



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

India - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 23 November 2009

Treatment of widows in India; legal status; current situation; discrimination; government and societal attitude; available police protection and services; availability of NGO support; social welfare support; freedom of movement

Radio Netherlands in November 2009 states:

“There are more than 40 million widows in India - 10 percent of the country's female population. And for the majority of these women, life is what some have described as a “living sati”, a reference to the now outlawed practice of widow burning. Only 28 percent of the widows in India are eligible for pensions, and of that number, less than 11 percent actually receive the payments to which they're entitled. If a woman is not financially independent, she's at the mercy of her in laws and her parents. And if they don't have the will or the resources to take care of her and her children, she's on her own” (*Radio Netherlands* (4 November 2009) *A life of ashes - The story of India's widows*)

This article also states:

“Hindu widows especially are faced with a battery of societal taboos; the general rule of thumb is that the higher their caste, the more restrictions widows face. Traditionally when a man dies, his widow is expected to renounce all earthly pleasures. Widows should no longer look attractive, and are expected to wear only simple white saris for the rest of their lives. On news of their husband's death, they break their bangles and can no longer wear jewellery or use sindhoor - the red powder women wear in their parting and on their foreheads to denote their married status” (ibid)

This article also notes:

“Moitri Chatterjee has been campaigning for the rights of widows for years. Coming from a traditional Bengali Hindu family, she saw close up the hardships women had to suffer once their husbands died. In the world she grew up in, she saw how a family would be ostracized if they didn't adhere to the restrictions society placed on widows. “Washer men wouldn't wash their clothes, no shopkeeper would sell things to them, they wouldn't be able to participate in any rituals, and so on, so it was considered a great sin.” In addition a widow was considered inauspicious, so she couldn't be present at the rituals and celebrations that form such an integral part of Indian life, such as marriage or birth ceremonies. In some cases even her shadow was considered polluting or offensive to “cleaner” members of society” (ibid)

Commenting on cities in Bengal the article goes on to state:

“These cities are still magnets for widows and today they are full of dingy guest houses and ashrams where impoverished and abandoned widows come to try to eke out an existence till the death they long for comes to claim them. It is common knowledge that younger widows are often sexually exploited in these places, though the subject is taboo enough to earn an instant brush off if brought up with the authorities. As for the older women, their only hope is to plant themselves near temples or on busy streets and beg. Some go to bhajanashrams where they sit in shifts to chant prayers - for a four hour shift they can earn a cup of rice and 7 rupees - about 12 cents” (ibid)

An *Inter Press Service* news story in October 2009 states:

“It has been more than eight years since the January 2001 earthquake struck the Indian state of Gujarat, but Hansa Rathore still cannot quite shake off memories of that not too distant past — all because it left her a widow. Twenty-nine-year-old Rathore was just one of thousands of women widowed in the deadly earthquake, one of the worst in India's recorded history. The disaster that left nearly 20,000 people dead in its wake changed her life forever. “My mother was widowed in the same calamity; my house was destroyed and I had no means to feed my nine-month-old son,” she recalls. She soon learned what it meant to survive in a cloistered conservative community that socially ostracised widows, imposing cruel restrictions on them. “I got no help from my in-laws and was forced to shelter literally in the open, rigging up a makeshift room with sacks and a tin roof. I had no access to work, food or health services for my son, who became very ill,” she states” (Inter Press Service (22 October 2009) *India: Single Women Break Their Silence, Challenge Societal Norms*)

This article also states:

“Sudha Jha, 49, of Katihar district in the northern state of Bihar was widowed in 1998 and has since struggled to raise her three sons and one daughter single-handedly. “My in-laws didn't want me to stay with them after my husband died, and it was tough getting work to feed and educate my children,” says Jha matter-of-factly. She adds that one of the most direct impacts of widowhood was restricted mobility, which often makes widows invisible and unable to access work outside the home. “A widow is not treated with respect. At times she is still expected to shave her head, wear extremely simple and coarse white clothes, forbidden to wear jewelry or make-up, and is forced to eat separately, the food consisting of a frugal vegetarian diet,” Jha points out. “Why should widows undergo such tortures? Men don't face such discrimination when their wives die; they just marry again!” Rich or poor, widows struggle against a deep social stigma in most communities in India. Even more ostracised are women who live alone, either because they are unmarried or have been deserted by their husbands” (ibid)

