

TRAUMA OF BEING A WIDOW: RATTLING IN THE EMPTINESS

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Abstract: Widows in India number 34 million people and the overall number of widows proportional to the total population of India is 6.9%. The entire context of widowhood in India is dominated by the notion that a widow is considered inauspicious, and this is used to justify her exclusion from and oppression by society. They are reflected in the restricted modes of behaviour, diet, and shun in all forms of symbols attached with marriage-hood, discouraging widows from remarriage, and lastly exert control over the sexuality of women, which completely socially marginalize the widows involved. In contextualizing the discussion on the social marginalization of Hindu Widows in India, the associated term stigmatization is closely related. The signs and symbols through which the idea of stigma is conveyed are embodied and indeed are often conveyed by the very person who is being stigmatized, through one's bodily expression. In the paper, I would try to explore patterns of marginalization of the Hindu Widows. The study is significant to explore how the Body and Sexuality of the Hindu Widows are disciplined through religious and cultural norms.

Keywords: Widows, social marginalization, body and sexuality, inauspiciousness, stigmatization.

INTRODUCTION

The death of husband brings a state of trauma in the life of a woman (Giri, 2012). She is perceived as a burden, and is considered as inauspicious and sexually dangerous (Lamb, 1997). The marginalized state of the widows is associated with patriarchy, that is deeply entrenched (Lamb, 2001). Patriarchy and Patrilineality is the source of widow deprivation and vulnerability (Chen and Dreeze, 1995). The abuse and ill-treatment of widows is closely related to gender inequality, where women are perceived as dependent on husband. With the death of her husband, her role in the husband family deteriorates and she loses control of her right in the property and is subject to social oppression (Young, 2006). The patterns of vulnerability of widows are reflected in their daily life-styles, remarriage, and in economic exploitation (Chen and Dreeze, 1992). The marginalization of Hindu widow is determined by social order, where the ideal woman is regarded as 'pativrata' (devoted to her husband). Hindu marriage and kinship rules are strictly articulated; impinge heavily on the relations between men and women and on the behaviour of women. It means, a woman must take vow to protect her husband in three ways- by serving him with food, care and children; by performing ritual fast; by remaining devoted towards him all his life (Chen, 2000; Atwal, 2016). It says a woman remains married throughout her life, even to a death corpse (Lamb, 2001).

Although the present paper does not cover all aspects of the plight of widow in Indian scenario, it does seek to investigate in depth few matters associated with the

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patterns of social marginalization of widows living in the temple town of Nabadwip, West Bengal, India. It comprises a spectrum of literature review, methods and reflections. The condition of widows in Nabadwip, is not necessarily to be claim a generalized picture of the condition of widows.

BEING A WIDOW: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

To talk on widowhood, difference of age, life-stage or maternal statuses are noted and it makes a difference of being childless widow, widow as a mother and a single woman. It is important to note, a widow who is childless, her widowhood as an identity becomes a salient theme. A widow with child, the motherhood becomes a prominent identity than a widow (Lamb, 2001; Lamb, 1997). Sarah lamb (1997) in her work on Mangaldihi, reported that childless widows focuses on “baper-bari” and happy life then and a much difficult life of being a widow. For childless widow, marriage is the most crucial part of their life, be it with living or dead husband. Widows as mother, provides brief accounts of married life, husband death and emphasized much on motherhood. Motherhood period for them is a mixture of joys and difficulties. It’s a phase of raising your young children alone in extreme difficulties and self sufferings. The stories of elderly widow with children, stresses much more on their expectation on children, sometimes painful as the children do not reciprocate the sacrifice of their mother has done after growing up and get married. In these cases, the narrative is much more located on mother’s identity as mother-in-law and as a widow mother (Lamb, 1997; Lamb, 1999).

Be it young or old, the social stigma attached with widowhood is present, even though the intensity of marginalization varies. To discuss on the marginalization of a widow, it is closely associated with purity and pollution. A woman is expected to maintain purity (here it refers to honour and prestige) of the family, by maintaining the particular behavior as expected from her. It is considered as her responsibility to protect her husband from death and ensures long life (Bean, 1981; Atwal, 2016). To ensure the long life of a husband, she is expected to perform certain *Vrats* (rituals) (Dandavate and Verghese, 1989). If a woman outlives her husband, it brings a dark and challenging phase in her life. She is considered as unprotected and uncontrolled. To protect her vulnerability, she is expected to maintain a life of an ascetic (Ghosh, 2000; Mangai, 2008). There are various mechanisms of rites and rituals attached with widowhood that enforced upon her to control and disciplines her from being uncontrolled (Chakravarti, 1995; Chen and Dreeze, 1992).

