

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN0976-8165

# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

14 Years of Open Access

Vol. 14 Issue-III June 2023

Bi-monthly Peer-Reviewed e-Journal

DR. VISHWANATH BITE

Editor-In-Chief

DR. MADHURI BITE

Managing Editor

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Bani Basu's *A Plate of White Marble*: Journey of a Mother from Wifhood to Widowhood**

**Puspita Hazra**

Ph D Scholar,  
Amity School of Languages,  
Amity University Chhattisgarh.

**&**

**(Dr) Indrani Singh Rai**

Professor,  
Amity School of Languages,  
Amity University Chhattisgarh.

**Article History:** Submitted-05/06/2023, Revised-28/06/2023, Accepted-29/06/2023, Published-30/06/2023.

### **Abstract:**

Wifehood, widowhood and motherhood are three completely different aspects of a woman's life. The first two increase the value of a single woman in a family whereas the other throws a woman away out of her family covering her with a mark as "inauspicious". The socio-cultural background of Hindu society deprives widow woman from many authoritative issues and forces upon them some rigorous customs and rituals to perform despite their unwillingness. Bani Basu's *A Plate of White Marble*, translated from the Bengali original *Swet Patharer Thala* protests silently against the stereotyped rituals and customs that have been forced upon Bandana, the widow protagonist, by her family as well as by the society simultaneously. This paper raises several important questions on the status and position of a young, modern, educated, and beautiful widow in contemporary Bengali society. It enquires the socio-cultural transition of a female from a 'wife' to a 'widow' with a common status of a 'mother' in both the journeys.

**Keywords:** Wifehood, widowhood, motherhood, customs, subjugation.

### **Introduction:**

Throughout the history women have become one of the most important parts of the society whether the society is civilised or non-civilised. They are often deprived from decision making power and authoritative issues due to their biological indifference with men and lack of physical strength also. Thus, from the very historical beginning of society itself women have been subjugated and marginalised possessing their inferior position and status. Even in this

twenty first century when the rest of the world is moving towards the new technological advancements and development, women are facing the same enforced subordination and have become victims of social exploitation and injustice. The year 1975 has been declared as the International Year of the Women and the decade 1976-85 has been announced as the International Decade for women. During this changing scenario, Government has taken various steps regarding the welfare of women and is trying continually to increase the employment and educational opportunities for them. They can now take part in some political activities like electoral voter right, attending political meetings etc. But inspite of all these increasing opportunities and enactment of various laws for the women, most of them are still in darkness.

### **Bengal and Widowhood:**

The discrimination of gender role and manifestation of masculine authority are the most prominent issues regarding widowhood in West Bengal. Marriage is a social institution for both male and female and the death of any life partner during life journey is inevitable, a normal phenomenon. People are also aware of it. But the tragedy is that after the death of her husband the wife has thrown to a painful life for leading herself: "Widowhood may be defined simply as the transition from one marital status to another. But due to the severe complexity of its consequences in our social setup, it draws the attention of sociologists and demographers". (Agarwal, 49) It is true that some of the happenings such as divorce, mutual separation also leads to the life of aloneness and separation. But nothing is compared with the tragedy of widowhood that making widows' lives single and alone and with lots of difficulties. The period of widowhood is characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, economic crisis caused by depression, anxiety, loneliness and throwing away from all social relationships. Although the sufferer should be both male and female (in case of losing their life partners) in most cases Hindu widows in West Bengal suffer a lot in society: "Widowhood phenomenon in different cultural settings has varied political and historical trajectories inevitably tied to the histories and political processes of local contexts in which laws, debates and inquiries around widowhood take shape". (Das, 64) After her husband's death a widow whether she dwells with her family or dwells alone carries within her a distinct position. Apart from all social economic and cultural problems which the widow must face the very hardship that a Hindu widow faces is the life of rigorous austerity and sacrifices:

The tragic alienation of a widow is causally related to the continued loss of her status and dignity in the remote past. The loss and decline of the status of woman is reflected

in our mythology and in the *Manusmriti* which codified the Hindu social organisation based on the *vamashrama* ideology. (Hajnal, 111)

The observation of all these rituals is nothing but the banishment of a widow from society in a deceptive way. Everywhere in the society the widows face the same problem in various ways. The only difference lies in regarding various culture and within a same society indicating different factors.