The article later notes:

“According to the 2001 census by the government — the latest available data — there are 36 million single women in India. But activists dismiss this figure as a conservative estimate, saying it only includes legally divorced and separated women and widows. Abandoned, deserted or unmarried women remain outside the ambit of government's policy and welfare schemes” (ibid)

In March 2009 *Social Security Online* states:

“Survivor pension (widow’s pension): The pension is equal to 60% of the deceased’s total disability pension (the average pension is equal to 70% of the deceased’s earnings)” (Social Security Online (March 2009) *India*, p.81)

A legal paper by *Nehaluddin Ahmad* in 2009 states:

“Traditionally, Hinduism frowned on widows remarrying and many have their social and economic power eroded, although in recent years many widows have benefited from moves to enhance their status. By restricting widow’s remarriage, high-status groups limit restructuring of the lineage on the death of a male member. An unmarried widow remains a member of her husband’s lineage, with no competing ties to other groups of in-laws. Her rights to her husband’s property, traditionally limited though they are to management rather than outright inheritance, remain uncomplicated by remarriage to a man from another lineage. It is among lower-ranking groups with lesser amounts of property and prestige that widow remarriage is most frequent. Whereas a widower can remarry as many times as he likes, a widow marriage in India is still a restricted practice. It is not easy for a widow to remarry irrespective of her age...” (Nehaluddin Ahmad (2009) *Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio- legal Examination*, p.4)

The Indian *Ministry of Women and Child Development* in 2008 mentions a programme called Swadhar which includes the following target group/beneficiaries:

“Widows deserted by their families and relatives and left uncared at religious places where they are victims of exploitation” (Ministry of Women and Child Development (2008) *Annual Report 2007-08*, Chapter 2: Programmes for Women, p.29)

The Indian *Ministry of Women and Child Development* reviewing legislation states:

“Prior to the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 a female Hindu only had a right to maintenance from ancestral property and a widow had a limited estate which she was disentitled to part with. The amendment in the act has gone a long way to make the law far more egalitarian” (Ministry of Women and Child Development (undated) *Directory of Supreme Court and High Court Judgements on issues relating to Women and Children*, p.35, Research Studies, Research Study Reports, Other Reports/Publications/Manuals, Publications/Reports).

The *Loomba Trust* states:

“In India, with the largest widow population in the world, government action is beginning to have an effect but more needs to be done at an international level if lasting differences are to be made” (Loomba Trust (undated) *Easing the plight of India’s widows*).

This reports also notes:

“A pension scheme for widows has also been established, with over 25 per cent now receiving state relief” (ibid)

The *Guild of Service* a charity that works for widows in India states:

“The Guild runs Amar Bari, a home for over 100 widows in Vrindavan, just three hours from Delhi. Another home for 500 widows, Ma Dham, is being inaugurated later this year by the President of India. In fact there are five categories of widows that the Guild is working for. Widows who have lost their life partners in wars, in communal strife, women who have donned white robes after natural calamities wiped out their husbands and families, children who were married early and became widows and other widows” (Guild of Service (undated) *About us*)

The 2008-2009 annual report produced by the *Guild of Service* states:

“India has 43 million widows. The vast majority of these face stigma, simply by virtue of the fact that their husbands had died” (Guild of Service (2009) *Annual Report 2008 – 2009*, p.11).

This report also states:

“Vrindavan is also known as the City of Widows due to the large number of widows who move into the town and surrounding area after losing their husbands and being deserted by their loved ones. There are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 widows living on the streets, many of whom have spent over 30 years there. In exchange for singing bhajan hymns for 7-8 hours in bhajanashrams, women are given a cup of rice and a pittance of money (around Rs. 2), which they try to supplement by begging on the streets or in some instances, even through prostitution. The Guild was formed to assist these deprived women and children. In 2000 the organization opened Amar Bari (My Home), a refuge for 120 Vrindavan widows, and Ma Dham was opened on the 16th of November, 2007” (ibid, p.24).

A report by the *Guild of Service* in 2007 on widows in Vrindavan states:

“In Vrindavan just 25 per cent of the widows get pension and most of them live in homes or shelters that enable them to access these pensions” (Guild of Service (2007) *Spirituality, Poverty, Charity Brings Widows To Vrindavan*, p.8).