While we discuss on the vulnerability of a widows, it is essential to look back at the long history of vulnerability where a woman was burnt alive with her husband, as she is considered as ‘*sahagamini*’ i.e. one who goes together with one husband (Gilbert, 2001; Stein, 1988). The processes of dying in the husband pyre are regarded as Sati (Stein, 1978; Stein, 1988). In the context of ‘sati’, Gilbert argued that a widow

is still a wife because she is determined to die with her husband (Gilbert, 2001). She is not only taken in husband pyre to be burned, but she herself is burning with the loss. Sativrata came from the concept of Sati, is considered as her goodness. With the death of her husband, the burn of the heat consumes her body (Chakravati and Gill, 2001; Myers et.al, 1987).

With the passage of time, Sati system has been abolished. It is regarded as unlawful in 1829 under the British rule (Stein, 1988). However, the hardship of a widow with the death of her husband is still prevalent.

Given an account on the idea of being a widow, the next passage shall be discussed on the social marginalization of a widow.

PATTERNS OF SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION

In the island of marginalization, widows are regarded as one of the marginalized groups for being an unwanted insider in the family, sexually vulnerable, and are denied to get access to socio-economic resources (UN women, 2014).

The social patterns of marginalization is expressed through stringent behaviour code, diet restrictions, dress code, discourage from re-marriage, unwelcome in the religious festivals and are considered as unholy (Jensen, 2005; Chen, 2000; Chen and Dreeze, 1992).

- Code of behaviour: With the death of husband, widows are regarded as dirty, unclean, unholy and polluted. Just after the death of her husband, she is not allowed to clean clothes for weak and is expected to remain confined within the room. She is forbidden to have any contact with the male relatives outside his family (Rajan, 2001; Giri et.al, 2016). It is paradoxical when in one hand we see a woman as a heart of the family after marriage, and they are expected to take all care and nurture her children, and husband. On the other hand with death of her husband, she is considered as potential danger (Chen and Dreeze, 1997). The idea of danger related to widowhood has a link with cultural expectations. If a woman loses husband pre-maturely just after her marriage, she is considered as dangerous, and is regarded as “*Rakhasi*” (one who is considered as evil) (Lamb, 1999). She needs to give up all her possession that she received during marriage and is left to remain in destitution (Young, 2006). In some instances, she needs to undergo some rituals in order to safeguard the community from her impurity as a widow (young, 2006). The condition of widow’s belongs to Brahmin caste is much more miserable compared to the widows of other caste.
- Control of Sexuality: After the death of husband, a woman is taken to the pond to purify herself. From that day onwards, she is forbidden to intake any non-vegetarian food. Non-vegetarian food like meat, eggs, onion, garlic, alcohol, and groundnut are regarded as hot (*garam*) food. Whereas, rice,

milk, honey and ghee are regarded as cold (*thanda*) food. The hot food is believed to be associated with lust, and aggression. To make the body content, and self-restrain, a widow is expected to intake cold food (Ranjan, 2001; Giri et.al, 2016). The restrictions are given even in the number of time one can intake the food (Lamb, 1999).

In an ethnographic study by Sarah Lamb in Mangaldihi, West Bengal a married woman reported that “Widows avoid non-vegetarian food, so that their bodies do not become hot and they will not want any man. They cannot keep their bodies cool on their own” (Lamb, 1993:382). Some other women reported that a widow is expected to eat once in a day and only rice. This will make her body weak (*durbal*) and dry (*sukna*) (Lamb, 1993). In many communities especially among the upper cast, a widow is expected to observe periodic fast. This is done to make her less attractive towards men and reduce her sexual energy. The description of restricted food also has an economic dimension. A widow is seen as an unwanted dependent, who doesn't contribute to the household and is regarded as just another mouth to feed. Thus, control over sexuality is based on patriarchal control over women through institution of marriage (Chen and Dreeze, 1995; Ghosh, 2000; Chakravarti and Gill, 2001).

