncle, maternal, maternal grandmother and maternal uncle. No particular form of solemnization is prescribed by the Act. The parties are free to solemnize the marriage in accordance with the customary rites and ceremonies. The Act permits judicial separation as well as annulment of marriage.

Either party can seek judicial separation on any one of the four grounds; desertion for a continuous of two years, cruel treatment, leprosy, and adultery. The annulment of marriage may be on any one of the following four grounds: (i) the spouse must have been impotent at the time of marriage and continues to be so until the institution of the proceedings, (ii) party to the marriage was an

idiot or lunatic at the time of marriage, (iii) consent of the petitioner or of the guardian was obtained by force or fraud. However, the petition presented on this ground will not be entertained after one years of marriage, and (iv) the wife was pregnant by some person other than the petitioner at the time of marriage.

The dissolution of marriage may be on the grounds of adultery, conversion of religion, unsound mind, leprosy, venereal disease, renunciation, desertion for seven years, and cohabitation not resumed after two years after judicial separation. A wife may also apply for divorce if her husband had already a wife before marriage, and he is guilty of rape or bestiality. The 1986 amendment permits divorce on the ground of incompatibility and mutual consent also. The petition for dissolution of marriage can be submitted to the court only when three years have elapsed after marriage.

This period has, however, been reduced to one year after the 1986 amendment. The divorcees cannot remarry till one year elapses since the decree of divorce. The Act also provides for the maintenance allowance during judicial separation and alimony after divorce. Not only wife but also husband can also claim the maintenance allowances.

CHAPTER – III

WIDOWHOOD AND ITS STIGMATIZATION

“The little white lilies,
poor things,
gave me tender leaf
to wear, when I was young,
now my great husband is dead,
I eat at untimely evening hours
and the lilies give me lily seed,
a widow’s rice.”

3.0 WIDOWHOOD AS PERCEIVED THROUGH AGES

3.1 Position of Women and Widowhood during the Vedic Period

It is well known that Hindu society was organized on the basis of *varnashram dharma* which divided the people into a hierarchy of castes, each with its separate duties and distinctive way of life, and structured the lives of individuals according to a prescribed pattern. Theoretically, all Aryans belonged to one of the four *varnas*: *Brahmin*, the priests and scholars; *kshatriya*, the warriors; *vaishya*, the traders; and *shudra*, the workers. However, small children ascetics and widows were considered outside the system. The highest status was given to Brahmins, whose duty was to study, teach and conduct religious rituals. Their specialized knowledge enabled them to exercise hegemony over the other castes. The conventions of brahminism were codified in the *Dharmashastras* or the sacred law-books of the Hindus, according to which the lives of men and women had to be organized according to their place in society, determined at birth and dependent on their caste and sex. Brahmins had the highest place in the caste hierarchy and were obliged to maintain their social position by scrupulously observing the prescribed rituals governing every aspect of their lives and following the rules regarding purity and pollution. Caste purity had to be guarded by strictly avoiding inter-dining and intermarriage with members of other

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casts or religious. A Brahmin was supposed to lead a disciplined life and engage himself in intellectual or religious activities, resisting the lure of material prosperity. Though he undertook the duties of a householder for a specified period, the ultimate goal for him was renunciation and he was expected to prepare himself for it by cultivating detachment from worldly concerns, leading a simple life and maintaining a high standard of personal conduct. The respect shown to him by all other sections of society ensured in the Brahmin a high self-esteem and a fierce desire to maintain the in egalitarian and patriarchal caste-structure of a society in which the lower castes were controlled by the higher ones, women were controlled by men, and an individual had little opportunity to be adventurous, to take independent decisions or to rise above the status determined by his caste. The dreaded institution of excommunication was an effective measure by which a group controlled the lives and behaviour of its members. The obsession with caste purity resulted in the seclusion and subordination of women. **Early marriage, sexual initiation at the onset of puberty, and the impossibility of divorce and remarriage ensured their total dependence on the males in the family.**

Over the centuries an effective ideology supporting brahminical patriarchy was worked out, which provided the rationale for the subjugation of women and the lower castes. The theory of *karma* ascribed to every individual a certain value on the basis of caste and sex which was supposed to be the consequence of actions performed in the previous birth. A woman's inferior social status was justified on the basis of what was supposed to be her inherent moral weakness and she could hope to improve her prospects in the next birth only by faithfully following the duties prescribed for her by the lawgivers. As a girl she was under the tutelage of her father, as an adult of her husband, and as a widow of her sons (Manu, V-148). Marriage was made obligatory for a woman by the *Dharmashastras*. Ideally, a girl had to be married off before she reached puberty, though she could remain

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with her natal family till she came of age. Contrary to the general law of karma, a wife was supposed to partake in the lot of her husband and was bound to her husband till eternity, through all the cycles of birth and death. She was required to be faithful to him in thought and deed, irrespective of whether he was virtuous or unworthy, dead or alive and whether the marriage was consummated or not. "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be worshipped as a God by a faithful wife" (Manu: 154). To ensure case purity, women were jealously guarded and their freedom severely restricted. The ideology of *pativratya* or *satitva* (Chastity and devotion to the husband) was designed to make them control their own sexuality and avoid transgressing patriarchal norms.

Men's dependence on women for the continuation of the race, for providing sons and for serving and nurturing the family was duly recognized, and women enjoyed a certain importance as wives and mothers. With the loss of a husband, however, a woman's utility was practically over, particularly if she had no children. *Sati* or the co-cremation of a widow with her husband, though never universally practiced or approved, was still considered the highest ideal a widow could achieve. The term *sati* originally meant a virtuous woman. In the Vedic period a widow had to perform symbolic self-immolation at the death of her husband. In one of the funeral hymens of the Rigveda, the widow lies down beside the dead man and his bow is placed in his hand; then the bow is removed and the woman is called on to return to the land of the living. It is not clear whether the rite was restricted to the aristocracy alone. It may have been the origin of the practice of *sati* when, in later centuries, a widow actually burnt herself on her husband's funeral pyre. By medieval times the custom became more common, and there are innumerable *sati* stones all over India commemorating the many faithful wives who followed their husbands in death. Some law-givers such as Parasara (before AD 1300) admitted the possibility of a woman's remarriage if her husband died,

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disappeared, renounced the world, lost caste or was proved impotent and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) used it as a starting point for his campaign for the remarriage of Hindu widows in the mid-nineteenth century. There is evidence in the Rigveda as well as in the earlier epics that the practice of levirate (which allowed a widow to marry her brother-in-law to provide heirs to her husband) was prevalent in the Aryan settlements around Punjab and Haryana. This is not uncommon in certain communities in these regions even today. Before the beginning of the Christian era, however, it began to be disapproved of by the upper castes.

In the case of a widow, *pativratya* entailed a complete withdrawal from participation in the social life of the community and the imposition of a severe discipline which made her existence a virtual social death. She was, to all intents and purposes, an ascetic, and any breach of her austere discipline not only made her liable to a very unhappy rebirth, but also endangered the welfare of the soul of her departed husband, who might suffer in the after life for the shortcomings of his other half on earth. The Dharmashastras prescribed that:

“[A widow] should give up adorning her hair chewing betel-nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, taking food from a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying collyrium to her eyes; she should wear a white garment, should curb her senses and anger, she should not resort to deceit and tricks, should be free from laziness and sleep, should be pure and of good conduct, should always worship God, should sleep on the floor at night on a mat of ‘kusa’ grass, she should be intent on concentration of mind and on the company of the good.”

For a Hindu wife, widowhood traditionally meant one of three things: **immediate death, lifelong condemnation to segregation and**

drudgery, and subjection to clandestine sexual exploitation by the males of the family or locality. ‘Just as birds flock to a piece of flesh left on the ground so all men try to seduce a woman whose husband is dead. The majority of widows in India, particularly in the upper castes, had to observe strict celibacy and withdraw from social life. There were severe restrictions on their diet, attire and movements, and their heads were tonsured in an attempt to, de-feminize and de-sexualize them. A young childless widow had no status in the family, and was treated as an unpaid drudge and a useless drag on resources as she had no direct or manifest economic role. She was considered ritually impure, inauspicious, and dangerous- someone to be shunned and treated with suspicion. For this reason widows do not find a place even in ancient and medieval Indian literature which was largely written by and for upper-caste males.

The great epics even do not cast a favourable status for the women at that time. The widows in the *Ramayana* of Valmiki (c. 300 BC) are not important as individuals. They are subjected to the customs prevailing in ancient society in different regions of the country. The three queens of King Dasharatha live to their old age as queen mothers in the palace of Ayodhya. Bali’s wife Tara, coming from a non-aryan community, marries her brother-in-law Sugriva after her husband is slain by Lord Rama. There is also a reference to Vedavati’s mother committing *sati* in the Uttarakanda, an episode which was probably added to the original text around AD 500 when the practice of immolating widows became more common. The Valmiki *Ramayana* upholds the ideology of *pativrata* which requires a wife to merge her individuality completely into that of her husband, thereby turning herself into his shadow, incapable even of complaining against injustice or maltreatment at his hands. Sita is the archetypal *pativrata*, a paragon of wifely devotion in the *Ramayana* as well as in the subsequent versions of the story in other literary texts. The *Ramayana* also narrates the legend by Ahalya

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who was turned into a rock by her husband for unwittingly transgressing her *pativrata dharma* and redeemed in a later epoch by Lord Ramchandra, believed to be the incarnation of Vishnu. Both Sita and Ahalya exemplify the high value placed on female chastity in Indian culture and bring into sharp focus the harsh verdict that follows the slightest breach of propriety by a woman, even if she happens to be a victim of sexual assault.

The *Mahabharata* (c. 400 BC to AD 400) which has been described by Indian critics as *itihasa* or history rather than poetry since it shows life in its rich complexity, mentions several widows and a variety of customs associated with them. The custom of *sati* or widow-burning was practiced on a selective basis for a fairly long time. After the death of King Pandu, his younger wife Madri commits *sati*. However, Kunti, the elder one, does not do so in order to take care of Pandu's sons. Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madira are burnt with King Vasudeva's corpse but his other wives are spared. Similarly, Rukmini and seven other queens of Krishna die with Krishna but Satyabhama, along with the other queens, lives on. Satyawati, Duhshala and Uttara spend their widowhood in looking after their offsprings; and Ambika and Ambalika, the daughters-in-law of Satyawati, are prevailed upon to practise *niyoga* or levirate to perpetuate the royal line. The *Mahabharata* also tells the story of Arjun's marriage with the widow Ulupi, of Damayanti's second *swayamvara* after the disappearance of her husband Nala, and of Savitri who brought back her husband from the land of the dead by her courage and determination. It has been argued that in the 'core' epic, women are shown to be exercising much more freedom than in the interpolated sections of a more prescriptive nature added on later. These show a hostile attitude towards women and grant them a very low status in society.

The most individualized widow in the *Mahabharata* is Kunti. She is not only the mother and guardian of the Pandavas, the heroes of the battle

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of Kurukshetra, but her unacknowledged first-born Karna, fights against his brothers on behalf of the Kauravas, making her situation extremely poignant. After the death of King Pandu, Kunti has a difficult time bringing up the five Pandavas alone, surrounded as they are by the hostile Kauravas. The struggle turns her into a hard, bitter woman. She wields complete authority over her sons and looks after their affairs till they are married to Draupadi and come to power. She does not accompany them to the forest after their defeat in the game of dice but continues to take an active interest in their fortunes till she finally leaves the city of Hastinapur with Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Vidura to spend her last days in contemplation.

Thus, the royal widows mentioned in the two epics do not follow a uniform convention. While some immolate themselves with their husbands, others remarry or take a levirate to perpetuate the princely lineage. Young widowed mothers dedicate themselves to the task of raising their children and those with grown-up sons hold a prestigious position in the family. With the passage of time, the custom of remarriage and levirate remained in vogue only among the lower castes, and upper-caste widows were compelled to lead ascetic lives, devoted to religion and the memory of their dead husbands.

Puranic literature (c. AD 400 to AD 900), considered sacred by Hindus, was written with the purpose of communicating the glory of God and the essentials of Hindu rituals and ethics to common people in the guise of mythology. The Puranas, totaling eighteen in number on which popular Hinduism is largely based, have many stories about virtuous women, who, with the power of their *satitva* or chastity, protect their husbands from disaster or death and make great sacrifices for their sake. The stories, of which many also occur in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, illustrate the devotion of wives, but ignore the problems of widows, the emphasis being on the superhuman powers of a *pativratha* or steadfast wife.

Buddhism and Jainism, which evolved as a protest against the oppressive caste system and the hegemony of Brahmins adopted a more liberal attitude towards a widows. *Sati* was not practiced amongst Buddhists and Jains, and a widow was not forced to shave her head, relinquish good clothes and ornaments, observe fasts and stay away from family celebrations. She was still regarded as a rational human being and granted the independence to chart her own life. Widows were permitted to join the social functions, go on religious missions and seek spiritual fulfillment outside the domestic sphere.

3.1.2 Status of Women and Widowhood in the Medieval India

The emergence of the Bhakti movement, the cult of devotion to god, opened up another channel for women in medieval India wherein they could transcend their social or familial roles and direct their sexual and emotional energy. The chief mood of *bhakti* is the erotic *sringara*, seen almost entirely from a woman's point of view, whether in the phase of separation from, or union with, her beloved deity. Women saints like Andaal, Mahadevi, Karaikalammai and Avvai subverted or even inverted the traditional ideals of womanhood by rejecting marriage and family, and rebelling against patriarchal social conventions. Mirabai of Rajasthan (1499-1547) refused to acknowledge her marriage or her widowhood and, ignoring the restrictions imposed on her by her husband's family, joined the bands of wandering devotees and sang of her love for Krishna. In the twentieth century, Gandhi held her up as an apostle of *satyagraha*, who was undaunted by the persecution she had to suffer at the hands of her husband and his powerful family and exhorted Indian women to follow her example in the service of the nation.

3.1.3 Changing Status of Women in the Modern Era

From time to time in the history of Indian culture, there were sporadic movements to liberalize attitudes towards widows, to abolish extreme

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practices like *sati* and to give them access to a religious life. However, none of them was so concerted and well-organized as the one in the nineteenth century. The leaders of the new reform movement were inspired by the spirit of rationalism and individualism which had come to India from the West through Protestant Missionaries, the newly established press and educational institutions. The nineteenth-century reforms were mainly directed towards upper-caste Hindu women because the men of their community were the first to come into contact with Western liberal ideology through English education, the first to accept employment in British institutions and to join the new professions as lawyers, doctors, teachers and journalists. They acquired their position and strength through professional competence rather than hereditary privilege. Under the impact of British rule and as a reaction to it, they started movements for the reform and modernization of their own communities, a phenomenon which has been described as 'bourgeoisification of the indigenous culture in a colonial context'. The social and religious movements initiated by the new middle class Hindus sought to educate women, bring them out of seclusion, abolish child marriage and polygamy, and ameliorate the condition of widows. The leaders of these movements wished to refashion their personal and domestic relationships, to break away from the joint family and to bring about a radical change in the relations between men and women in marriage. They argued for a closer union based on compatibility and companionship rather than a relationship which, consisted largely of the formal fulfillment of the roles of husband and wife.