This report also states:

“The 1991 census estimates that 9 per cent of the female population or 33 million are widows. In fact every fourth house has a widow and 50 per cent of them are over 50 years of age. Traditionally they were considered inauspicious and many of them from upper caste homes were forced to leave their homes to spend their years of widowhood in prayer and meditation in holy cities like Varanasi (traditionally known as Kashi) and Vrindavan. The plight of the Bengali widows in particular was pathetic. Emaciated, head

shaven, wearing coarse white saris, they were allowed to eat only vegetarian food and could not attend any religious function or festivity" (ibid, p.11).

The report goes on to note:

"Despite several years of studies/surveys on the status of widows in Vrindavan and some concerted interventions by civil society and government to set up homes, provide widows' pension and ration cards it is only an insignificant number, 148, that have been rehabilitated in homes run by NGOs. Another 526 have been provided shelter by UP government with assistance from the Centre, but they still run to Bhajan Ashrams or beg to earn enough to stave off hunger. In the government supported shelters they have to collect ration and cook for themselves. According to the 2006 survey of the Municipal Corporation of Vrindavan there are 3105 Bengali widows in this city alone" (ibid, p.15).

The *UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* in April 2008 states:

"Several State Governments have formulated their own social assistance programmes, apart from implementing the schemes under NSAP. For example, widow pension is granted in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhatisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnatka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Pondicherry, Uttrakhand and West Bengal" (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (23 April 2008) *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights : consideration of reports submitted by States parties in accordance with article 16 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: India*)

The *US Department of State* reviewing events of 2008 states in February 2009:

"The government continued to ban and discourage sati, the practice of burning a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, and there were few instances of sati. There were no reports of sati during the year" (US Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Human Rights Reports: India*, Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons, Women)

An *Inter Press Service* article in February 2008 reports:

"The Guild of Service runs a shelter for 120 widows in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, where there are at least 6,000 widows who have fled to the holy city from lives of trauma in West Bengal and other areas. Many survive by singing hymns in the temples for a cup of rice or by begging on the streets, and some are forced into prostitution" (Nergui Manalsuren (12 February 2008) *Rights: Widows Face a Life of Quiet Destitution*, Inter Press Service)

This article also states:

"The Guild also works with government agencies and other organisations to educate widows about their legal rights, helping them to open bank accounts and secure the state pensions they are entitled to" (ibid)

Reported in *Voice of America* in January 2008 an article states:

"Vrindavan, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, is called the "City of Widows." Upper-caste Hindu widows who are disowned by their families go there to live. Young and old spend their remaining years singing hymns in temples in exchange for food, and a small daily stipend of coins" (Voice of America (24 January 2008) *Indian Widows Continue to Live Desperate Life in 'City of Widows'*)

This article also states:

"For centuries, Vrindavan has also been home to thousands of Hindu widows, mostly upper-caste women from West Bengal, who were either abandoned by their families, or are seeking refuge from greedy and cruel relatives. An estimated 15,000 of these women are believed to be residing in Vrindavan today, and the number is increasing. Most survive by singing hymns in temples known as bhajan ashrams. In exchange for chanting six hours every day, the widows receive a little food, and the equivalent of 15 cents a day. Some can also be seen begging on the streets, wearing white saris with their heads shaven according to custom. There have been reports that some, by choice or because of circumstances, have gone into prostitution" (ibid)

The article later reports:

"Traditionally, upper-caste Hindus have not been allowed to remarry, but widowhood remains a stigma for most Indians, especially those in rural areas and from less-educated families. Land reforms initiated by the British enabled widows to inherit property from their dead husbands, which greedy relatives sometimes try to usurp. Since the women are considered inauspicious, people will not give them respectable employment" (ibid). The article also states: "Recently, the Women and Child Development Ministry announced that it will begin rehabilitating and retraining the country's 33 million widows, and try to get them remarried. But activists are skeptical, saying India has a long way to go before such women, cast aside by society, can overcome the traditional stigma of widowhood." (ibid)

A report in 2008 by the *International Women's Rights Action Watch* states:

"When a marriage comes to an end by the death of a spouse the impact of this loss on the living spouse and his/her ability to cope is influenced by the social ambience in which they live. The acceptance of and sympathy for widowers, but not for widows, is a situation that leads to the rejection of these women. Sometimes this rejection is mitigated by the extra-ordinary circumstances of widowhood, for example, war-widows, but it is never excused. The hardship they face may be different but it still exists. What informs this mass psyche is the memory of sati, where a woman would die with her husband rather than live without him. If divorce is looked upon as the betrayal of one's promise, then widows, it must be assumed, have done no wrong. They have remained in the marriage till the death of their spouse. One would therefore presume that the social and legal system would do everything

to ensure that the rights of widows would be made secure and accessible. However, the response reserved for the widow is one of outright rejection that unless she has a son, her life is not worth living" (International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (2008) *Baseline Report, Rights of Women in Relation to Marriage in India*, p.58).