- Disfiguring the body: With the death of husband, a woman is expected to give up the symbols attached with marriagehood- vermilion, bangles and colourful sarees (Lamb, 1993). In South India, the common symbol of marriage includes nose rings, glass bangles, colouring on the feet, flowers in the hair and most importantly mangalsutra. In West Bengal, distinctive symbol of married women are wearing iron bangles, sometimes coloured with vermilion on each wrist. In North India, a distinctive feature of married women is wearing toe ring (Ghosh, 2000). During the rites of passage to widowhood, these symbols are snatched by the social norms, is what serves to identify the widowed women. Widows found to wear white bindis made of ash and black bindis in place of red. Sindoor or Vermillion in fore-head symbolizes sexual appeal of a woman. Once she becomes widow, she is asked to remove sindoor in order to look unappealing (Ranjan, 2001). A widow is expected to remain chaste, unattractive and wear plain white saree preferably without border or a narrow border, in some places with no blouse. Wearing of white saree is not consistent in all places. In Deccan plateau, upper caste widows sometimes wear reddish saree, and in Gujrat, some wear black sarees. In Rajasthan, some upper caste widows wear black shawls. In some communities of Karnataka, widows have a set of silver bangles (Charavarti and Gill, 2001; Dandvate and Verghese, 1989).

In addition to that, a widow is expected to remove the symbol of beauty and is refrained from using cosmetics and even refrains from looking herself in

the mirror. The ultimate expression of mistreatment is when she is asked to shave her hair (Giri et al., 2016). It is one of the 'savage' forms of ritual to be performed by the widows (Young, 2006). Shaving of hair symbolizes renunciation and cutting off ties from the world. Traditionally, upper caste widows shave their head every other week not just once. In case of widow, her hair symbolizes her ties with husband in this world that binds her. Once she shaves her hair, she releases the spirit to the next life. Besides that, long hair is a symbol of beauty for the women, shaving of hair has a negative influence on the life of a woman. The forced shaving of hair is associated with physical violation which is deeply traumatic and humiliating, leads to depression (Young, 2006).

Today shaving of hair is no more a prevalent practice. However, in the study by Sarah Lamb (1993) in Mangaldihi village in West Bengal, reported the oldest widow proudly shaves the white hair from head every two weeks. It is a sign of loyalty and respect towards the corpse.

- Avoid auspicious occasion: Widows are regarded to cast an evil spirit and are considered as inauspicious. To avoid the sight of the evil spirit, widows are banned from attending auspicious ceremony, visiting auspicious places, and conduct specific rituals. In some regions, a widow could not prepare food for any auspicious occasion in home; they couldn't touch a deity and attend important ceremonies (Jensen, 2005; Young, 2006; Chen and Dreeze, 1992).
- Restrictions on widow-remarriage- Among several restrictions attached with the idea of widowhood, restriction of re-marriage is another offence. Patriarchal society vests economic and social power in man (Brown, 2011). Looking back on the tradition of remarriage, it is found that in the Rigveda, a widow, whose husband was dead is allowed to have conjugal relation with her brother in law (Chakravarti and Gill, 2001). In the North West India among the Jats, Rajputs, Ahirs and Gujjar a widow is still allowed to remarry (Giri et.al, 2016). In the Arthashastras, a widow can remarry, and in if they did, they must forfeit the bride price. However, if a widow does not remarry, she is treated with esteem for upholding her dharma (Chakravati and Gill, 2001; Chen, 2000).

In regard to remarriage, a man is often encouraged and is more frequent to remarriage (Jensen, 2005; Giri, 2012; Giri et.al, 2016), whereas the widow is not permitted to have remarriage unless it is sanctioned by the local customs (Dandvate et.al, 1989; Parmar, 2003). Among higher caste, widow remarriage is a taboo, while it is not enforced very rigidly among the lower caste (Myers, 1987; Anjan, 2001); except for those emulating higher caste (Halder and Jaishankar, 2008-09). Today widow remarriage is prohibited

in lower and middle castes as a means of achieving higher social status. Local Custom where remarriage is allowed, it continues to be levirate marriage, in which the widow was accepted as wife by the younger brother of the deceased brother; falling him the elder brother; falling him the first cousin and so on (Patil, 2000; Chen, 2000). However, levirate is not as widely practiced per se. Chen (2000), in the study in South India, found levirate is largely absent except in occasional case in Backward or Schedule castes. In North India and in Eastern India (West Bengal) in some places only levirate is practiced especially by upper caste and some prominent backward castes. It is widely practiced in Tehri Garhwal hills of Uttar Pradesh by all castes from Brahmin to Rajput (Chen, 2000).