The early reformers tended to look upon colonial rule as a friendly force which would help them in getting rid of some of the retrograde practices in society. The miserable condition of widows languishing in almost every household aroused their compassion and compelled them to seek measures to alleviate their suffering. In Bengal, Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) sought to abolish the practice of *sati* through legislation,

using the lack of a Vedic precedent for this practice as his principal argument against it. Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) tried to legitimize the remarriage of Hindu widows on the basis of scriptural authority. In his essay *The Marriage of Hindu Widows* (1855), which was translated into English in 1856 and into Marathi in 1865, he argued that though Manu had prescribed a life of celibacy for widows, Narad and Parashar permitted their remarriage under special circumstances. It was largely due to his effort that the Widow Remarriage Act was, passed in 1856, and a new awareness about the need to improve their condition was generated all over India. Vishnushastri Pandit, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Dhondo Keshav Karve in Maharashtra, Behramji Mehrawnji Malabari in Gujarat, and Kandukuri, Veersalingam in Andhra, campaigned for the rehabilitation and remarriage of widows. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, a Sanskrit scholar and a widow herself, accepted Christianity and opened *Sharada Sadan*, a home for widows in Pune. In her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1880), she exposed the system which tyrannized women and did not let them develop into independent human beings. Dayanand Saraswati (1824-85), the founder of the Arya Samaj, recommended the marriage of healthy virgin widows and also the practice of levirate for childless widows for the continuation of a healthy race.

3.1.4 Status of Women and Widows in the Modern Era

Over the last few years there has been a high decibel noise for women's rights and against women atrocities. There is no doubt that one can see the result of these activism in the form of authorities taking action against the offenders on women atrocities. But, whether this activism has led to decrease women atrocities is debatable. However, in all these din of women rights and protection, everybody including the women activists forget the widows as a class. As compared to women atrocities, there seems to be less noise regarding the rights of widows as a class.

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Despite constitutional safeguards against discrimination on the basis of sex, religion and creed, spread of modern education and modernization in present day India, the treatment meted out to widows remains as mentioned above.

Only for the past two or three decades the government of India, voluntary organizations and social science researchers have become conscious about gender discrimination in general and discrimination of the widows within the segment of the women leading to affirmative actions like welfare measures, empowerment effort and initiation of research to understand the problems of women in general and widows in particular. It is unfortunate that many of the affirmative programmes like welfare and empowerment and even research studies do not recognize widows as a separate category requiring separate treatment but are clubbed under general category of women. No doubt widows as a separate category requiring separate treatment but are clubbed under general category of women. However, a few researchers and voluntary agencies did recognize 'widows' as a separate category requiring different approach in research as well as in empowering them.

Widowhood is not just transition from one marital status to another after the death of the husband. Even today, entering into widowhood is more hazardous, painful and humiliating to women than to a widower because of the discrimination, ritual sanctions of the society against the widows. With the result, widows in India not only suffer with social and economic sanctions but also face many psychological consequences, loneliness and in many cases deprivation causing emotional disturbances and imbalance.

The tendency to look at the widows as a single category among the development agencies, social science researchers and voluntary

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organizations in India is common. This tendency leads to evolving uniform measures of welfare and development to the widows as a single category. The need of the hour is to look at the problems of the widows at segregated level because the problems, tribulations and difficulties differ from one category of widows to that of

Even today there are differences on the grounds of caste and class. Widows among the twice born upper castes are discriminated more within their families and castes and the restriction placed on their personal attire like dress, ornamentation, hair style, food etc., is very rigid and oppressive. Further their presence is prohibited at socio cultural and religious ceremonies. The most important prohibition is that they are not permitted to remarry. In North India the upper caste widows seems to be becoming destitute running away from their homes.

On the other hand widows among the lower castes suffer with different type of disabilities. Among the lower castes widow remarriage though is not prohibited yet there is some aversion towards it. One important aspect among the lower castes which cause hardship to the widows is the type of family in which they live. Nuclear families are the norm and the labour of husband and wife compliment each other in earning livelihood and in looking after the dependent children. When husband dies there is no one coming to the economic rescue of the widow, not because her parents and other relatives are unwilling but their economic position usually is none to good since most of them depend on wage labour. Economic security for the widows and her infants among lower castes is the most important problem rather than socio cultural discrimination. Further the elderly and the young widows as they grow into old age are virtually abandoned in many cases and suffer with untold miseries and deprivations.

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Like wise there are different categories of widows the aged, the destitute, the young and even widows of tender age etc., and each category of widows has its own problems and solution to solve the problems may also differ from one category to the other. Another process which has been noticed by various social scientists in the country is the process of Sanskritisation among the lower castes and the consequence of which is increasing rigid attitude towards the widows in these castes. Sanskritisation means adopting the rituals and customs of the twice born castes by the people belonging to lower castes, one of it is prohibiting the remarriage of widows. Simultaneously, one can also notice the opposite of it i.e., relaxation of attitude towards widows among the upper classes in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, etc., Because of the above mentioned variations of the status and nature of widows in this country there is a need to understand the problems of widows at segregated level. This means besides, the assessment of gender specific needs, the assessment of specific needs of the widows is necessary to understand the position of the widows and to empower them.

“Empowerment of Women” is the slogan and rhetoric today, particularly in the third world countries. U.N.O and other world organization and NGO’s despite their best efforts are unable to achieve gender equality, through the empowerment of women. Empowerment of widows is such more difficult because of more religious and cultural restrictions imposed on them. As long as religious and cultural construction of widows in India are not demolished it would be difficult to empower the widows in India.

3.2 Stigmatization of Widows

Redefining widowhood in Modern India women are definitely the 'fairer' sex but certainly not the weaker sex. In male dominated societies of the world women have been subjected to gruesome atrocities that has affected them physically, emotionally sexually and morally. In a predominantly male dominated society like India, widowhood has always been considered a social stigma. Stigmatization can be defined as "severe social disapproval of personal characteristics or belief that are against cultural norms which often leads to marginalisation." In case of widows stigmatization is complete which emanates not only in the community but also in their very families. They have been looked down upon at all social gatherings be it a marriage, birth of a child or house warming ceremonies. Widows of upper caste families especially in Brahmanical society in India are shaved their heads and forced to wear coarse white saris only, expected to live in solitary confinement till they pass away. Newly married women were not allowed to talk to them, or drink water or eat anything from their hands as this was a curse that they would not conceive. Hence widowhood is considered a curse in orthodox India. They are devoid of eating good food, wearing a *kumkum* (symbol of marriage of a Hindu Woman), shun all jewellery. They are expected to keep various fast to wash away their sins and expected to spend the rest of their lives in religious activities and paying to God. Unfortunately barring a handful of women mostly in working women in urban centres most of the estimated 33 millions of widows of India have to face this stigmatization in the worst form.

3.2.1 Widows in the State of Orissa

Orissa as discussed earlier is a very conservative state where there is strict familial bonding based on birth and lineage and also most of the state practice monogamy. The institution of marriage is also sacrosanct is held at with highest regards. However, as far as position of women is concerned it is a little disappointing. Though the women, especially married women (with living husbands) are given due rights

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as a mother and wife still given their due their role as decision makers are not respected by the society. Similarly the unmarried and young girls are guarded with vengeance by family members. Though the freedom was curtailed to a great extent of women in the state, over the last few decades due to exposure to the media and the new world order, women have got some amount of freedom especially in the urban centres. This can be attributed to the increasing literacy rate and educational level.

But, sadly enough the condition of women has not changed for the better even in the urban areas. Despite an impressive literacy rate and unprecedented growth in educational level the attitude of the society and the family remains the same towards the widows. Though the atrocities against them as was practiced earlier has come down substantial, still the lofty ideas of widows' remarriage has not converted into reality. Still there is a strong aversion of marrying a widow. In the urban centres, no noticeable atrocities against the widows can be noticed. But the rural areas has not changed. The widows in the rural areas are still looked down upon shunned of any rights. Only those widows who have grown up sons seems to be protected and respected. But this respect comes more as being mothers rather than being a widow. As a widow she is still shunned and in most cases when a widow is childless is subjected to physical and mental abuse and is driven out of her homes. The reasons are many varying from socio-religious to economic which are discussed in detail in the chapter dealing with the socio-economic analysis. The widows are still stigmatized and forced to observe the rituals/practice as expected of them which the Hindu lawmakers have imposed on the widows for ages. While many widows are condemned to live the life of a recluse, many others are driven out of their very homes to religious centres on the pretext of washing their sins. Shunned by the family and community they are forced to seek solace in the various temples across the state, especially the Jagannath Temple at Puri. These

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widows who come to Puri to get solace either of their own will or forced wait for a slow and painful death in this religious city- their only consolation that at least they will be cremated at the *Swargadwara* the crematorium at Puri which has great religious belief of all the people in Orissa, which literally means if cremated here, one goes to heaven. The extent of sufferings and hardships that these widows face in the holy city of Puri are discussed in detail in the next chapters.

CHAPTER - IV

HOLY CITY OF PURI: HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

4.0 INTRODUCTION:

In the history of Orissa Puri city occupies a very important place in mind and soul of the people because it is regarded as one of the four most sacred places of spiritualism for the Hindus. The people of Orissa have a very emotional attachment to the city of Puri. Puri being a coastal district of Orissa, is famous for its Historic antiquities, Religious sanctuaries, Architectural Grandeur, Sea-scape beauty, moderate climate. It holds a wealth of attraction for the visitors. The city is a popular destination both due to its religious importance and tourist attraction. The city has a continuous history from the 3rd Century B.C. to the present day and its unique monuments like those of Lord Jagannath Temple at Puri, the Sun Temple at Konark are the famous in the world. The district has also the Chilika Lake, one of the largest brackish water lakes in India that holds a picturesque Sea-Scape beauty. It offers an ideal resort for birds who migrate from different parts of the continent. By virtue of its geographical location, the climate of Puri is equable through out the year.

4.1 PRE-HISTORY:

Like many other parts of Orissa, in the Puri District, river gravels and slits may be included among the various Pleistone formations. But no formation of this period has so far yielded any type of pre-historic stone-tools though they are found in a large number from similar formations (river gravels, secondary laterite pits and murrans) in the districts of Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundargarh. So whatever information we have regarding the pre-historic cultures of this

districts are mainly derived from different types of stone tools collected from the surface.

4.1.2 ORIGIN OF THE NAME:

The District has been named after its headquarters town, Puri. According to Cunningham the ancient name of this town was Charitra mentioned by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang as Che-li-ta-lo. But the restoration of the word Che-li-ta-lo as Charitra and its identification with the town of Puri are open to doubt. The importance of the town as a seat of Vaisnavism increased when Chodaganga Deva constructed the temple of Purusottama Jagannath and installed the images of the deities. Thereafter, it became famous as the abode of Purusottama and was popularly called *Purusottama Kshetra*.

In the drama Anargharaghava Natakam attributed to cir. 9th century A.D. we find the name Purusottama applied to this town. In the Nagari Plate of Anangabhima III of the Saka year 1151-52 i.e., 1229-30 A.D. the place is called *Purusottama Kshetra*. This name in the form of *Purusottama Chhatar* or only in the form *Chhatar* was used by the Mughals, the Maratha as well as the early British rulers in their official records. even in Yoginitantra and Kalikapurana the city is referred to as Purusottam. Puri region was also known as Utkal.

The name *Purusottama Kshetra* was also for sometimes known as *Purusottama Puri* and as the word *Purusottama Kshetra* was contracted into *Kshetra* or *Chhatra* so also *Purusottama Puri* was expressed in the contracted form Puri. In fact, in many early British records this town is known by the name Pooree. In modern times Puri has become the most popular of all the other names of this town.

4.1.3 HISTORY OF THE CITY:

Under the Mughal rule (1592-1751), Orissa for the purpose of Revenue Administration was divided in to three circars, namely, Jaleswar, Bhadrak, and Kataka, each of which was subdivided into Mahals or Dandapatas and the Mahals were again subdivided into Bishis. Puri formed a part of Kataka circar.

The conquest of Orissa by the British in 1803 set forth great changes in revenue divisions and political relations. In June 1804, the Province was divided in to two divisions, namely, the northern and southern divisions, the river Mahanadi, forming the natural boundary.

As the Raja of Khurda revolted in 1804, he was arrested and was placed in confinement in the Fort of Barabati at Cuttack. His territory was confiscated and the Raja was subsequently released. In 1807 he was permitted to live at Balisahi in the town of Puri and functioned as the Superintendent of the temple of Jagannath.

Puri was the capital of the province of Orissa and the headquarters of the Collector till 1816. In 1806 there was a proposal to remove the headquarters of Jajpur, but did not get government sanction. In August 1814, a part of the Collector's establishment was removed to Cuttack, which was again brought back to Puri in December. A petition from a number of Zamidars for the removal of the Collectorate to Cuttack, which was the seat of administration under the Mughal and the Marathas, although rejected by the Collector, was finally approved and the headquarters was permanently shifted from Puri to Cuttack in 1816.

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4.1.4 THE DISTRICT:

The city of Puri comes under the Puri district which being a coastal district of Orissa , is famous for its Historic antiquities ,Religious sanctuaries , Architectural Grandeur , Sea-scape beauty, moderate climate. It holds a wealth of attraction for the visitors. It boasts of a continuous history from the 3rd Century B.C. to the present day and its unique monuments like those of Lord Jagannath at Puri , the Sun God at Konark are the famous in the world. It has the Chilika lake , one of the largest brackish water lakes in India, that holds a picturesque Sea-Scape beauty. It offers an ideal resort for birds who migrate from different parts of the continent . By virtue of Geographical location, the climate of Puri is equable through out the year. A few socio-economic and demographic details are given below.

4.1.5 BASIC INFORMATION OF PURI DISTRICT:

Table- 4.1

1	No. of Subdivision	1
2	No. of Tehsils	7
3	No of Blocks	11
4	No of G .Ps	230
5	No.of NACS	3
6	No. of Municipality	1
7	No. of Revenue Villages	1714
8	No of J.A.O Circles	22
9	No. of V.A.W Circles	149
10	No of P.A.C.S	213
11	Geographical Area in hecets	264988 Ha/ 3051 Sq. Km.
12	Cultivated Area in hecets	188745
a)	High land	45653
b)	Medium land	57654
c)	Low land	85438

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13	Paddy Area in hecets	170658
a)	High land	27966
b)	Medium land	57254
c)	Low land	85438
14	Water logged Area inhects	15192
15	Saline area in hecets	19480
16	Imigate Area in hecets	105106
17	Forest Area in hecets	18175
18	Misc trees groves in hecets	7524
19	permanent pasturcs in hecets	11328
20	Culturable waste in hecets	8226
21	Land pat to non-Agri use in hecets	17259
22	Baren & uncultrurable waste in hecets	8866
23	No. of High Schools	173
24	No. of Sanskrit Tol	10
25	No. of English Medium School	3
26	Total Population	1502682
(a)	Male	763389
(b)	Female	739293
27	Rural	1298654
(a)	Male	657199
(b)	Female	641455
28	Urban	204028
(a)	Male	106190
(b)	Female	97838
29	SC	273917
(a)	Male	138550
(b)	Female	135367
30	ST	4482
(a)	Male	2355
(b)	Female	2127
31	No. of Police Stations	17

The city of Puri is the abode of Vishnu as Jagannath which contributed the word " Juggernaut" to the English language, represents its integrated individuality as its cultural heritage , a unique blend of

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claims of time and eternity with a power answerable only to wisdom . Puri's compendious heritage has been representing that spark of immortality that the Oriyas and the Indians have own against the powers of negation , through a spirit of universality , adaptability , and an astute mixture of the present which no other culture can aspire to explain as its self justification. The name of the Lord as Purusottama (perfection personified) or as Jagannath (Lord of Universe) represents a universality in true with the familiar faternity of mankind (Vasudheiva Kutumbakam). Adi Shankaracharya visited Puri , set up the Gobardhan matha (monastery) as the exception from his other three mathas as a vaishnavite, defined Jagannath as the Supreme one. It is thus not only one of the four Dhams (Holy Places) for Hindus but the most pious and sacred place.