This report also states:

"The primary issue before the widows is one of survival and of survival with dignity. In some village communities in South Bihar and eastern UP, we came across instances in which women have been chased out of village communities or the village itself or even murdered on the basis of allegations of being a 'churel' or a witch. Any mishap that takes place in a village, death of children, destruction of crops or of livestock, can be interpreted as an indication of a witch being active in the area and the woman so identified, would in many cases be a widow. This becomes an excuse to do away with the widow who would otherwise be a claimant to property of her deceased husband" (ibid, p.61).

This report also notes:

Most of the state sponsored schemes centre around payment of paltry amounts to the woman in need or giving money as incentives to men marrying them. The state has not taken any concrete steps to empower these women or rehabilitate them in surroundings outside of a family unit. Unless the state takes steps to educate or train them to be financially independent, these state sponsored schemes make no real difference to the lives of women. International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (2008) *Baseline Report, Rights of Women in Relation to Marriage in India*, p.65).

The report later notes:

"Access to their rights is further complicated by their vulnerable status as single women. This deprives them of a life with dignity. Their presence is seen as inauspicious and even their families shun them. Very few find the support of the community or family. In situations where remarriage is a viable option and socially acceptable, it is the question of control over property that is central to the issue and not the woman herself. The other reason for permitting remarriage is for control over her sexuality, which is now the responsibility of the in-laws. The only way she can access control over resources, which were hers, is to accept levirate marriage, here it is not necessary for the man to be single. This man then has actual control over the land that the widow would have received from the dead husband. What is ironic is, that after this said remarriage, if the second husband were to leave the woman, he would still have control over this land. However, the only way a woman can continue to exercise some right over the land is through continued domicile in the marital village through this remarriage. This litany of control, deprivation and violence is evidence of the ways in which widows experience violation of their rights. This helplessness makes them vulnerable to domestic violence" (ibid, p.66).

The report later notes:

"It is very difficult for a woman to access her share in the property of her deceased husband especially if she is childless. Except for paltry sums distributed under pension schemes the State machinery has chosen to ignore the plight of widows. Lack of financial resources coupled with social ostracism contributes to the marginalisation of widows" (*ibid*,p.64). The report also states: "The most popular programme for widows, initiated in 1971-72, continues to be the widow pension scheme of Rs.100/- per month, which is sent by money order to the widow who has no other means of survival. This amount is supposed to benefit other dependants of the widow also. The state runs training centres for widows, where they receive skills training in knitting and embroidery, to help them earn their living" (*ibid*, p.65).

BBC in December 2007 states:

"India's Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Chowdhury has outlined ambitious plans to help the country's young widows. Ms Chowdhury wants them to overcome poverty, lead meaningful lives and, if they want, get remarried. India's dominant Hinduism frowns on widows remarrying and they often see their social and economic power eroded" (BBC, (22 December 2007), *Aid plan for India's 33m widows*). This story also states: "Previous initiatives aimed at improving their lives have achieved little and their continuing plight makes a government initiative sorely needed" (*ibid*). The story also reports: "A woman can quickly lose her dignity, even her basic rights, when she loses her husband. Many widows are dumped by their relatives in religious towns like Vrindavan in northern India. A study carried out by the municipal corporation in Vrindavan found more than 3,000 helpless widows living there" (*ibid*). The story goes on to note: "Most of the widows are left to survive on charity, many are reduced to begging on the streets" (*ibid*). The story also states: "Some surveys show that steeped in their religious beliefs and fearful of violating social customs they were brought up to believe in, many widows themselves do not want to remarry. However, for others who silently suffer the daily humiliations abandoned widows have to face, any government help would be a deliverance" (*ibid*).