The age of widow is also significant factor whether or not she remarries. The older they are and have children are less likely to remarry (Lamb, 2001). The number and age of children also determine remarriage. They fear their children will not be looked upon by the new in-laws (Lamb, 1993). They have a fear of ill-treatment in new family and abuse by the family member towards their children (Agarwal, 1998; Chen, 2000, Jensen, 2005; Lamb, 1993). Most of the remarriage noticed is that of a childless widow who tends to remarry (Lamb, 1993)

In legal terms, Hindu widow remarriage was legalized by Hindu widow's remarriage Act 1856. Although, the ground reality does not show a hike in widow remarriage. Chen's (2000) study on widows' remarriage reported that, over 13% widows from North Indian states (this was primarily due to practice of levirate in the northern states) remarried compared to only 6% in south India. Most widows did not practice the freedom to decide their second husband out of fear and the quality of remarried life was hardly ever discussed within the households (Chen (ed), 1998; Chen & Dreeze, 1992).

NOTES FROM THE FIELDⁱ

The constant disciplining and subjugation by the religious code of conduct, made the widow to live in complete disillusionment by the hypocrisy of social relationships.

i The interview was conducted at the ashrams and the questions were asked in their regional language. The schedule addresses questions to obtain information on the following category:

- Background of the widows- including age at present, age at marriage, difference between age of spouse, age of husband death, type of family, reaction towards married life, socio-economic characteristics.
- Deprivation faced by the widows- Economic, social, emotional and cultural.

Along with that I also engage in group discussion with Hindu widows in the Bhajan Ashram.

Some of the widows leave their ascetic day to day lives as a widow, to take up actual life of an ascetic. The most common and least permanent way to do this is to take pilgrimage (Chen, 2000). Due to the indifference in the attitude of family member and continuous subjugation from society, widows are found in the holy city of Vrindavan, Mathura, Varanasi etc (Chakravati & Gill, 2001; Bhattacharya, 2008; Ghosh, 2000). They come to the temple town in search of salvation (Bhattacharya, 2008). The presence of many widows in the Bhajan Ashrams and Pilgrimage explain that many of these widows had been ostracized from their own communities and these places become their make-shift sojourn (Guha, 1987 in Chen, 2000).

Even though a large number of works are done in the temple town of India, very limited work is done on the temple town of West Bengal, within the sociological sphere that could be cited to explain the social marginalization of the Hindu widows in the temple town of West Bengal. The past research on temple town mostly focus on widows of Vrindavan, however the widows in temple town of Nabadwip remain outside the study. The present work aims to fill the gap by examining the social marginalization of the widows of the Bhajan Ashram in temple town of Nabadwip. The temple town of Nabadwip is a home to Radha and is also a home to disciples of Chaitanya.

My mode of engagement in the field was long in-depth conversation with the widows in the temple town and those begging in the temples. I have also participated in their daily rites and rituals, and during their bhajans. In regard to the selection of sample, I have used simple random sampling and snow ball sampling methods for the study.

Given that, in regard to area, Nabadwip is in the district of Nadia, West Bengal. It is the birth place of Chaitanya, who holds an important place in Vaishnava mythologyⁱⁱ. If we go back to history, Nabadwip is an important centre for Sanskrit-

ii The term Bengal Vaishnavism is a religious movement which is started with Sri KrisnaChaitanya usually known as Chaitanya. He was born in Nabadwip and, was absorbed in emotional Bhakti to Krishna. The conception of Bhakti Rasa derived its inspirations from Sanskrit poetics in general and specifically from Hemadri. Bhakti is emotional mystical identification with Radha, her experience of separation from Krishna and the expression of religious emotions- music, dance, acting etc. Chaitanya Sampradaya in 18th Century was not an independent origin, but was artificially linked with earlier Sampradaya i.e. Madhava. Kesava Bharati was a monk whom Chaitanya took his Samasya. Chaitanya suggested to Kesava Bharati which mantra he should give him during the initiation ceremony, guru was not satisfied, later through inspiration from Sarasvati he called him Krishna Chaitanya.