Various sectarian head visited Puri on piligrimage , setup his own monastery for continued serve to Lord Jagannath and returned.

Spiritually mollified - The list includes Kabir and the "Torani' of Kabirchaura nayak the founder of Shikhism , visited Puri and gained entrance into the temple by performing a miraculous feat of showing the trinity reflected on his palms . He setup the bauli and Mangi mathas which still attract the Shikhs from the worldover . Sankar Deva of Assam had followed the same path. Other religious heads and dignifiers like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Rai Ramananda , Jayadeva, Gorakhanath, the father of Nath, cult of religious icolocasm supposed by visited Puri. Saint Totapuri a vedant teacher of Ramakrishna has also visited Puri.

Bhakti Krishnatirtha and Muquaddam Jahanies also visited this holy city. The latters synthesized "Pir" concept at Konark bears the testimony. Sridhar Swami, SadhuSundar Das visited Puri for fulfilment of their spiritual craze.

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The quintessential characteristic of its culture and philosophy has made it from Pan-Indian to Pan-Continental. The Car-Festicval of Shri Lord Jagannath now not limited to Puri or Orissa rather it is celebrated in global scale , the reverberation echos of which are heard from Los Angeles to Piccadily from Heidelberg to Tokyo.

The Jagannath culture is not only pre-dominated in Puri but it is global. Its Universal affirmation is secular defusion of such an attitude is futuristic. It calls for unity in diversity is an age of diverse perversity. The consecration of all the empire by Gajapati of Puri .Kapilendra Deva to Lord Jagannath , the lord emerging as "istadeva " and "Rastradevata" and rolled down the centuries as the crest of nationalism which found Madhusudan Das (the eminent barister of British era)in 1928 to cryout 'serve us, Lord Jagannath'. The dazzle of Kohi-noor, originally gifted to Lord Jagannath , the Hum of devotional "Janana"(non-bhajan), the cries of Chandan Hajuri (the chief warier of Maharani Laxmibai) and 'the Mahaprasad brotherhood' have been unifying forces and symbols of national unity .

The evolution of Odissi Dance and music out of the Devadasi-institution still enchants all with its mystic rhythm. The Orissan school of architecture emerging from here is a poetry frozen in stone. The Patta-paintings and applique work are a craze in the west ,particularly in U.S.A. of today . The Shell-craft of Puri have a major appeal.

It is thus here at Puri that the pattern of a Pan-Indian, (nay, global) culture of tomorrow is on the anvil. People are individual atoms ever contributing their properties to the "matter" of Jagannath Dharma without consciousness of mutual distinctions . Puri belongs to humanity , the seat of an eternal education , the bridge that gulfs the past and the future and the blending of diverse impulses for a single embodiment in the march of all fulfilling time .

4.1.6 PURI CITY AT A GLANCE:

Geographically Puri town is bound by sea in the South, Musa River in the north, Sunamuhin River in the west and Balukhanda Reserved Forest in the east. Physiographically, Puri is divided into (a) Beach (b) Beach ridge dune complex (c) Lower Deltaic Plain and (d) Upper Deltaic Plain.

As per 2001 Census, the population of Puri town was 1,57,610 with a growth rate of 26% during the period 1991-2001, while the administrative jurisdiction of Puri municipal area spreads over 16.3268 sq km. On an average, the floating population is



almost 5,000 persons per day. During the Ratha Yatra period the floating population rises up to 1.2 million in one day.

The religious importance, which attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims throughout the year, could be the reason for immense and complex institution of temple administration and the necessary organization. The total number of people directly employed within the organization counts approximately two hundred. These temple officers form the administrative and control staff. The ritual organization, which consists of nearly two thousand people, receives a share of Bhoga as remuneration for their services. Out of this 30 % are hierarchy of

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commercial spaces in Puri Town. We find few daily markets, weekly markets, shopping avenues and local markets. The Swargadwar market attracts mainly the tourist crowd in particular the ones who visit the sea beach. The commercial area along the Grand Road mainly attracts the pilgrims who visit the Jagannath temple. The other commercial areas are generally used by the local residents for their daily shopping.

4.2 JAGANNATH TEMPLE: ITS RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE:

The **Jagannath Temple in Puri** is one of the most important Hindu Temples dedicated to Lord Jagannath (believed to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna) and located in the coastal town of Puri in the state of Orissa.. The name

Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) is a combination of the Sanskrit words *Jagat* (Universe) and *Nath* (Lord of). The temple is an important pilgrimage destination for many Hindus, traditions, particularly worshippers of



Krishna. Puri represents one of the four peethas established by **Sankaracharya**, the other four being Sringeri in South India, Dwaraka in Saurashtra, and Badrinath in the Himalayas. **Ramananda** of the 14th century - a follower of the Sri Vaishnava religious leader **Ramanuja**, was also associated with this temple. **Chaitanya** of the 15th - 16th centuries popularized the worship of Jagannath through his

Bhakti Movement. Association of all these religious leaders has made the importance of Jagannath Temple to such an extent that many even regard this temple as the most important religious shrines in the country.

4.2.1 Legend surrounding the temple origin:

According to the legend, Indrayumna, the king of Malava in Sata Yuga, was a great devotee of Vishnu. Once the king dreamt of Nilamadhava Vishnu and was curious to know where that particular form of the Lord was worshipped. Therefore, he sent his emissaries in four directions to find this.

Brahmin Vidyapati was sent to the east. He came to Utkala and entered Savara village where he took shelter in the house of the Savara King Visvvasu. Lalita, king's daughter, fell in love with Vidyapati and the latter got married to her to extract information about Nilamadhava.

Visvvasu used to go to the forest every morning to worship Nilamadhava installed in Niakandara (Blue cave). Vidyapati thus coaxed his wife to request her father to allow him to see Nilamadhava. Visvvasu agreed on the condition that Vidyapati will be taken to the shrine and brought back from there with a blindfold.

On hearing this, Vidyapati went to his wife and asked her to make such an arrangement that he may subsequently know the path. Lalita gave him some sesame seeds to be scattered on the side of the road he followed so that he might know the path when sesame plants grew up during the rains.

Accordingly, Vidyapati was taken to Nilakandara where he saw Nilamadhava. Later, when Vasu Savara offered food to the deity, he did not take it as usual to the king's dismay. At this, a divine voice was heard. It said, "we would no longer continue to be worshipped by you.

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Oh! Vasu, we will change the present Nilamadhava form and assume Daru form. We shall be worshipped in the temple by Raja Indradyumna".

The king came back from the blue cave with a very heavy heart losing his deity. Vidyapati too bade farewell to his wife and father-in-law and started for Malava. Having heard the story, King Indradyumna started with his retinue for Utkal to see Nilamadhava. On reaching Nilakandara, he found it vacant. But a divine voice told him to construct a temple on Nilasaila (Blue Mountain).

Hearing this, the king ordered the construction to begin. On completion of the temple, the king went to Brahmaloaka to invite Brahma to consecrate the temple. But, Brahma being in meditation, he had to wait for nine Yugas. The temple thus got buried in sand in his absence.

In the mean time, a new dynasty came to rule at Utkala. Galamadhva, a king of that dynasty, detected the buried temple by accident. He was considering installing images in the temple when Indradyumna with Lord Brahma appeared before him. Both the kings had a tussle over the ownership of the temple. However, Lord Brahma decided in favor of Indradyumna and asked him to install deities in the temple.

Now, the king was at a loss as to where to find the deities from. Therefore, god told him in his dream that he would be floating in the sea in the form of a log of wood. Then Sage Narada assured Indradyumna that Vishnu would appear to him in the temple form of three wooden images.

When a big tree, radiant with light was seen floating in the sea, Narada told the king to make three idols out of it and place them in a pavilion. Indradyumna got Visvakarma, the architect of Gods, to build a magnificent temple to house the idols and Vishnu himself appeared in

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the guise of a carpenter to make the idols on condition that he was to be left undisturbed until he finished the work.

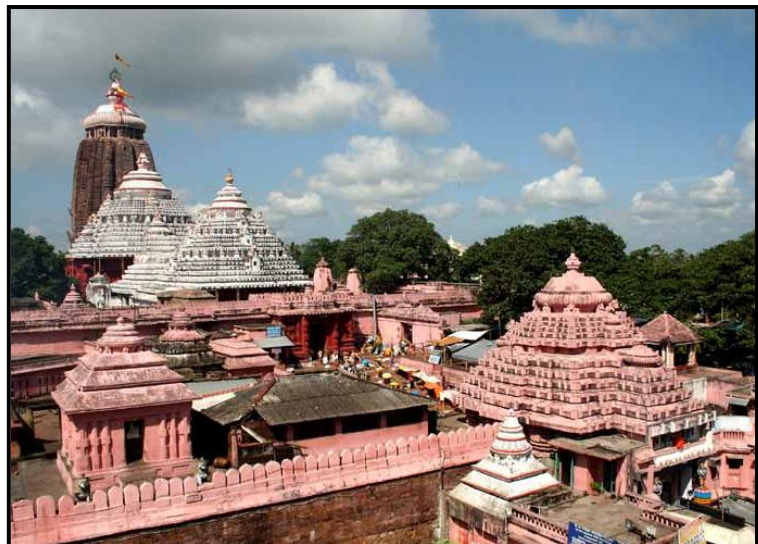
But just after two weeks, the Queen became very anxious when no sound emanated from the closed doors. She took the carpenter to be dead as no sound came from the temple. Therefore, she requested the king to open the door. Thus, they went to see Vishnu at work at which the latter abandoned his work leaving the idols unfinished. But a divine voice told Indradyumana to install them in the temple.

The three idols represent Lord Jagannath, his elder brother, Balabhadra and their sister, Subhadra. This wooden idol prepared from a log of wood floating on the ocean finds a mention in the Rig Veda, where it is referred to as Purushottama. Interestingly, the wooden images being worshipped are renewed during special occasions. New images have been constructed and installed in the years 1863, 1893, 1931, 1950, 1969 and 1977.

4.2.2 History of the Temple:

The temple was originally built by the Kalinga ruler **Anantavarman Chodaganga** (1078 - 1148 CE). Much of the present structure was built by King

Ananga Bhima Deva in the year 1174 CE. It took 14 years to complete and was consecrated in 1198 CE. It is believed that the image of Jagannath was buried thrice in the



Chilka lake for protection from invaders.

According to recently discovered copper plates from the Ganga Dynasty, the construction of the Current Jagannath temple was initiated by the ruler of Kalinga, *Anantavarman Chodaganga Dev*. The *Jagamohana* and the *Vimana* portions of the temple were built during his reign (1078 - 1148 CE). However it was only in the year 1174 CE that the Orissan ruler *Ananga Bhima Deva* rebuilt the temple to give a shape in which it stands today.

Jagannath worship in the temple continued until 1558, when Orissa was attacked by the Afghan general Kalapahada. Subsequently, when Ramachandra Deb established an independent kingdom at Khurda in Orissa, the temple was consecrated and the deities reinstalled.

4.2.3 The Temple:

The vast temple complex at present occupies an area of over 400000 square feet (37,000 m²), and is bounded by a 20 feet high fortified wall. It contains at least 120 temples and shrines. With its sculptural richness and fluidity of the Orissan style of temple architecture, it is one of the most magnificent monuments of India. The shikhara of the Jagannath temple towers to a height of 192 feet.

Structurally the temple has four chambers. The outermost is the **Bhogmandir**, the next is the **Nata-mandir** pillared hall for music and dance, the next is the **Jagamohana** - or the mandapa where devotees gather for worship and the last is the sanctum or the **Deul** enshrining the deities.

The main temple is a curvilinear temple and crowning the top is the 'srichakra' (an eight-spoked wheel) of Lord Vishnu. Also known as the "Nilachakra", it is made out of Ashtadhatu and is considered sacrosanct. The temple tower was built on a raised platform of stone and, rising to 214 feet (65 m) above the inner sanctum where the deities reside, dominates the surrounding landscape. The pyramidal

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roofs of the surrounding temples and adjoining halls, or *mandapas*, rise in steps toward the tower like a ridge of mountain peaks.

The **Singhadwara**, which in Sanskrit means The Lion Gate, is one of the four gates to the temple and forms the Main entrance. The

Singhadwara is so named because two huge statues of crouching lions exist on either side of the entrance. The gate faces east opening on to the **Bada Danda** or the Grand Road. The **Baisi Pahacha** or the flight of twenty two steps leads into the temple complex. An idol of Jagannath known as **Patita Pavana**, which in Sanskrit, means the "Saviour of the downtrodden and the fallen" is painted on the



right side of the entrance. In ancient times when untouchables were not allowed inside the temple, they could pray to Patita Pavana. The statues of the two guards to the temple Jaya and Vijaya stand on either side of the doorway. A magnificent sixteen-sided monolithic pillar known as the *Aruna stambha* stands in front of the main gate. This pillar has an idol of Arun, the charioteer of the Sun God Surya, on its top. The pillar originally installed in the Sun temple of Konark was shifted to Puri by the Raja of Khurda.

Apart from the Singhadwara, which is the main entrance to the temple, there are three other entrances facing north, south and west. They are named after the sculptures of animals guarding them. The other entrances are the **Hathidwara** or the Elephant Gate, the **Vyaghradwara** or the Tiger Gate and the **Ashwadwara** or the Horse Gate.

There are many *Mandapas* or Pillared halls on raised platforms within the temple complex meant for religious congregations. The most prominent is the **Mukti Mandap** the congregation hall of the **Sevayats** or the temple servitors. Here important decisions regarding conduct of daily worship and festivals are taken. The **Dol Mandap** is noteworthy for a beautifully carved stone Torana or arch which is used for constructing a swing for the annual Dol Yatra festival. During the festival the idol of Dologobindo is placed on the swing. The Snana Bedi is a rectangular stone platform where idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are placed for ceremonial bathing during the Snana Yatra, a fortnight before the annual Chariot Festival.

4.2.4 Deities:

The central forms of Lords Jagannath, Balabhadra and and the goddess Subhadra constitute the trinity of deities sitting on the bejewelled platform or the **Ratnavedi** in the inner sanctum. The Sudarshana Chakra , idols of Madanmohan and Bishwadhatri are also placed on the Ratnavedi. The idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan Chakra are made from sacred Neem logs known as Daru Bramha. Depending on the season the deities are adorned in different garbs. Worship of the deities pre-date the temple structure and may have originated in an ancient tribal shrine.

4.2.5 Minor Temples:

There are numerous smaller temples and shrines within the Temple complex where active worship is regularly conducted. The temple of Mahalaxmi has an important role in rituals of the main temple. It is said that preparation of food as offering for Jagannath is supervised by Goddess Mahalakshmi. The Bata Ganesh Temple is dedicated to Lord Ganesh, the revered elephant-head god. Tradition maintains that the idol of Ganesh was brought from Kanchipuram in present day Tamil Nadu by the legendary Oriya King Purushottam after he defeated the King of Kanchipuram in ancient times. Similarly the temple of Goddess Bimala is very important in the overall Jagannath Culture as only after offering *prasada* to Goddess Bimala the *prasada* becomes *Mahaprasada*. This is extremely significant from the point of the present study as it signifies the importance of women in the Jagannath Cult. In the temple the twin Goddess of Mahalaxmi (wife of Lord Jagannath) and Goddess Bimala (wife of Lord Shiva) hold pre-eminence position without whom the worshipping the Lord remains half-filled.