In November 2007 the *United Nations Development Fund for Women* reports:

"The launch of a UNIFEM-supported study, "Spirituality, Poverty, Charity brings Widows to Vrindavan," by Usha Rai, casts an important spotlight on the plight of widows in India. Known as the City of Widows, Vrindavan is a place where destitute upper-caste widows traditionally go after they are abandoned by their families on the death of their husbands. The study is the culmination of a journey UNIFEM embarked on with the Guild of Service — an organization working for the development, empowerment and rehabilitation of widows — in 2002, when they joined forces to organize the South Asian Conference on Widows. The study found that 82 percent of widows moved to Vrindavan as their husbands had left no savings, 65 percent said they owned no property, and only 50 percent of those who did own property said they were able to access it. Its recommendations include establishing rehabilitation homes to provide food, medical care and other services; making information on accessing the widow's pension more widely available; encouraging religious leaders to support widow remarriage; facilitating vocational training for young widows; and making marriage registration compulsory, in order to check the practice of child brides in Bengal" (United Nations Development

Fund for Women (November 2007) *Currents, Study on the Plight of Widows in Vrindavan Launched*)

The *BBC* in July 2007 reports:

"The number of young Hindu widows seeking refuge in India's holy city of Vrindavan - nicknamed "the city of widows" - is rising, a study says. The study, funded by the United Nations women's organisation Unifem, found it was poverty, and not spirituality, that was driving women to Vrindavan. The report said that poor and helpless women went to the northern city to escape "humiliation and dependence". Nearly 15,000 widows are believed to be living on the streets of Vrindavan. Widows are traditionally ostracised in India and the new study shows their plight remains pretty much unchanged" (BBC (27 July 2007) *More Indians in 'city of widows'*).

CNN in July 2007 states:

"Ostracized by society, thousands of India's widows flock to the holy city of Vrindavan waiting to die. They are found on side streets, hunched over with walking canes, their heads shaved and their pain etched by hundreds of deep wrinkles in their faces. These Hindu widows, the poorest of the poor, are shunned from society when their husbands die, not for religious reasons, but because of tradition -- and because they're seen as a financial drain on their families" (CNN (5 July 2007) *Shunned from society, widows flock to city to die*)

This story also reports:

"There are an estimated 40 million widows in India, the least fortunate of them shunned and stripped of the life they lived when they were married. It's believed that 15,000 widows live on the streets of Vrindavan, a city of about 55,000 in northern India. "Widows don't have many social rights within the family," says Ranjana Kumari with the Center for Social Research, a group that works to empower women. The situation is much more extreme within some of India's rural community. "There, it is much more tradition-bound; in urban areas, there are more chances and possibilities to live a normal life." (ibid)

A paper produced in January 2007 by *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* notes:

"...the amended Hindu Succession Act, which gave widows and daughters the right to inherit ancestral property, including agricultural land" (United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (26 January 2007) *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirty-seventh session, Summary record of the 761st meeting (Chamber A), p.2*).

A paper in 2007 by P. Madhava Rao states:

"In India, widowhood can push the aged woman into oblivion. She is excluded from all the social functions in the family and financially also her dependency increases on her sons. They constitute the poorest among the elderly" (P.

Madhava Rao, (2007), *Economic and Financial Aspects of Ageing in India*, p.6).

A report produced by the Indian *Ministry of Women and Child Development* in 2006 states:

“Women without independent resources are highly vulnerable to poverty and destitution in case of desertion, divorce, or widowhood. In parts of western and northwestern India, not uncommonly, rural women even from rich parental and marital families, deprived of their property shares when widowed, can be found working as agricultural laborers on the farms of their well-off brothers or brothers-inlaw” (Ministry of Women and Child Development, (2006), *Report Of The Working Group On Empowerment Of Women For The Xi Plan*, p.31, Women Development, Policy, Women Group Report on Empowerment of Women for the XI Plan).

This report also states:

“Also pensions policy needs a relook in view of the large number of widow population in the country” (ibid, p.121)

In November 2006 the *National Alliance of Women* states:

“The social stigma associated with single women -- divorced, unmarried, or widowed, and the exclusion of survivors of sexual abuse is a major contributing factor. With no support system to provide them security, they fall a prey to the traffickers” (National Alliance of Women (19 November 2006) *India, Second Ngo Shadow Report On Cedaw*, p.53).

The report also states:

“Tradition and customs limit the effective implementation of the law in practices like sati. Widows make up 8% of the population but there is no effective support system in place for them. The monetary compensation given to war widows only worsened their situation as they were forced to remarry into the family of the dead husband for the sake of the money and then abandoned. The number of young widows is increasing as the HIV epidemic spreads” (ibid, p.130).