The Vaisnava movement in Bengal had risen in 11th and 12th Century A.D. In some aspects its doctrine and history is peculiar to the medieval India. Chaitanaya the most important figure of Bengal Vaisnava, belongs to the South Indian School of dualistic philosopher Madhava. He was a member of Sankara advaita. In Vaisnava, Krishna is considered as supreme deity and not a mere incarnation of Vishnu. Krishna is the full God not a mere avatar of Vishnu. Bengal Vaidshnavism splits into two group: 1. Nityananda (intimate companion, the casteless Avadhuta) and Advaita Acarya (early leading devotee of Chaitanya) Branch. First split was between Vrindavan and Bengal branch. Later it again got splitted into further two.

based learning since the days of Lakshman Sen, the last king of Sen dynasty and Nabadwip was one of the capital of his kingdom in Gaud. Chaitanya himself was a great scholar and was believed to have opened a *toll (Vedic learning centre)* there. Recently as Mayapur is a centre of modern pilgrim tourism due to ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), Nabadwip is getting neglected and seems bleak for pilgrimage. The residents of Nabadwip although deny the claims of ISKON and in my visit to Nabadwip, the people of Nabadwip spotted a locality called Prachin (old) Mayapur, which they consider the birth place of Chaitanya.

Nabadwip besides being a temple town and birth place of Chaitanya, is a significant place of pilgrimage for widows. Women in stick, half bend wearing white saris are found around the city in various temples and in the Bhajan Ashrams. Widows stayed in Bhajna Ashrams spent their days in contemplation of Radha and Krishna. Like Vrindaban, Nabadwip has its own pilgrim circuit and they have their own calendar of holy events. Nabadwip has two Bhajan Ashrams on the model of those in Vrindaban. The two Bhajan Ashrams in Nabadwip are Kangaler Thakurer Annachhatra and Nabadwip Bhajan Ashrams. Nabadwip Bhajan Ashrams is mostly run by the Marwaris that attracts large number of destitute women and widows. My study was mostly in Nabadwip Bhajan Ashrams.

Widows in the temple town of Nabadwip mostly are victims of partition and have settled down in Nabadwip coming from Bangladesh. They came with their son and husband, later lost them. Most of the widows attach themselves to one of the Ashrams or Temples and joined other widows in singing Radha-Krishna bhajan. Those widows stayed in the Bhajan Ashram have visible symbol of the Vaishnava and, are old and chant the name of Radha and Krishna. They have adopted their gurus after coming to Nabadwip. Most of the widows reported that the chanting the name of Radha and Krishna is a solace, under multiple social vulnerabilities that women suffer as widow.

The widows I met are the poorest of poor and in a state of utter helplessness because of poverty and old age. The majority of widows were illiterate. They are mostly old and came from surrounding areas and settled in Nabadwip. Although regarding old age, I could not be specific whether they are fifty or sixty. As old or '*bayaska*' refer to advanced stage or phase of life and most do not even know the exact age as on date in absolute manner. They try to remember their date of birth based on various celestial events. When a woman is seen in white hair, and physically weak she is regarded as '*bayaska*'.

In regard to caste group, widows in Bhajan Ashram belong to various caste groups. Mostly they were Brahmins; however few also belong to lower caste. Most

Bengal Vaisnavism movement spread rapidly during 16th and 17th century. But Nityananada and Advaita couldn't have same influence as like Chaitanya. However, bhakti that he preached is not dead, rather it is still a strong and intellectual force (Hardy, 1974; Solomon, 1917).

of them got married at an early age and loose the husband few years after marriage. The difference between spouses is in almost all cases a minimum difference of 13-15 years. For some, it is 20 years difference in age at the time of marriage. Some of them were too young when they lost their husband, and do not even remember their face.