4.2.6 Festivals:

Elaborate worship services and rituals are carried out throughout the day here. There are as many as 24 major festivals held each year, the most important one of them being the Rath Yatra or the Chariot festival in the month June – July or the Hindu month of *Asadha*. This spectacular festival includes a procession of three huge chariots bearing the idols of Jagannath, Balarama and Subhadra through the **Bada Danda** meaning the Grand Avenue of Puri till their final destination the Gundicha Temple. The Gods return to the Jagannath Temple after spending about eleven days in the Gundicha Temple. In a year that has two months of *Asadha* which is usually once in twelve years the wooden idols of the deities are replaced during the Navakalevara ceremony. On Akshya Tritiya every year the Chandan

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Yatra festival marks the commencement of the construction of the Chariots of the Rath Yatra. On the Purnima of the month of Jyestha the Gods are ceremonially bathed and decorated every year on the occasion of Snana Yatra. Apart from this Grand festival many other smaller but significant ones like Dolo Yatra, Dipawali, Dusseharrha and Jhulan Yatra are celebrated by devotees every

year.

In modern times the temple is busy and functioning. The temple is selective regarding who is allowed entry into the grounds. Most non-Hindus are excluded from its premises, as are Hindus of non-Indian origin. Visitors not allowed entry may view the precincts from the roof of the nearby Raghunandan Library. There is some evidence that this came into force following



a series of invasions by foreigners into the temple and surrounding area. Buddhist, and Jain groups are allowed into the temple compound if they are able to prove their Indian ancestry. Even if Sikhs are a separate religious group they are allowed entry into the temple.

4.2.7 The Temple Kitchen:

The temple's kitchen is considered as the largest kitchen in India. Tradition maintains that all food cooked in the temple kitchens are supervised by the Goddess Malaxmi herself. It is said that if the food prepared has any fault in it a dog appears near the temple kitchen, the temple cooks or Mahasuaras take this as a sign of displeasure of Mahalakshmi with the food which is promptly buried and a new batch cooked afresh. All food is cooked following rules as prescribed by Hindu religious texts. Cooking is done only in earthen pots with water drawn from two special wells near the kitchen called Ganga and Jamuna. The food after being offered to Jagannath and later Goddess Bimala is distributed as Mahaprasad to devotees in the Ananda Bazar located to the North of the Singhadwara inside the temple complex. It is said that while eating this Mahaprasada there is no barrier on caste, creed or community. This *Mahaprasada* is like lifeline of widows of Puri who depend upon heavily for their daily diet. Those who can afford buy it and those who cannot afford just depend upon the left-overs or mercy of others.

4.3 IMPORTANCE OF JAGANNATH TEMPLE FOR THE WIDOWS:

The Jagannath temple is the heart and soul of widows not only of Puri district but also of entire Orissa. It is the will of every widow of the state to spend some time, at least the holy month of Kartika at Puri every year. For the widows of Orissa the holy month of Kartika means a month of prayer to the Lord. Thousands of widows from all over the state flock to the temple in this month and spend most of their time in

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religious activities at the temple premises. The details of their activity are discussed in the subsequent chapters. Apart from the month of

Kartika, there are hundreds of widows who live either willingly or forced to live in this city in the hope to spend their last days by



making *darshan* of the lord and spend their last days in Puri in order to get salvation. Needless to mention that it Lord Jagannath and the temple occupies a significant place not only the widows but every Oriya who resides in their heart and soul. Despite the poverty and impoverishment of the people in the state, this emotional bond between the God and the people keep the Oriya community going and they take pride that Lord Jagannath rules the heart soul of the people of the state.

CHAPTER - V

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITION OF WIDOWS IN PURI CITY

5.0 INTRODUCTION:

As pointed out earlier Puri is one the most important places of worship for millions of Hindus worldwide. As it is one of the four sacred places it is the desire of every Hindu to visit this place at least once in his/her lifetime. Apart from its religious importance it has a very beautiful sea beach which attracts equal number of tourists from across the world. The socio-religious importance of this temple city has been described in the previous chapters. But among all these tourists and pilgrims one can find a particular class of visitor who remain almost throughout the year in the temple city who roam around the temple in search of God. But they unwaveringly wear a look which is far away from a look of a devotee. On the contrary these white-saree clad women look very fragile and fearful of their own self either begging or doing petty business in and around the temple. These women are widows who have been condemned to lead a life of poverty and impoverishment for no fault of theirs.

There has been an attempt by various agencies to study regarding the condition of the widows at various religious places of India like Vrindaban, Mathura, Varanasi etc. These studies are quite comprehensive and informative. Unfortunately, there seems to be no specific studies of the socio-economic condition of the widows in the religious city of Puri. So this study is an attempt to look into the various issues which affect the widows living in Puri.

5.1 WIDOWS OF PURI

Unlike the widows of Vrindaban, Mathura and Varanasi the widows visiting Puri belong to several categories.

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First, there are widows who stay at the city of Puri as its permanent residents which is as natural as other places in India with a slight difference that these widows seem to be a bit more religious because of staying in proximity to a prominent religious place.

Second, there are widows who do not belong to Puri but staying here for quite some time either of their own will or out of compulsion who are the most distressed of them all.

Third, there are widows who visit this city for one month in the holy month of *Kartika* to observe the rituals and then go back to their own homes. These widows also face hardships during their stay at Puri, but not as impoverished as the ones who stay here permanently without a home of their own.

Fourth, there are quite a few widows who visit this city on various festive occasions and stay here for some time and go back to their villages. Most of these widows belong to the district of Puri itself which permits them to visit this holy city more frequently.

5.2 SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITION OF THE WIDOWS IN PURI

5.2.1 Summary of Respondents: Socio-Economic Profile

The present study and the samples taken is a fairly a large one. A brief summary of the respondents is given below which will be helpful in understanding the socio-economic condition of the respondents better. Out of the total respondents most of them were above the age 60.

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THE WIDOWS IN THE HOLY CITY OF PURI**

Table 1. 1: Respondents by Age

Age in years	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	4	0.4	0.5
26-30	14	1.5	1.9
31-35	21	2.2	4.1
36-40	40	4.2	8.3
41-45	56	5.9	14.3
46-50	82	8.7	22.9
51-55	80	8.4	31.4
56-60	116	12.2	43.6
> 60	534	56.4	100.0
Total	947	100.0	

As the table shows most of the respondents belong to the age group of above 51 years of age who together constitute 77% of the total respondents. This also seems to be representative through our observations of all the widows living in Puri. The young widows (between the age group of 18-35) constitute about 4.1% of the total respondents.

5.2.2 Social Background

Table 1. 2: Respondents by Social Group

Caste/Community	Frequency	In %
Brahmin	259	27.3
Karan	106	11.2
Khandayat	188	19.9
Backward Caste	270	28.5
SC	115	12.1
ST	9	1.0
Total	947	100.0

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As far as the distribution caste is concerned Brahmins seem to be the biggest social group. Though backward castes seem to be a little higher, the backward caste category constitute a whole lot of backward castes. A careful look at the distribution shows that upper castes of the state comprising Brahmins, Karanas and Khandayats together constitute 58.4% of the total respondents. This is startling as it is believed that the upper caste people are more conservative about their women and generally they do not like to see them stepping outside their homes. So this gives also an interesting starting point to further analyze the reason for so many upper caste women living alone in this holy city.

5.2.3 Place of Domicile

Table 1. 3: Respondents by Domicile

<i>Region</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>In %</i>
Outside Orissa	34	3.6
Western Orissa	7	0.7
Coastal Orissa	887	93.7
Central Orissa	7	0.7
North Orissa	3	0.3
Southern Orissa	9	1.0
Total	947	100.0

Not surprisingly most of the widows who were interviewed were found to belong to the Coastal Orissa comprising broadly the undivided Cuttack, Khudra, Balesore and Dhenkanal districts. Out of this an overwhelming majority were found to be from the Puri district. This is because of the proximity of Jagannath temple and also due to the fact that being the home district of Lord Jagannath the people of the district are emotionally much more attached to the Jagannath culture. But, this is not to say that condition of widows in other parts of the state is any better or they are a well-respected lot

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in their homes. As the scope of the study is limited to the socio-economic condition of widows in the Puri city, not much is known about the widows of other regions. But, keeping in mind the overall trend their condition is not better compared to the studied group of respondents.

5.2.4 Qualification

There is no surprise that most of the women staying in Puri belong to marginalized sections of society. This is further evident from the fact that an overwhelming majority of these widows are illiterate which amounts to 58.1% of the total respondents. Another 7.6% of the respondents had received only formal education. Only a handful of the interviewed widows had education upto at least high school level which stands at 6% of the total respondents most of which seem to be the permanent residents of Puri.

Table 1. 4: Respondents by Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percent
No Response	31	3.3
Illiterate	550	58.1
Formal Education	72	7.6
Primary	183	19.3
Upper Primary	53	5.6
High School	44	4.6
Intermediate	4	0.4
Graduation	5	0.5
Post-Graduation/Technical	5	0.5
Total	947	100.0

Education which is a major socio-economic indicator seems to be the most of the problems that the widows are facing at the family as well as the

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community level as they are not aware of their rights as individuals in their own family as well as they are not in a position to demand their own rights from the authorities.

5.2.5 Financial Background of the Widows

It was long believed that most of the widows who have made Puri their home after leaving their own home belong to the financially weaker section of the society. This is reaffirmed in the study. More than half of the entire respondents come from very poor families. As many as 53.7% of the entire respondents come from the families having a monthly income of less than Rs. 3,000/- rupees. Of the total widows that were interviewed 18.4% come from comparatively well-to-do families having at least an income level of rupees six thousand and more. The poor economic condition of the families is to some extent responsible for the hostile attitude towards the widows apart from the other factors like taboos towards them. These reasons have been discussed in later chapters.

Table 1. 5: Respondents by Family Income

Monthly Income per month in Rs.	Frequency	Percent
No Response	117	12.4
<1000	243	25.7
1,000-3,000	265	28.0
3,000-6,000	148	15.6
6,000-10,000	63	6.7
10,000-15,000	58	6.1
>15,000	53	5.6
Total	947	100.0

5.2.6 Duration of Stay at Puri

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As pointed out earlier unlike other religious places of India, Puri has got different types of widows who visit or stay here depending upon the religious occasions. But from the scope of the study the main target group for this study are those who have been staying here for considerable time in a year unlike thousands of widows who spend only one month in a year (the holy month of Kartika).

Table 1. 6: Duration of Stay at Puri

Duration of Stay	Frequency	Percent
No Response	31	3.3
Permanently	862	91.0
1-3 Years	18	1.9
4-6 Years	18	1.9
7-9 Years	6	.6
> 10 Years	12	1.3
Total	947	100.0

Among all the respondents as many as 91% of the total respondents said to be staying in Puri on a permanent basis. This does not necessarily mean that those staying here on a permanent basis are domicile of the city itself. Those widows who belong to outside Puri city but staying in the city for a considerable period of time also said to be staying on a permanent basis. This included respondents who could not recall exact number of years, but seems to be staying here for quite some time. So those staying permanently seem to belong to those who are staying as domicile of the city as well as those outside of the city, but have made Puri as their home.

5.2.7 Place of Residence

Table 1. 7: Place of Present Residence

<i>Place of Stay</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>No Response</i>	30	3.2
<i>Ashram</i>	9	1.0
<i>Matha</i>	24	2.5
<i>Short Stay/Swadhar Home</i>	130	13.7
<i>Rented Mess</i>	166	17.5
<i>Own Home</i>	544	57.4
<i>Relatives</i>	44	4.6
<i>Total</i>	947	100.0

As far as place of residence is concerned most of the widows that were interviewed seem to be living in their own homes with their in-laws. Of the rest a little over 17% seem to be living in private mess by paying rent or services. Another 13.7% of the respondents stay at various short stay homes and Swadhar Homes in and around Puric city. A small percentage of the widows in Puri live in various *Ashramsas* and *Mathas* spread over the city. This is a surprising observation as it was believed prior to the survey that most of the widows in the city live in these *Ashramsas* and *Mathas*. This was also validated during the interviews with the Chief these *Ashramsas* and *Mathas*. They said that they allow the widows the stay in these *Ashramsas* and *Mathas* only during the month of *Kartika*. Only a handful of widows stay in these places who work mostly as domestic helps and do daily chorus of the *Ashramsas* and *Mathas*. A few of the widows said to live with their relatives, but nothing much is known under which circumstances these women stay with the relatives. But one thing is common to all- all of these women live in a very wretched condition to put it mildly.

5.3 MARRIAGE AND WIDOWHOOD

5.3.1 Type of Marriage

Earlier it has been pointed out that Orissa is a conservative society. Keeping with this orthodoxy even today most of the marriages are arranged by parents and relatives. This was reiterated by this study also. Out of the total respondents as many as 97.7% said that their marriage was settled by their parents. But it was not clear whether their opinion was sought or respected before their marriages were solemnized by their parents. Only a few of the widows said that they married against the will of their parents. Similarly, only 0.4% of the total interviewed widows said that they were forced to marry against their will.

Table 1. 8: Types of Marriage

Type of Marriage	Frequency	Percent
No Response	13	1.4
Arranged by Parents	925	97.7
Married Against will of Parents	5	.5
Married against my will	4	.4
Total	947	100.0

5.3.2 Age at Marriage

Akin to rural Orissa it was found that the families married them off at a very early age. During the study it was found that as many as 81.1% of the respondents were married off when they were less than eighteen years of age. Another 13.5% were married off between the age of 19-22 years of age. Only a few of the respondents were married at an ideal age of 23-30 which amounts to only 3.2% of the total respondents. This is a worrisome trend in general terms of getting the women married off at a very early age. The early marriage has so

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many socio-economic repercussions apart from sufferings in widowhood which is far worse.

Table 1. 9: Age At Marriage

<i>Age at Marriage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<18	768	81.1
19-22	128	13.5
23-25	20	2.1
26-30	10	1.1
31-35	1	0.1
36-39	4	0.4
>40	8	0.8
<i>Don't Remember</i>	8	0.8
<i>Total</i>	947	100.0

The study shows that most of the women had a married life of over 20 years before entering into widowhood. Of the total respondents 48.7% had a married life of between 20-25 years and another 32.4% had a married life of more than 25 years. This explains why most of the widows roaming in Puri are over the age of 50.

Table 1. 10: Duration of Married Life

Duration of Married Life in years	Frequency	Percent
Don't Remember	25	2.6
< 4	17	1.8
5-9	35	3.7
10-14	45	4.8
15-19	57	6.0
20-25	461	48.7
>25	307	32.4
Total	947	100.0

5.3.3 Attitude of Husband and in-laws during Marriage

From the study it was found that the women were treated well and looked after well by their husbands when they were alive. Out of the total respondents as many as 93.6% of the respondents seemed to be happy with the treatment meted out to them by their husbands. Less than one percent said that they were treated extremely badly and were not happy with the way they were treated by their husbands.

Table 1. 11: Treatment by Husband during Married Life

Treatment by Husband	Frequency	Percent
Extremely Good	342	36.1
Good Enough	64	6.8
Good	480	50.7
Extremely Bad	8	0.8
Bad Enough	25	2.6
Bad	25	2.6
DK/CS	3	.3
Total	947	100.0

Similarly, while their husbands were alive it seems they were treated well by the in-laws as well. It was found that as many as 80% said that they did not have any complaints against their in-laws with regards to treatment meted out to them when their husbands were alive. About 16% of them felt that they were treated quite badly by the in-laws even while their husbands were alive. So it is presumed that only after the death of the husbands that these widows were treated badly and pushed out of their homes.