The report later notes:

“While widowers are getting married again, widows are not allowed to remarry if they wish to, as it is not a socially accepted practice” (ibid, p.175).

In 2005 the *Indian Department of Women and Child, the Indian Development Ministry of Human Resource Development* and the *Government of India* stated in a report:

“DWCD supported a package of measures for rehabilitation of widows and children affected by riots, trauma-counselling centres and training centres for affected women” (Indian Department of Women and Child, the Indian Development Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Government of India (2005) *Platform for Action 10 years after, India Country Report*, p.64).

The *BBC* in September 2004 reporting on a film about widows in India states:

“A new film, by an Indian-American director, tells harrowing tales of sexual and physical abuse” (BBC (9 September 2004) *Film highlights widows' plight*).

A *UK Home Office* report from July 2004 citing external sources states:

“According to the same source, under the Hindu Succession Act women became absolute owners of the inherited property and she was free to do what she wanted with the property which on her death would be subdivided amongst her heirs. This is the legal position but in practice there may be a totally different outcome with many obstacles preventing a woman gaining full control of the inherited property. Women who do inherit are often cheated out of their share. A widow whose husband had not separated from the joint estate is given only usage rights over the land and her share is not registered so she may be deprived of her usage rights. Although the inheritance rights of a widow are recognised in law, in practice many still do not inherit and those that do have their rights severely restricted” (UK Home Office (24 July 2004) *Report of the Fact Finding Mission to India (11-24 July 2004). Women in India*).

A news story in *Peace Women* from April 2004 states:

“Widows in India still undergo ritual humiliations and extreme ostracism; conditions that several new programs are seeking to redress” (Peace Women, (18 April 2004), *India's Outcast Widows Have New Havens*). This story also states: “...the estimated 33 million widows in India, the country with the largest widow population in the world. Among them, at least 20,000, like Bai, sit on the banks of the river Ganges and beg for alms. Vrindavan and Varanasi, holy cities in the north of India and two of the country's most sought-after pilgrim centers, have become home to the husbandless” (ibid). The story also notes: “Although the horrific practice of sati--requiring widows to throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres--was abolished in 1829, widows still undergo ritual humiliations. After the death of a husband, a woman is shorn of her bridal ornamentation; her head is shaved by the local barber and her body is wrapped in a stark white sari so she may not arouse carnal pleasures in other men” (ibid). The story later reports: “The 1856 Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act gave women the legal right to remarry and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women the same inheritance rights as men. Those rights, however, are rarely put into practice. Since women in India are often married off at a young age instead of being educated, they usually lack the skills and knowledge to fend for themselves economically and fight for their basic rights” (ibid). The story also states: “The government is also beginning to try to help widows who are cast out by their families. One of the plans is Swadhar, an \$11 million network of shelters, which will provide food, medical care, education, counseling and training” (ibid).

No further information on these issues could be found among sources available to the RDC.

References

Nehaluddin Ahmad (2009) *Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio-legal Examination*

<http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2009/issue2/pdf/ahmad2.pdf>

Accessed 23 November 2009

BBC (22 December 2007) *Aid plan for India's 33m widows*

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7157979.stm

Accessed 20 November 2009

BBC (27 July 2007) *More Indians in 'city of widows'*

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6919862.stm

Accessed 20 November 2009

BBC (9 September 2004) *Film highlights widows' plight*

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3611848.stm

Accessed 20 November 2009

CNN (5 July 2007) *Shunned from society, widows flock to city to die*

<http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/07/05/damon.india.widows/index.html>

Accessed 20 November 2009

Guild of Service (2009) *Annual Report 2008 – 2009*

<http://www.guildofservice.org/2008-2009.pdf>

Accessed 23 November 2009

Guild of Service (2007) *Spirituality, Poverty, Charity Brings Widows To Vrindavan*

http://www.unifem.org.in/Inside_Unifem_final.pdf

Accessed 23 November 2009

Guild of Service (undated) *About us*

http://www.guildofservice.org/about_us.php

Accessed 23 November 2009

Indian Department of Women and Child, the Indian Development Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Government of India (2005) *Platform for Action 10 years after, India Country*