Religion is no doubt important to them as it helps them to come out of domestic confines. Apart from Ashrams, many widows live and earn livelihood by attending prayer on various temples. They are at the mercy of the Bhajan Ashrams, and, have no resources of their own with the death of husband. Urmila Di, an elderly lady told she has been so tortured in the home after the death of husband that she had to come to the Bhajan Ashram to find peace. As she says "*Ora ghor thake amay tariye diyeche... amar sob kichu niye niyeche*" (I was dragged out from home by my in-laws family, and they have snatched all my resources). Another women Maya di narrated "*ekhanei bhalo achi. Swami mara jawar por, ora kheteo ditona, aaj o dena, taka paysa sob jor kore kere niyehe..ekhane duto bhaat pai, eksathe galpo kori such-dhukeri*" (I am happy in the Bhajan Ashrams, in my home I am not given food after the death of my husband, all my economic resource was snatched from me. In the Bhajan Ashram, I at least get some food everyday and we chat together all day of our joy and sorrow). The widows live a life of isolation, poverty and despair. They beg for alms in the ashram, and, live life of isolation and completely apart from society and are often subject to cultural disapproval. Matri, a lady lost her husband at very young age and is childless living in a temple narrated "*swami mara jawar por theke eetai amar ghor, bhikka kore khai, thakar jayga nei. Barite keu nei na amay*"(after I lost my husband, I find bhajan ashram as my home, I live by begging, I have no permanent place to reside. Nobody cares to take me back home, I reside in the temple). It reflects the utter helplessness situation of these widows.

The alternative for the widows to survive in the temple town is to live in the street as a beggar, and under humiliation. In this holy cities as like in Vrindavan, Nabadwip, philanthropic rich men started Bhajna Ashram, as like in Nabadwip, where widow's chant bhajan in return for 250 gm of rice and Rs2/-. They are having two shifts of singing of four hours. If they fail then they are denied food and shelter and live in alms and suffer from abject poverty, with no toilet facilities, electricity, and running water. In the Bhajan Ashrams they are regularly distributed cooked food, cooked rice and, uncooked rice. Most of them reported they do not like the food they get every day from ashram, and thus they prefer to sell the uncooked rice received from Ashrams, as alms and buy vegetables jointly with other widows and put into cooking pots of companions. Apart from food cooked at Ashrams, the owner of Ashram reported that, the donors provide cooked food and sometimes give saris to the devotees and the destitute widows of the temple twice in a year. Rakhi, Anjali, and Urmila told how three of them share the room together in the ashram. They bring together their food received from bhajan ashram, and together

sell them in the market in return of buying rice and vegetables. According to them the cooked food in the ashram is not possible to eat as they are half cooked (*“kacha kacha thake, khawa jay na”*), so they jointly cook food together and share among them. In my visit, I even saw these women in the room cooking, buying rice and vegetables from outside. In regards to distribution of sari, when asked to these widows in a group discussion during their time of bhajan, most of them did not say anything clearly because of the presence of owner nearby. It does seem to me that they might not be quite happy with two saris a year.

These widows in Nabadwip, are even forbidden from getting any pension and ration card. Mode of earning is to get bare minimum Rs. 3.00 against 4 hourly singing hymns.

In the ashram, medical assistance is virtually non-existing. The temple economy causes a toll in the life of the widows. Thus the hidden violence of faith is presently latent and it reflects the violent morphing of the faith (Ranjan, 2001). Most of the widows during my study in Nabadwip, reported that they do not get regular pension in hand. Many of them added, they do not have the required documents with them, to provide. Many of them could not read and write. According to Aratri, very old lady of late 80's, told me *“jigas korle bole paben taka, tarpor se jei ke sei..kono taka dena. kober thake taka paina..Eije tomay bolchi, suncho, tarpor ki ar kichu korbe”* (These narration reflects a deep cry and sadness in the mind of Arati, who is not receiving pension for many months now. She is always given a hope she will get the pension, but reality seems bleak). The narration of Arati, also made me reflect deep as a researcher, taking the data from her what really fruitful can I do for her? In her narrative it reflects how she is expecting something in return of telling her story of sadness.