Table 1. 12: Treatment by In-laws during Married Life

<i>Treatment by In-laws</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<u>Extremely Good</u>	294	31.0
Good Enough	52	5.5
Good	412	43.5
Extremely Bad	6	0.6
Bad Enough	47	5.0
Bad	93	9.8
DK/CS	43	4.5
Total	947	100.0

5.3.4 Occupation of the Husband

Most of the widows interviewed said that their husbands were either self-employed or doing other low-paying jobs like casual labour, agricultural labour, working as *sevayat* in the Jagannath Temple etc. However, quite a high proportionate number of women said that their husbands were working as Govt. servants. So an attempt was made to understand why they were not getting any pension which they were entitled. The widows had different answers regarding this. Some said that they found it very difficult to process the pension, others said that their in-laws are taking the pension amount forcibly.

Table 1. 13: Occupation of Husband when he was Alive

Occupation of Husband	Frequency	Percent
Govt. Service	132	13.9
Private Service	65	6.9
Self-Employed	315	33.3
Cultivation	64	6.8
Unemployed	28	3.0
Other	333	35.2
DK/CS	10	1.1
Total	947	100.0

5.3.5 Rights as Daughter-in-Law

How do they feel regarding their rights as daughter-in-law. From the interaction with the respondents it was found that they seem to be happy as far as their rights as a daughter-in-law given by in-laws were concerned. Close to 60% of the total respondents said that while their husbands were alive they were getting all their rights as daughter-in-law. However, more than 20% of the respondents said that they never got their rights as a daughter-in-law. So it reaffirms the belief that there is no rampant atrocities against women by the in-laws during the life of the husbands. But this should not be construed as there are no atrocities against the women. It seems in most cases the married women are well respected by most of the people barring some exceptions.

Table 1. 14: Rights as a Daughter-in-law before Widowhood

Rights as Daughter-in-law	Frequency	Percent
Very Well	560	59.1
To some Extent	39	4.1
Not at all	102	10.8
Not sympathetic	92	9.7
DK/CS	154	16.3
Total	947	100.0

5.3.6 Decision-making Power as a Daughter-in-law

Though Orissa seems to give respect to its women it does not seem to be giving enough rights in the decision-making power to the women. There are several studies to show that in a patriarchal society like Orissa women were never made a part of the decision-making process in the family as well as in the community. In the present study also the same was reaffirmed. Of the

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total respondents more than 45.7% of the widows said that they were never made a part of any decision-making process in the family. All the decisions were taken by the male members. Only 20.8% of the total respondents said that they were always made a part in the decision-making process in their families. A little over one-fourth of the total respondents said that they were consulted only a some times in any major decision-making occasion in the family. So there is no wonder that after the husbands died they were not treated well and made to leave the safety of their houses.

Table 1. 15: Decision-making Rights

Decision-making Rights	Frequency	Percent
Never	433	45.7
Sometimes	254	26.8
Always	197	20.8
DK/CS	63	4.8
Total	947	100.0

5.3.7 Treatment by Parental House

Like other parts of the country the married daughters in a family are well-treated by their parents. Orissa is no exception. The widows that were interviewed seem to be happy with the way they were treated by their parents as far as they had the protection of their husbands. As many as 80.4% of the respondents did not have any complaints against their parental families and seem to be happy. But a significant 14.2% of them said that they were not happy with the way they were treated by their parental family after they were married off.

Table 1. 16: Treatment by Parents Before Widowhood

Kind of Treatment	Frequency	Percent
Extremely Good	261	27.6
Good Enough	105	11.1
Good	395	41.7
Extremely Bad	8	0.8
Bad Enough	31	3.3
Bad/Indifferent	96	10.1
DK/CS	51	5.4
Total	947	100.0

As far as the background of the widows in terms of marriage and family and their overall social relationship it seems that most of them if not all have a normal marital life with close family bonds. Even the in-laws who seem to have turned their backs on them now were sympathetic to them as long as their husbands were alive and were around to look after them. It is only the death of their husbands it seems they have to face hardships. So it remains to be investigated the actual reason for such apathy and indifference to these elderly women. In the following sections an attempt has been made regarding this changed attitude of the family members which culminated in their eviction from their own homes.

5.4 WIDOWHOOD AND ITS AFTERMATH

Widows as a social group is undoubtedly one of the most disadvantaged sections of the society. They are still stigmatized by both their families and society. The widows are treated as individuals of lesser Gods. Despite several reforms and a string of legislations things have not moved in the right direction. All those myths, stigma remains and widows, especially belonging to the poorer sections of the society who are looked down upon only by the society but by their own

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families. So from the perspective of this study it is very important to understand the attitude of their own families.

5.4.1 Age of Widowhood

From the perspective of the study most of the widows seem to be widowed at a later age, i.e. after 40 years of age. This is not to project it as a trend of widowhood happening in the state. This will be erroneous to suggest that. As the scope of the study is strictly confined to the religious city of Puri, this seems to hold good as one can notice elderly widows staying in the city. In the study it was found that as many as 68.3% of the interviewed widows were widowed after the age of 40. There seems to be a small percentage of women who were widowed at a young age of less than 25 years. Again this is not a representative sample to pass on a judgment on the age of widowhood in the state. Strictly, speaking of the widows staying in Puri seem to be widowed at a later part their lives.

Table 1. 17: Age of Widowhood

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent
< 18	24	2.5
19-22	32	3.4
23-25	36	3.8
26-30	75	7.9
31-35	51	5.4
35-39	70	7.4
>40	647	68.3
DK/CS	12	1.3
Total	947	100.0

5.4.2 Duration of Widowhood

It is very important to know the duration of widowhood that these women had to spend before abandoned by their respective families.

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This will give an understanding regarding the tolerance level of widows in their own homes. The study reveals an interesting facet to widowhood. As many as 60.2% of the total respondents said that they were widowed in less than four years ago which precisely translate that their family members started to see them as liability in less than four years which is quite disturbing. Another 11% seem to be widowed for less than ten years. So it seems that the rural Orissa and especially the poor and marginalized see their widows as burden and they prefer to dump them out rather than sympathize with them.

Table 1. 18: Duration of Widowhood

Duration in Years	Frequency	Percent
< 4	570	60.2
5-9	104	11.0
10-14	78	8.2
16-19	66	7.0
> 20	31	3.3
DK/CS	98	10.3
Total	947	100.0

5.4.3 Death of Husband and Coping with it

Death of husband is a rude shock for every Indian woman. This is more so for the rural women where she is not financially independent to support herself and her children. Most of the widows said that their husbands died a natural death. Another 31.7% said that they do not know the reason exactly the cause of their death.

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Table 1. 19: Reason of Death of Husband

Reason of Death	Frequency	Percent
.00	3	.3
1.00	484	51.1
2.00	91	9.6
3.00	43	4.5
4.00	14	1.5
5.00	4	.4
6.00	8	.8
7.00	300	31.7
Total	947	100.0

Most of the women seem to have taken the death of their husband naturally. A few of them thought of killing themselves while a little over 1% blamed themselves for the death of their husbands. But everybody said that it was a traumatic experience for them to lose their husbands.

Table 1. 20: Reaction to the Death of Husband

<i>Reaction to Husband's death</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Naturally</i>	652	68.8
<i>Blamed Myself</i>	11	1.2
<i>Felt Very Insecured</i>	60	6.3
<i>Felt to Commit Suicide</i>	17	1.8
<i>DK/CS</i>	207	21.7
<i>Total</i>	947	100.0

Many a times it was believed that the woman was blamed every time for the death of her husband is concerned, especially if the death occurs untimely. This has been often used as an excuse to mistreat the widows and used as a pretext to drive her away from the home.

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But this study shows that the widows were not largely blamed for the death of their husbands. Only a little over 2% said they were held responsible for the death of their husbands. But as many as 96.9% of the respondents said that nobody in their in-laws' family blamed them directly for the death of their husbands. So it seems at least one taboo which is to put the onus of responsibility squarely on the widow for her sins in her past life for the death of her husband in the present life is categorically removed. So it seems that if the widows have left their homes voluntarily or forced to do so is more to do so for economic reasons rather than for strict socio-religious taboos.

Table 1. 21: Putting Blame of Death of Husband

Blaming for the death of Husband	Frequency	Percent
Yes	10	1.1
Sometimes	9	1.0
Never	918	96.9
DK/CS	10	1.0
Total	947	100.0

The loss of a dear one is always a shock. It seems these widows though have been spending their widowhood for quite sometime now, have not been able to come to terms fully. As many as 93.2% of the respondents said that they are yet to recover the loss of their husbands. This may be explained because of their loneliness and left uncared for. With nobody to look after them and struggling for survival it is not surprising that they do miss for somebody who stood by their side in their difficult period in the happier period. While, probed further they leave it the wishes of Lord Jagannath.

Table 1. 22: Recovery Time from the Shock of Husband's Death

Recovery Period of Husband's Death	Frequency	Percent
< 1 month	9	1.0
1-6	7	0.7
6-12	13	1.4
>12	31	3.3
Still to Recover	883	93.2
DK/CS	4	0.4
Total	947	100.0

5.4.4 Treatment by Family and Friends

The Indian culture teaches us to everybody with empathy, especially those in a difficult circumstance. There is no compensation to the loss of a dear one and especially of a husband. This is more so for a women belonging to the poorer section of the society as the woman in the rural parts of the country has only one asset in her life to care of- her husband. And if it is lost she loses everything. Contrary to belief, the widows in the state of Orissa do not seem to face cruelty from the in-laws. Yes, there are many widows who are treated by the in-laws which can be called less than humane. But largely whenever a woman loses her husband, she is treated with sympathy, at least immediately. This seems to be confirmed by the study in which 59% of the respondents said that immediately after their husbands died they were treated with sympathy by the in-laws. But there are quite a few of them who also said that they were not treated well by their in-laws. Among all the respondents 10.2% said to have undergone taunting by the in-laws. Similarly, 8.8% said that they were misbehaved and another 13.5% said to be treated indifferently by the in-laws. Anther noticeable

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finding of the study is that about five percent of the total widows interviewed that they have to undergo the traumatic experience of physical abuse which often has led a scar psychologically if not physically on them. So among those studied majority said to be treated with sympathy many complained of misbehavior and sometimes hostile behaviour.

Table 1. 23: Treatment by in-laws after the Death of Husband

Treatment by the In-laws	Frequency	Percent
Taunting	97	10.2
Misbehaved	83	8.8
Physical Abuse	46	4.9
With Sympathy	559	59.0
More Care	22	2.3
Indifferently	128	13.5
DK/CS	12	1.2
Total	947	100.0

In the state of Orissa unmarried daughters are one of the most protected members in a family and so is the married daughter if widowed. This is reaffirmed in this study also. Most of the widows said that they were treated with sympathy and even more care immediately after the death of their husbands by their parents and parental relatives. But as the below table shows about 20% of the widows said that they were either treated indifferently or were mis-behaved by their relatives.

**Table 1. 24: Treatment by Parental Relatives
after the Death of Husband**

Treatment by Parents and Relatives	Frequency	Percent
Taunting	4	0.4
Misbehaved	81	8.6
Physical Abuse	1	0.1
With Sympathy	669	70.6
More Care	50	5.3
Indifferently	102	10.8
DK/CS	40	4.2
Total	947	100.0

But, it seems this sympathetic attitude towards the widowed daughter did not translate into actual deed as far as taking care of her is concerned. As many as 69.3% of the total respondents said despite their difficulties after the loss of their husbands their parents did not offer to look after them and instead left them to fend for themselves at the mercy of the in-laws. Another 2% said that they were indifferent in offering for taking care of them in the absence of their husbands. Only 5.7% of the respondents that they did not feel it necessary that their parents should step in for their upkeep as they were getting all kinds of support from the in-laws. This is to be mentioned here that those who said to be looked after well by the relatives are permanent residents of Puri who are staying with their in-laws.

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Table 1. 25: Offer to Look after the Widowhood by Parents

Looking After by Parents	Frequency	Percent
Yes	179	18.9
No	656	69.3
Indifferent	19	2.0
Was not Necessary	54	5.7
DK/CS	39	4.1
Total	947	100.0

The parents also develop an apathetic attitude towards these widows which is reflected in the frequency of visits of the parents to the widowed daughter. Only 3.5% of the total respondents said that their parents visited them quite frequently after they were widowed. The apathetic attitude of the parents can be gauged from the fact that more than 67% of the respondents said that the parents and relatives visited them only occasionally and stopped visiting thereafter. So quite clearly in the marginalized and poorer section of the society in Orissa the widows are seen as a burden not only in the family of the in-laws but also by their own parental home.

5.4.5 Right to Survival: Providing Basic Amenities

Right to life and survival is the fundamental right of every person in this country. The family is duty bound to provide basic amenities like food, safe shelter and security to every of its members which cannot be compromised at any cost. But this fundamental rights seems to be denied to the poor widows by the families who turned their back on them. As many as 60.8% of the widows who are staying away from their home in Puri said that sometime after their grieving period the in-laws were reluctant to provide food and even shelter to them. About five percent of them said that immediately after the grieving period the in-laws immediately stopped providing food and repeatedly asked them to leave the house. The rest said that even though they were not

denied food and shelter the family members never want them to stay in the family after the death of their husbands.

5.5 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF WIDOWS IN PURI

5.5.1 Socio-Religious Sanctions

It is a matter of great regret that even in 21st century widows in India are subjected to go through many discriminatory practices. Many of these practices have nothing to do with religious practices or necessary for a healthy living. These socio-religious sanctions have been practiced by widows through centuries throughout India. It has been so entrenched in the heart and soul of the widows that they have taken to these rituals as natural. Among all the widows interviewed as many as 51.8% said that they practice these rituals religiously while another 38.2% said that though they do follow the rituals and socio-religious practices, they do not follow it very strictly. However, they said that they try their best to follow as much as they can. But a little over 9% said that they never follow the socio-religious practices meant for the widows. A close scrutiny shows that most of these non-followers are from the SC and backward caste communities. Those belonging to Brahmin, Karan and Khandayat caste found to follow the rituals and practices quite religiously.

Table 1. 26: Following of Rituals and Taboos

Following Rituals	Frequency	Percent
Yes	491	51.8
Yes, not Strictly	362	38.2
No	86	9.1
DK/CS	8	0.8
Total	947	100.0

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At attempt was made to understand the perception of the widows regarding following these rituals. As many as 42% of all the widows think that it is the duty of a widow to follow the rituals as prescribed by the society. A little over 22% said they get solace and peace by following these rituals. Only a few (0.3%) said that these rituals are forced upon by the society on them which they do not want to follow them. But interestingly close to 24% said they do not know why they are following it but believe that after widowhood it is the way of life for a widow. In the state of Orissa though there are quite elaborate practices which a widow is expected to follow, tonsuring of head seem to be absent. In stead of tonsuring, the practice here is cutting off some locks as a ritual.

Table 1. 27: Perception towards adherence to Rituals and Taboos

Accepting the Rituals/Taboos	Frequency	Percent
Voluntarily	109	11.5
As a duty of widow	398	42.0
Forced by the family	3	.3
For solace and Peace	210	22.2
DK/CS	227	23.9
Total	947	100.0

5.5.2 Taboos: Food and Dress

The biggest curb that is placed on the widows in the country is with regards to her food and dress code. The Hindu society is too rigid as far as how a widow should eat or dress herself. This rigidity is even harsher in case of upper caste women. This was reaffirmed by this study. In the state of Orissa the widows have to wear only white saree unlike in some parts of the country where red or saffron sarees are allowed. During the study it was found that close to 72% of the widows do wear white saree as is expected of them. But more than 28.1% of the respondents were found to wear sarees other than white. At a

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closer look at the data these widows were found to stay in various short-stay homes or outside where they have to depend upon their caretakers for their dress. So even if they want to wear white always they cannot do as they cannot afford to buy a saree for themselves.