<http://wcd.nic.in/PFA-BOOK+10.pdf>

Accessed 23 November 2009

International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (2008) *Baseline Report, Rights of Women in Relation to Marriage in India*

http://www.iwraw-ap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPrights_women_rtn_marriage.pdf

Accessed 20 November 2009

Inter Press Service (22 October 2009) *India: Single Women Break Their Silence, Challenge Societal Norms*

<http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=48953>

Accessed 23 November 2009

Inter Press Service (12 February 2008) *Rights: Widows Face a Life of Quiet Destitution*,

<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=41166>

Accessed 20 November 2009

Loomba Trust (undated) *Easing the plight of India's widows*

http://www.theloombatrust.org/pdf/Article_Raj_Loomba.pdf

Accessed 23 November 2009

P. Madhava Rao (2007) *Economic and Financial Aspects of Ageing in India*

<http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/Economic%20and%20Financial%20Aspects%20of%20Ageing.pdf>

Accessed 23 November 2009

Ministry of Women and Child Development (2008) *Annual Report 2007-08*

<http://wcd.nic.in/ar0708/English/Chapter-2.pdf>

Accessed Friday 20 November 2009

Ministry of Women and Child Development (2006) *Report Of The Working Group On Empowerment Of Women For The Xi Plan*

<http://wcd.nic.in/>

Accessed 20 November 2009

Ministry of Women and Child Development (undated) *Directory of Supreme Court and High Court Judgements on issues relating to Women and Children*

<http://wcd.nic.in/>

Accessed 20 November 2009

National Alliance of Women (19 November 2006) *India, Second Ngo Shadow Report On Cedaw*

<http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/India%20Shadow%20report.pdf>

Accessed Monday 23 November 2009

Peace Women (18 April 2004) *India's Outcast Widows Have New Havens*

<http://www.peacewomen.org/news/India/April04/outcast.html>

Accessed 20 November 2009

Radio Netherlands (4 November 2009) *A life of ashes - The story of India's widows*

<http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/life-ashes-story-indias-widows>

Accessed 23 November 2009

Social Security Online (March 2009) *India*

<http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2008-2009/asia/india.pdf>

Accessed 23 November 2009

United Kingdom Home Office (24 July 2004) *Report of the Fact Finding Mission to India (11-24 July 2004). Women in India*
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4305d7134.pdf>
Accessed 20 November 2009

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (26 January 2007) *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirty-seventh session, Summary record of the 761st meeting (Chamber A)*
http://www.bayefsky.com/summary/india_cedaw_c_sr_761a_2007.pdf
Accessed 20 November 2009

United Nations Development Fund for Women (November 2007) *Currents*
http://www.unifem.org/news_events/currents/issue200711.php#india
Accessed 19 November 2009

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (23 April 2008) *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights : consideration of reports submitted by States parties in accordance with article 16 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: India*
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4885cfbbd.pdf>
Accessed 20 November 2009

US Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Human Rights Reports: India*
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/sca/119134.htm>
Accessed 19 November 2009

Voice of America (24 January 2008) *Indian Widows Continue to Live Desperate Life in 'City of Widows'*
http://www.51voa.com/VOA_Standard_English/VOA_Standard_English_16718.html
Accessed 23 November 2009

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted

Amnesty International
Asian Centre for Human Rights
Asian Development Bank
Asian Human Rights Commission
Asia Foundation
BBC News
BBC Monitoring

Centre for Reproductive Rights
Centre for Social Research
Europa World Regional surveys of the world
European Country of Origin Information Network
Electronic Immigration Network
Family Health International
Freedomhouse
Google
The Guardian
The Hindu
The Hindustan Times
Human Rights Law Network
ID 21
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
India Ministry of Women and Child Development
International Crisis Group
International Labour Organisation
International Womens Rights Action Watch
Irish Times
Lexis Nexis
Loomba Trust
Ministry of Labour, Government of India
National Alliance of Women
National Commission for Women India
National Council of Applied Economic Research
National Human Rights Commission
Norwegian Refugee Council Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
Online Newspapers
Overseas Development Institute
Pathfind International
Peace Women
Refugee Documentation Centre E-Library
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Reliefweb
Social Security Online
United Kingdom Home Office
Office of the UN High Commission on Human Rights Treaty Body Database
UNHCR Refworld
United Nations Development Fund for Women
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Population Fund
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
United States Agency for International Development
United States Department of State
World Bank