Given the wretched condition of the widows in ashram, widows repeatedly expressed their desire to stay in the temple town because of its holiness. They search for the solace in the temple town after being pushed out from family, some cases they lack support from family, it forced these widows to survive in temple town. Most of the widows stay in Bhajan Ashram reported that temple town offered them an identity outside of widowhood. They identify themselves as mothers by adopting Krishna as a surrogate son, and as sister with other widows enter into communal life. They identify themselves with Radha. Ashram is a place that offer them food, shelter and companionship of other widows. In doing so they get a purpose in their life that they do not find at home. Although many complained of the food they receive, and difficulties in everyday life, however, those difficulties seems nothing compare to the hardship within family. Malati and Urmila, one middle aged other elderly widows narrated their desire to live all their life till death in Nabadwip. Malati reported *“Bari te sobai achhe, chele meye, ora bhaloi ache, amake ar dekhe na, bor mara jawar por thake, sob sampatti kere niyeche sasur bari. Ar jete chaina*

okhane Nabadwip e morte chai, Radha krishnar naam kore". Urmila reported "*eto khan bose bhajan korte kasta hoy, tao kori, raath 1 ta obdi tana korbo, tarpor arak dol bosbe.*" (Its difficult to seat for long to do bhajan, still I try to do, I am seating here till one PM, then the next group will seat.). In the Bhajan Ashram, there is a norm that bhajan needs to be played all day long, and it is divided among groups. When I asked Urmila, why do you take so pain in the body, she smiled and said "*etai shantir jayga, thakurer naam kori, kichu khata boli..ar to kichudin din por chole jabo. Ekhanei morte chai.*" (This is my place of peace; I do kirtan and talk with my fellows. I will live for few days then I shall die, I want to die in Nabadwip). She further added her husband died while she was in Bangladesh at young age, she does not even remember her husband face properly. Her mother brought her in Nabadwip, she was working as a house servant in her young age. With the death of her parents, she is left in the Ashram, now she made it her home.

These widows keep singing Bhajan in groups for twenty four hours. Some of the widows come from neighboring places as visit to the Bhajan Ashram to chant bhajan in the temple, and receive food in return. Apart from Bhajan Ashrams, there are temples where widows take shelter and managed to get food there. Now recently they are driven out 8 pm in the evening from the temple, and need to take shelter in shops and private house.

This self-reliance in the face of acute deprivation in Bhajan Ashram is sustained due to opportunity of small freedom they enjoy and relief from domestic chores, and neglect. The infrastructure of Bhajan Ashram converts trauma of the widows inside household into the fervor. This suggests that as a community of widows together, performing religious rites of being a widow is less difficult compared to the life of disciplining within their family.

The present paper although focuses on the social marginalization of the widows. However ostracization in social front does not end the processes of marginalization of the widows. They further encounter economic marginalization. Legally, a widow is entitled to have the rights of husband property. According to traditional law, a wife has right to have maintenance 'perks' but cannot sell her land. Even when the widows are aware of their right to the property of husband, they do not claim such rights. They pass on their rights to father-in-law or brother's kin.

DISCUSSION

It can be argued that widowhood shall exist as long as there is socially sanctioned and regulated marriage institutions persist. Marriage is one of the important life events of a person that changes their life style and there is an utter hope. However, widowhood is a failure of marital relationship which brought a huge set back in the life of an individual, family and community. "Personal, familial, and social disorganization are associated with widowhood" (Sheykhi, 2006: 253). One of the

important aspects of widowhood is “emotional crisis” (Sheykhi, 2006). Emotional crisis is perpetuated through loss of important person from life, followed by stress and anxiety along with grief of various forms (Sandy, 2001; Dandavate et. al, 1989). The vulnerable situation of widows made their life threatening, psychologically harmful, make them marginalized and deprive their right to live and lastly make suffer from economic exploitation (Young, 2006). The women in most cases if remarried are done within the family, so that her sexuality remains under control within the family itself. Some of the widows leave their ascetic life within home and take actual life of an ascetic in the temple town. These widows are found in the Bhajan Ashrams of the temple town and in various other Pilgrim centres. In these temple town of India, the oppression goes far beyond the physical starvation, economic deprivation and cultural neglect. Widows did not necessarily find the refuge they were seeking (Chen, 2000). There is destitution and humiliation (Giri, 2012). They are brought on the pretext of pilgrimage and then left on the path of hunger, poverty and humiliation (Giri et.al, 2016; Rajan, 2001). Life of widows in Nabadwip is not an exception from these sufferings and tragedy.

To improve the position of widows, there is an urgent need for the social policy. Unfortunately except the widow’s pension, there is no other government policy for the widows. Time has arrived for the Government and policy makers to consider the wretched widows condition and improve their situation as matter of right than well-being.

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