Table 1. 28: Wearing White Saree

Wearing White Saree	Frequency	Percent
Yes	493	71.9
No	454	28.1
Total	947	100.0

Similarly, as far as wearing ornaments like bangles, necklace etc. is concerned about three fourths of all widows said it is a complete taboo for them. But quite a substantial number (26%) of all those interviewed said that do wear some ornaments. On a closer scrutiny it was found that those wearing some ornaments prefer to wear simple ones like chain (of gold, silver or brass), metal bangles (not made of glass), ear rings etc. Any kind of cosmetic like kumkum, *kajal*, lip colour, perfume, is complete taboo for them. Even if those wearing these simple ornaments are found to be relatively young widows and those staying at Puri in their own homes. These organs staying outside simply cannot afford these ornaments. All most all the widows do wear *tulasi mali*, a chain made of herbs around their neck which has a deep religious attachment. This particular chain often symbolizes of being a good widow – or in other words a widow spending her life following the strict socio-religious sanctions.

As far as food habits is concerned all most all of them take very simple food and strictly vegetarian food. As many as 49.8% of the respondents said that they always take simple vegetarian food without onion and garlic. Another 10.3% said that they do take sometimes eat simple vegetarian food without onion and garlic. But 38.3% of all the

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widows said they cannot follow strict food restrictions as they are not sure from where their next meal could come. They candidly say that beggars cannot be chosen. As they have to live off the mercy of others they have to eat whatever they can lay their hands on from their givers.

Table 1. 29: If taking pure Vegetarian Meals

Taking Vegetarian Food	Frequency	Percent
DK/CS	14	1.5
Always	472	49.8
Sometimes	98	10.3
No	363	38.3
Total	947	100.0

For the widows of Puri, irrespective of where she stays *Mahaparasada* (*Mahaprasad* is the food cooked in the special kitchen consisting of rice, dal and a number of vegetable curry is offered to the God) is the supreme desire. Given a chance a widow would be extremely happy to have this *Mahaprasada* everyday. In fact *Mahaparasada* is very pious to every Oriya person in the state. As it is cooked without onion, garlic or other ingredients which are considered taboo there is not any problem of being this unpure from socio-religious point of view. But the unfortunate part of it is that not all the widows can afford to buy this from the *Anand Bazar*, the dedicated market place meant for selling of *Mahaprasada*. Even on a conservative estimate one person needs at least Rs. 15/- to Rs. 20/- for a single meal which is simply out of bounds for most of these widows. So many of these widows are found to be begging around for a little *Mahaprasada* which cannot be described in any words. It is really heartbreaking to see these widows looking at people enjoying the *Mahaprasada* with hunger in their eyes to pick up the leftovers so that they can live for another day. This has become routine for them and they are so accustomed to it that they take it naturally. After all, there is no other choice for them for survival. It is a matter of regret that even though Jagannath Temple is one of

the most popular temples with comparatively comfortable resources, there is no specific provisions on behalf of the temple administration to identify these widows who frequent the temple everyday and take care at least one meal. According to estimates there might be around 300 widows who are struggling on a daily basis. If the temple administration so wishes it can arrange for this small gesture, but somehow not interested in doing this. When asked about this the temple administration simply said they have not thought about this. This shows sheer apathy and lack of sensitivity on their part.

5.5.3 Taboos: Socio -Religious

Socio-religious taboos are deeply entrenched in the society even today. This was admitted by the widows who said that they have to face various taboos which varies from being barred to attend various ceremonies like marriage, thread ceremony, naming ceremony of the new borns etc. Many also complain that they were not allow to participate in the religious ceremonies. But the most humiliating taboo that they think is to bar them from even witnessing or participating the marriages of their children in the name of bad omen. But it seems they have taken it as usual and seem to have become immune these taboos as now they do not make any sense to them. This feeling is more prevalent among the widows who have left their homes and staying in Puri far away from their homes. But those widows staying at Puri in their homes or with relatives say that they do feel depressed and humiliating when barred from these socio-religious functions. But most of them are unanimous that these social customs are biased against the emotional needs of the widows and should be removed as a practice.

Asamani Das.....the Rebel



The atrocities on widows is well known and well-documented. Millions of widows suffer silently all the atrocities meted out to them by their in-laws and parents. There are only a few Mohini Giris who have come out of the shackles of stigma surrounding widowhood. But for millions of widows it is a life of hell, a slow and painful death.

But, there are some courageous women who against all the odds have faced this world on their own and have made a mark for themselves. Asamani Das one such woman who was harassed by her in-laws and driven out of her home. With two little children she had no where to go.

She came to the city of widows in Orissa and stayed in a home with her two children. With the assistance of some voluntary organizations she got some training in wick making. And with her hard labour and determination she is earning a decent income now. Not only she is self-independent, but also she has given employment to about ten such women who are selling wicks and earning something to survive.

She is a rebel in the sense that she does not wear white nor she adheres to the taboos like eating food without garlic, onion or ginger. Her only aim is to settle her two children who are studying in good schools in Puri now.

Asamani has shown, 'If there is a will, there is a way out there to achieve the goal.

5.6 SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES OF WIDOWS

The sight of these widows roaming across the streets of Puri prompts one to think if they have at all a family or whether their children are not ashamed of seeing their mothers begging in the streets of Puri? So an attempt was made to look into the families ties of these widows and their children. Not surprisingly as many as 73.7% said that they do have children who are grown up and are well settled. Another 2.3% said that though they have children they are minor and living with either their parents or in-laws. Around 8% of the total widows interviewed said that they do not have any children while the rest refused to answer.

Table 1. 30: Whether they have Children

Having Children	Frequency	Percent
Yes, Grown Up Ones	659	73.7
Yes, Minor Ones	22	2.3
No Children	73	7.7
DK/CS	153	16.2
Total	947	100.0

There is no doubt that these women are subjected to inhumane treatment by their own family and friends. About 15% of the total respondents said that they feel that their children have made gross injustice to them by not taking care of them when they needed it the most. They did not shy away from sharing how their own children and relatives inflicted atrocities on them. A few of these women feel that they do not blame anyone but their fate for all their sufferings. In a fatalistic tone they say that due to their sins in the past life they have to suffer at the hands of their children in this life. But even though a little over 25% of the widows did not want to discuss the treatment meted out by their children, they refused to discuss or reveal their sufferings in the open. Instead they seem to have silently been suffering. But one can clearly feel the emotional pain writing in their eyes. While the rest are staying away in their

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respective families and do not seem to have any major complaints against their children. Of those living in Puri away from home 4.8% respondents said that even though they are staying at Puri away from their home their children do visit them regularly and meet most of their needs. So they do not feel that any injustice is meted out to them by their children.

**Table 1. 31: Whether they feel the Children have done
Injustice to them**

Injustice by Children	Frequency	Percent
Yes	142	14.6
No, it was my Fate	13	1.4
No, they visit me regularly	45	4.8
<u>No</u>	507	53.5
No Response	240	25.3
Total	947	100.0

An attempt was made to know exactly reason of the changed attitude of the children to their widowed mother or relatives. Many of the widows said that their own children look upon them as a burden after the demise of their husbands. This is so because their children feel that they cannot earn and contribute to the family income pool. So in economically poorer families widows are not welcome. There are widows who said that their children and relatives were so indifferent to them that they felt it better to leave the house than to bear with this indifference. However, a little over 50% of the respondents said that their family members were sympathetic to them. These widows stay with their families and do not seem to have much complain against their families.

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Table 1.32: Change in Attitude of the Children

Change in Attitude of Children	Frequency	Percent
Yes, they look me as a burden	148	15.7
Forced me out of House	62	6.5
Indifferent	60	6.3
They Sympathise with me	312	32.9
They try to make me happy	184	19.5
No Response	181	19.1
<u>Total</u>	947	100.0

An attempt was made why their own children turned hostile to them? Many of the widows said their sons and daughters-in-laws and even their daughter do not want them to stay with them. Not many of them seemed to have a clue about this changed or hostile behaviour. Of those who could guess for the reason 21.2% said that they are reluctant to take care of them due to their inability to contribute to the family income pool. A significant portion of the widows felt that the family members want to deprive them of inheriting any property. Out of the total respondents 14.6% said that they felt that their family members do not want give any property to them. This was found more prevalent in case of joint families where the paternal property had not been divided at the point of death of the husbands and also in cases where either the widows do not have children or are widowed at a very young age. From talking to the widows it was found that most of these families are poor and have very little land holding. So obviously after the death of a brother (incase of a joint family) the other family members sensed an opportunity to part with a portion of the property to a helpless widow who does not have either the support in the form of grown up children or financial power to fight their rights in the court of law. Moreover none of them seem to be aware of their rights of widows as far as right to property is concerned. Similarly, about one-fifth of them felt that their children want to take away whatever little financial

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assistance like pension of their deceased husbands, widows pension etc. It seems financial considerations is the most important cause of the hostile attitude of the children and relatives.

Table 1. 33: Reason for the Changed Attitude of the Children

<i>Reason for Hostile Behaviour</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Taking the Financial Benefits</i>	42	12.2
<i>Take my pension</i>	23	6.7
<i>Reluctant to take care of me</i>	73	21.2
<i>Deprive me of Property</i>	50	14.6
<i>DK/CS</i>	156	45.3
<i>Total</i>	344	100

It is very important to know how these women are undergoing emotionally and how they are coping with this. It is extremely distressing emotionally to be shunned and shunted out of the family let alone for a woman. But this is the reality that these women have been driven out of the family and not wanted by their families. Most of the women who said they are living away from their homes seem to be depressed. Of the total widows that were interviewed 38.1% said that they feel depressed to stay away of their homes while 23.5% said that they feel lonely and miss their families very much. But they have no option as they cannot go back to their families where they are not welcome. A little over 6% of the total interviewed said that they feel insecure to stay alone at Puri. As far as more severe form of emotional stress is concerned 8.1% said that they face tantrums to stay away from the home, alone and without any emotional support. But it seems that for many of these women who have been living in the city quite a long time now, they have taken this in their stride and staying away from home does not matter any more to them. From amongst the women who said that they are staying at Puri away from home as many as 18.1% said that it does not matter to them anymore. They have snapped all relationship with their relatives and are emotionally attached to Lord Jagannath.

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Table 1. 34: Emotional Status of the Widows

Emotional Status	Frequency	Percent
Feel Lonely	81	23.5
Feel Insecured	21	6.1
Feel Depressed	131	38.1
Facing Tantrums	28	8.1
Does Not Matter	62	18.1
DK/CS	21	6.1
Total	344	100

For widows one of the main emotional disorders is having nightmares during night. From the study it was revealed that a little over 7.1% of the women do have nightmares on a regular basis and about 4% have nightmares sometimes. But most of them said that they do not have any nightmares.

Table 1. 35: Whether they Experience Nightmares

Nightmares	Frequency	Percent
Yes	67	7.1
Sometimes	38	4.0
Never	842	88.9
Total	947	100.0

5.6.1 Staying at Puri

Are these women happy staying at Puri? The popular belief is that as widow Puri is the best place for them to stay. But during the study it was found that not all of them happy staying at Puri. Most of the widows said that they are happy staying at Puri away from home. Among the 373 women who are staying at Puri close to 70% said that they are very happy to stay in Puri. These women have accepted their fate and the way of life that they have been forced on them willingly or unwillingly. But 30.6% of the widows said that they are not at all happy by staying at Puri away from their homes.

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Table 1. 36: Whether Happy Staying at Puri

Happy in Staying in Puri	Frequency	Percent
Yes	249	69.4
No	110	30.6
Total	359	100.0

Of the widows who said that they are happy to stay at Puri majority said that they are happy to stay at Puri because at least they get to have a *Darshan* of Lord Jagannath daily. As they are living in Puri and roam every day in and around the temple they can have the *darshan* of the Lord every time they want. These women have become so fatalist that *darshan* and worshipping the Lord is the most important goal of their life now. Another 23.8% said that they get solace at Puri as it is one of the most religious places of the country and now they have a chance to stay at her despite all the difficulties that they are facing. About 13% of the total respondents said that they are assured of shelter and food which is guaranteed by the Swadhar Homes or Short Stay Homes that they are staying. A small percentage of residents (3.6%) said that they are relieved from the gross misbehavior by staying at Puri. Similarly two percent widows said that they get an opportunity of generating some income by working at Puri which helps them to survive.

Table 1. 37: Reason of Being Happy to Stay at Puri

REASON FOR BEING HAPPY	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Relieved from Misbehavior	9	3.6
Get Solace	59	23.8
Darshan of the Lord	139	55.8
Assured shelter and Food	32	12.8
Can Generate Income	5	2.0
Free from worldly attachments	5	2.0
Total	249	100

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Of those who said that they are not happy staying at Puri majority said that they do not feel it comfortable of being overtly dependent upon others for their survival. They seem to have been very self-respecting, but they do not have any choice but to stay at Puri. Similarly, a little over 32% said that they do not have a source of income to sustain themselves which force them to live on the mercy of others. They have to beg for food and money to sustain themselves for another day. Similarly in case of any medical problems they just have to leave it to the mercy of others to get treatment. Only 10% of the total respondents said they are unhappy because they are missing their families. There seems to be no major complaints against the in-charge of their respective shelter homes or ashramas that they are staying. Only a couple of them pointed out that they have been physically/sexually abused by the in-charges.

Table 1. 38: Wearing White Saree

Reason for being Unhappy	Frequency	Percent
Lack of Source of Income	36	32.7
Over dependence on others	59	53.7
Missing the Family	11	10.0
Misbehaved by in-mates	2	1.8
Misbehaved by In-charge	2	1.8
Total	110	100

5.7 CONCLUSION

The social condition of the women staying in Puri is truly miserable. Shunned by their family and community they have to struggle to live for another day. Those widows consider themselves lucky who are staying in the Swadhar Homes or Short-Stay Homes. At least they have got a safe shelter with assured food and medical care. But this does not necessarily mean that they are happy. The stigma and the taboos written into the life of a widow are clearly visible in their face. Most of the widows unequivocally say that more than the socio-religious taboos it is the behaviour of their own children and relatives that hurts them the most. But now that they have reconciled to their fate they have learnt to live with the time and unanimous in their opinion that Lord Jagannath is their saviour and now they are waiting for their journey to *Swargadwar*, the Holy crematorium which is the holiest crematorium for every person in the state.

CHAPTER – VI
ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE WIDOWS IN PURI

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Self-survival instinct is dearest emotional and psychological trait of every human being with rare exceptions. This instinct keeps the human race going even in the most adverse condition which is responsible for evolving of human race over the last millions of years. So there is no wonder that the widows of Puri are also fighting to survive for another day in the most adverse conditions. Deserted by their family and friends these widows have made Puri their second home and embraced Lord Jagannath as their saviour. An attempt was made to explore the economic condition of these women and also to look for alternative for ensuring their livelihood.

6.1.1 Source of Livelihood

For the widows living in Puri the most important problem is a source of income. But unfortunately they do not have an assured source of livelihood. Those widows who are staying at Puri (as domiciles) perhaps do not have to bother about their daily existence as they have the support of their respective families. It is still debatable regarding the quality of this support. But it seems most of these widows do not have a problem for getting food for survival. But those widows who are staying here but do not belong to Puri town itself face untold sufferings. Out of the total widows that were interviewed 8.8% said that they beg to earn a little money for themselves. When asked why are they begging like his, they shot back who will feed them if they stop begging for which we did not have an answer. Some of the able bodied widows said that they work in various establishments like hotels, shops, tea stall doing petty jobs like washing utensils, house cleaning, running errands etc. by which they get

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something to take care of. A little over 17% of the total respondents said that they undertake petty business like preparing wicks, garland making, preparing handicrafts items etc. which gives them a decent income to them. But they complain that in proportionate to their labour they are paid less by the employers. But surprisingly, contrary to popular beliefs not many of these widows work in various *Ashramas/mathas*. Only a few of these widows said they work in these *Ashramas/mathas* on a regular basis as a source of income. Similarly only four of the total respondents said that they depend upon the temple for their survival. These few women have been adopted by at a personal level by the *sewayats* to help them out, but the temple administration does not formally provide any food to these women. This was later verified from the temple administration who said that they do not have any provision of providing free food to the widows in Puri, though they do provide free Prasada to various orphanages in and around the city.

Table 6.1: Source of Livelihood

<i>Source of Livelihood</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Nothing, Depends upon relatives</i>	152	16.1
Begging	83	8.8
<i>Petty Service</i>	97	10.2
<i>Small economic activities</i>	165	17.4
<i>Helping in daily chores of Ashramas/Mathas</i>	3	0.3
<i>Entirely depend upon Temple</i>	4	0.4
<i>DK/CS</i>	443	46.8
<i>Total</i>	947	100.0

As far as their motivation of working to earn their livelihood is concerned most of them work voluntarily as they need some money on various religious occasions and to fulfill the rituals. So those women who are even staying at Swadhar Homes/Short Stay Homes also work to earn an extra buck. Only a few (less than 1%) of the respondents said that they are forced to work against their will in their workplace. Most of these workplaces seem to be the *Asharamas* and *Mathas*. When inquired regarding their willingness to undertake some kind of economic activities, most of them readily agreed for such a prospect. They said if this can be done it will be great help and will relieve them from daily botheration of arranging their meal.

6.1.2 Food and Health

Among the widows that were interviewed those staying at their homes or with their relatives were found not to have any issues as far as their supply of diet is concerned. Even those widows staying in Short Stay Homes/Swadhar Homes seem to get at least three square meals a day. But those widows staying at private mess, *asharamsas/mathas* seem to be in a very difficult position for arranging their food. During the month of Kartika, all most all the widows eat only once a day. This is the practice not only of widows of Puri but also for all the widows of Orissa. So in the city of Puri also widows stick to this practice quite religiously. But during the rest of the month for some widows it is a quite a struggle.

More than half of the widows eat at least three meals a day. This number includes the widows who stay at their own homes as well as those living in Short Stay/Swadha Homes. Of the rest about 7% of the respondents said that they have to do with only one meal a day almost every day. On being asked how do they get their meals this category of women said that their source of food

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is *Ananda Bazar* (the market place where *Mahaprasada* is sold and also the open dining place of the pilgrims). They collect the left-overs of the devotees to survive themselves. Even though religiously it is very pious to share *Mahaparasada* irrespective of caste, class or creed, still the sight of these hungry women looking at the meals of devotees is less than religious. Close to thirty percent said that they eat at least twice in a day (excluding the month of Karika).

Table 6.2: No. of whole Meals a Day

No. of Meals a Day	Frequency	Percent
Once a Day	65	6.9
Twice a Day	373	39.4
Three Times a Day	500	52.7
DK/CS	9	1.0
Total	947	100

Do these women get to eat sufficiently? Not really. Not all the women said that they always get sufficient food to eat. Only a little over two thirds of all respondents said that they get sufficient food to eat whereas 28.45 of the respondents said that they do not get sufficient food always. This is understandable most of these women do not have assured source of getting food. A bad day in trade, illness can seriously compromise their chance of getting some food to eat. Similarly, begging also does not ensure that they will get enough money to buy food for themselves. In such a situation they do not have any option but to go hungry.

Table 6.3: If the Diet is Sufficient

Sufficiency of Diet	Frequency	Percent
Yes	643	67.9
Sometimes	269	28.4
Never	16	1.7
DK/CS	19	2.0
Total	947	100

6.1.3 Role of Temple Administration

The Lord Jagannath Temple Administration is one of the well-organised machineries which looks after the entire day-to-day functioning of the temple. But it seems that they do not have any concrete plans for these widows. As far as perception of the widows towards temple is concerned, most of them felt that temple is not doing anything for them. As many as 49.1% of the total respondents said that the temple administration is not doing anything for them. About 3.6% said that they are getting some financial assistance from the temple administration. This was a bit baffling. On further enquiry it was found that some widows are getting a pension of Rs. 300/- (three hundred rupees) from the temple administration. While talking to the temple administration officials, they confirmed that they do provide a pension of three hundred rupees to widows of *sevayats* (servants of Lord) who have died. This assistance is over and above the widow pension that they draw from the govt. under the widow pension scheme.

Table 6.4: Assistance from Temple Administration

Type of Assistance	Frequency	Percent
Financial	39	4.1
Food	06	0.6
Employment	78	8.3
Shelter	07	0.7
Nothing	465	49.1
DK/CS	352	37.2
Total	947	100

Only six respondents, amounting to 0.6% of the total respondents said that they get food in the form of *Mahaprasada* from the temple. So again this was cross-checked to verify that the temple administration does not provide any food assistance to any widows officially. There are a few *mathas* like *Annadana Atika*, *Raghava Das Matha* etc. who provide some food to the widows. However, they are not under any obligation to provide any such thing which the in-charges said that they do so out of empathy to a few widows who are in extremely difficult position to sustain themselves. Some of the widows said that the temple provides employment which in really means they are employed by the traders inside and outside the temple who engage them in various activities like garland making, wick production, selling *prasada*, preparing *prasada* etc. So this employment generation is nothing to do with the temple administration. But as these activities are directly related to various rituals of the temple the widows feel that the temple has given them this employment opportunity. Similarly, the temple does not have any provisions for providing safe shelter to the widows. A few of the widows did

mention that temple provides them shelter but in reality this shelter they were talking about was temporary in nature and is provided by various *ashramas/mathas* out of compassion and empathy towards these women. So needless to say that the temple administration does not do anything specifically for the widows in the form of food or shelter which it must look at seriously.

6.2 BENEFITS FROM THE GOVT.

In the city of Puri there seems to be no specific programmes aimed at the economic development of the widows who do not have a source of income. The only benefit that the govt. has been providing to the widows is the widows pension and old age pension. But not all of the widows are getting even this meager pension. Only 40.8% of the total respondents said that they are getting two hundred rupees under Madhubabu Pension Yojana while 58% said that they are not getting any financial benefit out of the Madhubabu Pension Yojana. None of the women who have left their villages to come to Puri (non-domicile) is getting pension even if some of them are living here for more than fifteen to twenty years. So during the in-depth interview this question was put across the district administration who clearly said that legally they cannot provide pension to any widow who is staying at Puri for which it is mandatory to be a resident of Puri. Those who have come from other places cannot be provided as there is a chance that there might be a chance of duplicity. However, these women clearly say that they also do not get any financial benefit at their native village also and do not know if somebody is drawing their pension on their behalf.

Table 6.5: Whether Getting Widow Pension

Getting Widow Pension	Frequency	Percent
Yes	387	40.8
No	549	58.0
DK/CS	11	1.2
Total	947	100

All those getting the pension said they are getting two hundred rupees per month. With regards to the regularity of drawing of pension most of the widows they do get it regularly and only about 14% said that the frequency of getting the pension is quite irregular. While probed on this aspect it was learnt that the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) conducts a pension day, preferably on a fixed day so that everybody could be provided the pension at one go. But he admitted that during the months of January and February they did have some problems in getting the sanctions in time which were technical. On further inquiry the research team was satisfied that with a couple of exception, the pension is provided quite regularly. Due to fact that Puri being the district headquarters there is very little scope of any irregularity. A little over 1700 widows are provided widows pension who are primarily residents of Puri city under the Madhu Babu Pension Yojana.

Table 6.6: Regularity of Getting Widow Pension

Regularity	Frequency	Percent
Regularly	336	86.8
Not very Regular	37	9.6
Highly irregular	14	3.6
Total	387	100

Of those widows who said that they are not getting any pension as of now do not have a clue regarding the reason why they are being denied this pension which could be very valuable to them. Even if some of the widows approached the officials they were told that they are not eligible to get the pension under the scheme. But, as far as awareness of the scheme is concerned only 4.4% said that they are not aware of such a scheme whereas 26.6% said that even if they know about the scheme they do not know how to get it from the govt. Similarly only ten of the widows said to have been receiving the old age pension from the govt.

6.2.1 Other Benefits

In the state of Orissa there is no specific scheme or programme directed at the widows, let alone for the widows of Puri. But there are some general schemes which is directed at the general population of which these widows are also the beneficiaries. During the course of the study it was found that the widows have received or have been receiving the following welfare schemes from the govt. apart from the cash benefits under the widows/old age scheme.

Table 6.7: Other Benefits Receiving

Type of Assistance	Frequency	Percent
Antodoya Anna Yojana	31	3.3
BPL Rice	251	26.5
Food Assistance	65	6.9
National Family Benefit Scheme	21	2.2
Others	89	9.4
Not Getting/Don't Know	490	51.7
Total	947	100

A little more than 26% of the widows said that they are getting BPL rice from the govt. which is available now at Rs. 2/- per K.G. This these women said helping them a lot as at least it is taking care of some parts of their most important expenses. Another very older widows said that the district administration is providing them with rice under the Antodoya Yojana where as about 6.9% of the respondents said that they are provided with one-time diet from the temple. But when in-depth interviews were conducted it was found that most of these widows are actually widows of *sevayats* who get *Mahaprasada* from the temple authorities. But those living here but do not belong to the city do not get any such assistance apart from some mercy giving by large-hearted philanthropic persons who provide some food to these widows as a personal gesture. More than 51% said that they are not getting any other benefits from the govt. However, twenty-one (21) widows said that they had got some financial benefits under the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS). Though they failed to recall the name of the exact scheme they clearly said that after the death of their husbands they did receive around ten thousand rupees. But every body was unanimous that the money never came to them but was retained by their family members. In two

cases it was found that after getting the family benefit scheme money, they were driven out of their homes. So apart from the govt. apathy toward them, this cruelty by their family members has hurt them the most. But, they do not have a choice either.

6.3 HEALTH STATUS OF THE WIDOWS

Health is a very important indicator of a person's overall socio-economic condition. In case of the widows in Puri, especially those living without any family ties face a difficult times during any illness. During the study it was found that most of the widows are facing some sort of chronic illness which makes their lives even more difficult. The table below shows the most important chronic illness that they feel bothers them the most. Apart from this, they are facing other illness. But they were asked to spell out the most important health problem. It was found out that as much as 38.6% of the widows are facing some form of orthopedic problem which they say hamper their movement. This was pointed out specifically by the older widows who find it difficult to scale about thirty to forty large steps to reach the temple to have a *darshan* of the Lord and to carry out other rituals inside the temple. About 24% of the widows that were interviewed pointed out a number of common to sever type of illness which the research team feels should get appropriate medical attention. But unfortunately, they cannot afford to see a doctor nor they can afford to buy medicines. A little over 31% said that they did not have any major health problems which cripple them to undertake their daily routine.

Table 6.8: Type of Health Problems Facing

Type of Health Problems	Frequency	Percent
Reproductive	14	1.5
Austio-arthritis	4	.4
Orthopedic	366	38.6
Opthamological	5	.5
Breathing/Asthma	16	1.7
Others	223	23.6
No Problems	295	31.2
DK/CS	24	2.5
Total	947	100

Out of the total 947 widows that were interviewed thirty-one women amounting to 3.3% of the total respondents said that they had fallen ill seriously in the last two years which required hospitalization.

Table 6.9: Whether Hospitalized in last two Years

Fallen Ill	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	3.3
No	916	96.7
Total	947	100.0

It was important for the research team to know actually who treated them during this difficult time. For the women who are staying with their families it was not very difficult to get the right treatment. But for those widows who are staying in Puri without any family ties seemed to be very difficult to get the basic treatment. Almost half of those required hospitalization (48.8%) did not have any helping hand but themselves to get the required treatment. About one fourth of them pointed out that some philanthropic persons who they

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know took them to hospital and provided the necessary treatment to them. Close to 13% of those fell sick said that their in-charges, mainly in Swadhar/Short Stay Homes provided them the required medical facilities to them. Fellow-feelingness and comradre was also quite visible for these widows in crisis. Around 10% of those interviewed that their fellow inmates took them to the hospital and did whatever they could or providing the necessary medical care. One respondents said she simply could not afford to treatment. She left it to her fate and Lord Jagannath to cure her. Fortunately, she recovered from her illness after some time.

Table 6.10: How they were Treated

Mode of Treatment	Frequency	Percent
Treated Myself	15	48.4
Inmates	3	9.7
In-charges	4	12.9
Recovered Naturally	1	3.2
Outsiders	8	25.8
Total	31	100

As far resources for medical care is concerned most of them said that they do not have any resources to treatment them during any emergency medical care. For them, getting food and cloth for survival is the most important thing now and they simply cannot afford to think about saving for treatment to look after their future. Spending money on healthcare obviously comes at the bottom of their priority. While asked about the need for possible serious health problems in future they pointed out that they do not have any option but to depend upon the mercy of others and Lord Jagannath to take care of them.

6.4 RIGHT TO PROPERTY

6.4.1 Widow's Right of Maintenance: The Legal Position

Keeping in mind the low status of women certain protection has been given to women on various fronts. Among all the difficult periods in the life of a woman, widowhood, perhaps is the single most difficult time. There have been several cases where women were driven out of their homes after their husbands died to deprive her of the property. So to provide protection a specific law was promulgated to give the widows the rights of maintenance and to inherit property.

Under the Hindu law if the father-in-law had received some property by survivorship in which his son (husband of the widow) had a vested interest, he was under a legal obligation to maintain her son's widow. But where he had not any such property, the obligation was only a moral one. According to ancient text, there was no such distinction between moral and legal obligation. It developed at the later stage which has been accepted by all high Courts and the Privy Council. On the death, however, of the father-in-law, his son, widow or other heir inheriting his property came under a legal obligation to maintain her out of such property. Therefore, the mother-in-law was bound to maintain the widow of the pre-deceased son who had lived in union with his father but of the latter's self acquired property to which the father-in-law had succeeded as heir. The above rule was according to the Bombay High Court subject to the condition that her husband was living at the time of his death in union with his father. However, according to Madras High Court, the obligation moral or legal of the father-in-law were not effected by the question whether the late husband was separate or joint.

If the father-in-law bequeathed by will or gifted away his self acquired property, then the father-in-law has no right of

maintenance against the divorcee or the donee of the father-in-law even though the divorcee or donee be also the next heir of the father-in-law.

Section 19 of the Act deals with the maintenance of daughter-in-law. This section also does not impose any personal obligation over her father-in-law to maintain her. She can claim maintenance from her father-in-law only if she is unable to obtain maintenance out of the estate of her husband or her father or mother or from her son or daughter or his or her estate. This right is further conditional upon the father-in-law having in his position coparcenary property in which the widow had not obtained any share. Upon her remarriage, this right ceases but, upon the death of the father-in-law his moral obligation ripens into a legal obligation of his or her heirs inheriting his estate by virtue of Section 2 of the Act which binds a Hindu to maintain dependents of the deceased and the widowed daughter-in-law is among dependents enumerated by Section 2 of the Act. The benefit of this section is applicable to the widows whether married before or after the commencement of the Act.

6.4.2 Perception of the Widows regarding Property Rights

Even if the law is very clear regarding the rights of widows for maintenance and inheriting property, they are not given any such practice by the family members. Most often than not the family members do not wish to part with their property after the death of a son in the family. So an attempt was made to understand to what extent the women are aware of their rights to inherit property as a widow.

Surprisingly it was found that most of the women are aware of the rights of widows to get some property after the death of their husbands. As many as 61.9% of the total respondents said that

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they are aware that they are entitled to get some property out of their in-laws holdings. But none of them are aware of the actual laws and the portion of the property they are entitled. But they are unequivocal in their opinion that their family members have made injustice to them by denying their rights to them. The rest do not know much about these rights and simply never thought about it.

Table 6.11: Level of Awareness on Property Rights

<i>Awareness on Property Rights</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	586	61.9
No	271	28.6
DK/CS	90	9.5
Total	947	100.0

6.4.3 Raising the Issue of Property

It was important to know if these widows ever raised the issue of inheriting their rights or at least demanded some portion of it for taking care of themselves in future. It was sad to discover that only a miniscule portion of these widows actually raised the issue of property after their widowhood. From the study it was found that only 3.4% said that they tried to bring about the property issues after the death of their husbands while the rest said that they never raised the issue before their in-laws. This was a bit disappointing that even if there seems to be a decent level of awareness regarding the property rights of the women, not many of them tried to assert their rights.

Table 6.12: Whether raised Property Issues with In-laws

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	Frequency	Percent
Yes	32	3.4
No	915	96.6
Total	947	100.0

Of those who dared to raise this issue before their in-laws were treated with disdain which resulted in being driven out of their homes later. Asked why did not follow up the matter, the widows asked who will foot the bill for legal expenses? So it is quite evident that even if there is the law and some of them are willing to assert their rights it is too expensive and cumbersome to get justice from the court of law, especially for a widows who is regarded with hostility by their in-laws. Of those who did not raise this issue said that they were too scared to bring this matter in the family as they felt that it would invite more wrath from their in-laws and result in more sufferings.

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Futile Fighting for the Rights.....

Everybody speaks of the rights of a widow to inherit the property. After the husband dies, even a widow's own children become enemies. This has been told many times over, but Ms. Sudesna Hota experienced it to believe it.

Sudeshan Hota, a brahmin woman was born and brought up in a western Orissa town of Sambalpur. She was the loving daughter of her parents who got her married. But her happiness did not last long. Her husband died in a fatal accident and she was left with her only daughter to spend the rest of her life. After bringing her daughter in the best possible manner she managed to get her married in the industrial town of Rourkela and thought that she can breath her last in peace. But little did she know that the worst is yet to come.



After her daughter was married off her parents-in-law started abusing her which became physical abuse. Unable to cope with the stress she went to her daughter's house at Rourkela and thought she is at safe hands. But little did she know what was in store for her. In the pretext of taking her for a darshan of Lord Jagannath, her own daughter and son-in-law took her to Puri for which she was very happy. But after reaching Puri next day to her shock and horror she found herself abandoned on the streets of Puri. Before, she could understand what has happened her daughter was gone leaving her to fend for herself. The motive was to take away her property.

Sudeshna did not have choice but to lead the life of a beggar to survive. By doing so she had saved some money. She thought of using the money to lay claim to her property. She reached her home town and hired a lawyer by paying him his fees of ten thousand rupees. But, the lawyer was also hand-in-glove with her daughter and in-laws. One day she was severely attacked on the head and seriously injured. Somehow she managed to save herself and came back to Puri to lead the life of impoverishment and to wear the tag of a beggar.

Sudeshna was aware of her rights even fought for it. But she found that a widow is helpless and unwanted in this world where there is no breathing space for widows like her. They are destined to die unwanted and uncared for.....

6.4.4 Life in the Holy City of Puri

For the widows in Puri life has lost its meaning as they do not have any emotional ties with their families. The only emotional ties that they share is only with Lord Jagannath who gives them solace and peace of mind. They seem to have resigned to their fate of contempt and depravity by their family and friends. But they expect a little sympathy from the scores of pilgrims that visit this holy city. But it was hard to get even this minimum from them most of the time. Only 29.8% of the widows felt that the pilgrims and tourists who come to Puri treat them with sympathy. There are many widows who feel that they are treated with contempt by the visiting tourists and twelve percent felt that the tourists hate them. Many of them said that the pilgrims and tourists simply are indifferent towards them and about 8% said that whenever they approach them for some help. But they say that they have no complaints against anyone. The refrain is that if the family members have disowned them, it does not matter how they are treated by people whom they even do not know them.

Table 6.13: Treatment by the Tourists/Pilgrims

<i>Treatment by the Pilgrims</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
With Contempt	212	22.4
They Hate Me	114	12.0
With Sympathy	282	29.8
Indifferent	142	15.0
Don't Allow to go near them	78	8.2
DK/CS	119	12.6
Total	947	100

6.5 CONCLUSION

The city of Puri brings solace and spiritual joy to millions of devotees who throng this important Hindu seat of religious importance. But for the widows who have been shunned by the family and makes no difference as they have to struggle day-in and day-out. For them the biggest problem is getting a source of sustainable income and a safe shelter. They complain that even if they most of the time in the temple neither the temple administration nor the govt. is doing anything for them. So it is time that some intervention is undertaken exclusively for these widows who are staying at Puri for quite some time now without any family ties.

CHAPTER VII

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUITABLE REHABILITATION

Present Benefits for the Widows

In the state of Orissa at present there is no specific scheme or programme directed specifically for the benefits of the widows, let alone for the widows of Puri. But there are some general schemes which is directed at the general population of which these widows are also the beneficiaries. During the course of the study it was found that the widows have received or have been receiving the following welfare schemes from the govt. apart from the cash benefits under the widows/old age scheme. A little more than 26% of the widows said that they are getting BPL rice from the govt. which is available now at Rs. 2/- per K.G. This these women said helping them a lot as at least it is taking care of some parts of their most important expenses. Another very older widows said that the district administration is providing them with rice under the Antodaya Yojana where as about 6.9% of the respondents said that they are provided with one-time diet from the temple. But when in-depth interviews were conducted it was found that most of these widows are actually widows of *sewayats* who get *Mahaprasada* from the temple authorities. But those living here but do not belong to the city do not get any such assistance apart from some mercy giving by large-hearted philanthropic persons who provide some food to these widows as a personal gesture. More than 51% said that they are not getting any other benefits from the govt. However, twenty-one (21) widows said that they had got some financial benefits under the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS). Though they failed to recall the name of the exact scheme they clearly said that after the death of their husbands they did receive around ten thousand rupees. But every body was unanimous that the money never came to them but was retained by their family members. In two cases it was found that after getting the family benefit scheme money, they were driven out of their homes. So apart from the govt.

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apathy toward them, this cruelty by their family members has hurt them the most. But, they do not have a choice either.

Recently the Govt. has been implementing Madhubabu Pension Yojana in which widows are also a beneficiaries. However, due to issues of domicile most of the widows who are living in Puri on a permanent basis are kept out of this scheme too. When contacted with the District Social Welfare Officer, Puri he said the existing rules do not permit the Govt. to provide pension to the widows outside the city as there might be chances of duplication.

In the city of Puri there seems to be no specific programmes aimed at the economic development of the widows who do not have a source of income. The only benefit that the govt. has been providing to the widows is the widows pension and old age pension. But not all of the widows are getting even this meager pension. Only 40.8% of the total respondents said that they are getting two hundred rupees under Madhubabu Pension Yojana while 58% said that they are not getting any financial benefit out of the Madhubabu Pension Yojana. None of the women who has left their villages to come to Puri (non-domicile) is getting pension even if some of them are living here for more than fifteen to twenty years. So during the in-depth interview this question was put across the district administration who clearly said that legally they cannot provide pension to any widow who is staying at Puri for which it is mandatory to be a resident of Puri. Those who have come from other places cannot be provided as there is a chance that there might be cases of duplicity. However, these women clearly say that they also do not get any financial benefit at their native village also and do not know if somebody is drawing their pension on their behalf.

All those getting the pension said they are getting two hundred rupees per month. With regards to the regularity of drawing of pension most of the widows they do get it regularly and only about 14% said that the frequency of getting the pension is quite irregular. While probed on this aspect it was learnt that the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) conducts a pension day, preferably on a fixed day so that everybody could be provided the pension at

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one go. But he admitted that during the months of January and February they did have some problems in getting the sanctions in time which were technical. On further inquiry the research team was satisfied that with a couple of exception, the pension is provided quite regularly. Due to fact that Puri being the district headquarters there is very little scope of any irregularity. A little over 1700 widows are provided widows pension who are primarily residents of Puri city under the Madhu Babu Pension Yojana.

Response of the Local Authority and Business Houses to Improve the Rehabilitation Avenues for the Widows

As far as the response of the local authorities are concerned there seems to be very little coming from them by way of material assistance. During the course of the study it was found that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents told that they are not getting any meaningful assistance from the Sri Jagannath Temple Administration. This was also validated from the in-depth interviews conducted with various temple administration officials. They said that they do not have any scheme or assistance programme specific for the widows. However, the research team was informed that the temple administration provides *Prasad* (consisting of rice and dal) to a handful of widows who provide service like preparing garlands for various rituals of the temple. There are a few *mathas* like *Annadana Atika*, *Raghava Das Matha* etc. who provide some food to the widows. However, they are not under any obligation to provide any such thing which the in-charges said that they do so out of empathy to a few widows who are in extremely difficult position to sustain themselves. Some of the widows said that the temple provides employment which in really means they are employed by the traders inside and outside the temple who engage them in various activities like garland making, wick production, selling *prasada*, preparing *prasada* etc. So this employment generation is nothing to do with the temple administration. But as these activities are directly related to various rituals of the temple the widows feel that the temple has given them this employment opportunity. Similarly, the temple does not have any provisions for providing safe shelter to the

widows. A few of the widows did mention that temple provides them shelter but in reality this shelter they were talking about was temporary in nature and is provided by various *ashramas/mathas* out of compassion and empathy towards these women. So needless to say that the temple administration does not do anything specifically for the widows in the form of food or shelter which it must look at seriously.

Effort in the Private Sector

As far as efforts in the private sector is concerned there is nothing much is being done. In the city of Puri only two organisations namely **Nilachal Nari Seba Samity (NNSS)** and **Vijaya** in the voluntary sector where there are facilities to lodge about 200 distressed women including women in difficult circumstances. Besides, NNSS is also running a Swadhar Home at Birogovindapur, just at the outskirts of Puri city. There are some *mathas* and *ashramas* around PUri where a few of the widows are also lodged. But in these places, they are exploited and many a times they are not allowed to stay if they cannot pay for their lodging and boarding either in the form of cash or through labour. Apart from this, there is no other facilities from private or voluntary sector to take care of the widows.

Opportunities Where they Can Spend a More Honorable Life

While undertaking the study the study team came across several problems faced by the widows. But after a deep thought and interacting with people in power it was felt that most of the problems faced by these widows can be addressed in the proper perspective. The following suggestions are made to enable the widows of Puri to lead a honourable life.

1. One of the biggest problems that the widows are facing is safe boarding. Unlike facilities in Mathura and Brindaban there is no exclusive boarding facilities for the widows. They simply live on the mercy of the owners of the *mathas* and *ashramas*. During the study it was found that the condition of these women in these institutions can be said to be less than pleasant. Because they do not have any other

choice they are condemned to live in these conditions. So it is felt that Govt. can facilitate either on its own or with private sector including voluntary sector to construct a facility exclusively for the widows. There are schemes like Swadhar/short-stay Homes under which such facilities can be created. Even though **Vijaya** is running such a facility under Swadhar, it was found grossly inadequate. So a facility for about 500 widows can be created at the outskirts of Puri city where land can be made available by the Govt.

2. The second biggest problem that the widows are facing is food. This seems to be confounding. The Jagannath Temple is known for providing food to thousands of devotees every day. It is said that none of the devotees who come to Puri goes hungry. But these widows who come here for peace and tranquility have to go to bed hungry with the name of the Lord as their only support. During the study it was found that the Temple Administration provides Mahaprasad free of cost to a few schools and orphanages in and around Puri. So there is no problem in doing the same for the widows. When asked about the possibility the administration said that there is no problem doing the same. But for them identifying the right beneficiary is the biggest problem. So if the beneficiaries or the most needy can be identified properly they will take necessary steps to facilitate the process. So the district administration should work closely with the temple administration to identify the most distressed widows who need the help the most.
3. Many of the widows are quite young who are physically and mentally fit to earn a living for themselves. When enquired if they are willing to work most of them said that with proper training and encouragement they will prefer to work to earn their livelihood. So it is also suggested that some targeted activities commensurate with their physical condition can be identified and provided training. After the training they may be linked with the business and commercial establishments. In this endeavour the private and voluntary sector must be involved who have shown interest in undertaking training the rehabilitation activities.

4. All those widows who are living in the city of Puri disowned and without any family ties must be identified on a priority basis and a data base must be created to facilitate them to get various facilities like Old Age Pension, Madhu Babu Pension Yojana etc. This data base can also be used for future rehabilitation and re-integration programmes. The temple administration also said that such a data base will help them to provide food to the widows.
5. Preparation and selling of wicks which are used by all most all the Hindu households are prepared and sold by the widows. Many of these widows earn a decent income out of this. Previously they used to sell the wicks inside the temple complex in the *baisi pahacha* (22 steps leading to the temple). But over the years they were driven out to Southern Gate where there is low inflow/outflow of devotees. So this important activity of the widows have been taken over by more resourceful entrepreneurs who employ small children for selling these wicks. This has snatched the daily livelihood of many of the widows and made the life even more difficult. So the authorities should immediately restore the selling place for the widows.
6. The hospital administration should be sensitized to take necessary steps in addressing the health needs of the disowned by their families and friends. This can be done by issuing health cards for the widows and the expenses can be met of the Rogi Kalyan Samiti in emergency.
7. Many of the widows are driven out of their homes only because of property issues. As these women are rendered helpless as they neither aware nor have the resources to fight out their legal cases. This weakness is taken advantage by their family members. It is felt that if the women can be helped to pursue their cases most of the family members may be willing to either accept them back into their families or provide financial help for their survival at Puri. So attempt should be made to work closely with the district legal cells of the respective districts they come from to file cases for their property rights. This will help the widows to be economically self-independent.

CONCLUSION

Temples and religious places are a part and parcel of Indian traditions. But unfortunately some religious and cultural traditions of the Hindu society are largely unfair to certain sections of the society. Needless to say even though in Hindu religious texts women in general have a decent and respectable place, the same is not true about the widows. The Hindu widows have to undergo a harsh life. The life becomes all the more difficult for a young widow. There are so many socio-religious restriction on the widows on the day-to-day life. The life becomes harsher for the widows in rural part of the country and it is no different in Orissa and Puri town.

Stung by these harsh torture and ill-treatment these women go to various religious places. Being one of the most important religious seats of Hindu religious many of these widows come to Puri to find solace in Lord Jagannath. But they are subjected to exploitation by the unscrupulous elements. Unlike in many other religious Mathura, Vrindaban there are no specific interventions either by the Govt. or non-Govt. organisations to make the life of these widows easy and honorable. The study reflects several facts regarding their socio-economic conditions and also suggests some do-able actions that can be undertaken by the government and also in partnership with the voluntary and private sector. It is also felt that the Lord Jagannath Temple administration should be a little bit more sensitive to the needs of these widows to provide them access to food (in the form of Mahaprasad) and access to livelihood by giving them selling space inside the Temple premises of wicks. This can be done without much difficulty. But a strong willpower to act in the interests of the widows is needed for helping them to enable to lead an honourable life again.

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