A widow in a Hindu family leads a life of utmost restraint and rigorousness in society, and the reason behind this rigorousness is to restrain her sexual urge, to make her less attractive in the eyes of man and to maintain her lifestyle less costly: “Condition of widows in India is pathetic in comparison to other countries. The reason being this cruel, inhuman custom has been an integral part of indigenous culture and tradition, followed not only by lower class but also by higher class as well”. (Chakravarti, 22) Only in Vedic age especially in Rig Vedic age women had a special position. They were allowed to take part in every important aspect of society. But the scenario changes with the passage of time. The late nineteenth century witnessed a strong protest in the socio-cultural position of the widowed women. In ancient age many scholars and great men like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Raja Rammohun Roy had tried to evaluate and develop the social status of women in Hindu society. Raja Rammohun Roy examined *Shastras* pages after pages and confirmed that there was only little evidence that advocates the widow burning custom that is called *Sati* ritual: “Women through the ages have evolved and become much stronger. The ‘sati’ system where the Rajput women jumped into the fire after their warrior husbands died in battle because they did not want to suffer humiliation at the hands of the Mughal rulers”. (Chandra,85) Similarly, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar proved that there was no contrary in the scriptures of *Shastras* regarding the issue of widow remarriage. He also stood against many auspicious rituals like child marriage, *kaulinya pratha* etc: “In a society where pre-pubescent girls are typically married to men in their mid-twenties or older, where the life expectancy of women is somewhat greater than that of men, and where widow remarriage is rigidly proscribed, one expects to find a good many widows.” (Nicholas, 42) However, with their untiring efforts and endless endeavour of the reformers ‘sati restraint Act’ (1829), ‘widow-remarriage Act’ (1856), ‘child-marriage restraint Act’ (1929), etc. had been passed by the then British Government.

But in present situation the condition has not changed positively. Widow remarriage act remains only in paper:

Despite best efforts made by the Arya Samaj in the field there has no perceptible progress.

Among the Scheduled Castes widow remarriage is performed not according to custom but as

an economic necessity. Amongst the Sikh Jats widows are remarried to their dewar or jeth.

Namadharis also preach widow remarriage. Widow remarriage among Jains is also not popular.

(Martha Alter Chen, 111)

Though the woman, the important half of the society must play an important role in the development of the society combining with the other half (man) of the society, yet they are still unwanted: "Bengali women scrutinize and critique the social world they experience, giving voice to their experiences through the language of story". (Lamb, 72) It is evident in the matter of rampant killing of female foetus or female infanticide. Even if they would survive by any way they are subordinated and marginalised and are forced to play the role of foil to the male: "The socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual ethos of a place has profound gendered effect on the construction of culturally specific femininities. In turn, cultural formations of gender and gender relations profusely impact the social construction and representation of a region." (Hunter, 17) And in India the position of women is more pathetic in comparison with other developing countries in the world: "Widowhood is inherently a gendered and cultured experience as the salience of different mechanisms linking widowhood to health may depend on gender and on local norms". (Carr, 43) Though in Hindu mythology women are described as the store of all power like devi Durga as *Maha sakti*, still women are subjugated to men. Even after almost 80 years of independence no radical change has been taken regarding the position of women especially widows in India: "In spite of their magnitude and significance, the deprivations of widows rarely feature in public debates, in the media, or even in social science research, except when- in a minute number of cases-they take a sensational form, such as *sati*".(Chandra, 17) Though with the touch of European civilisation the attitude towards women has begun to change yet most Indian people are still in darkness. If widowhood is a natural phenomenon of life, then why the widows are treated badly and are banned to lead normal life? So, a change in the stereotyped attitude towards woman is very necessary. Both men and women must feel that woman are an integral part of the society, and they are complementary to each other. Without female not only the advancement of the society will be stopped but the existence of the whole society will be in great danger:

The politics of narrativization becomes evident in the choices that agencies and individuals make in terms of selecting aspects of lives of widows that need to be highlighted and those considered not worthy of investigation. It is a vital feminist task to bring within the parameters of feminist knowledge, those aspects of women's lives that are neglected, erased, or thought of as too banal to be theorized. (Chakravarti, 248)

A good number of women not only after becoming widow have faced the social indifferences from their other family members and relatives but also must face the economic difficulties regarding their maintenance of livelihood: "A widow is treated like a low-class maid servant and usually kept in an abundant area of the house, not allowed to visit the main areas of the residence". (Giri, 73) During widowhood a direct change also takes place regarding the matter of their household chores. They are thrown away from the household works in a distinctive manner or in some cases they are forced to take the whole responsibility of the household works. The discussion of these various problems shows that the focus is not only upon the widows of Bengal but also upon all deprived women in various parts of our country.

In some regions of India, the widow is regarded as curse because she outlives her husband and is still alive even after her husband's death: "In India, a country with strict gender norms and traditional kinship systems, widowhood is considered to be a dreaded phase of life among some groups, particularly for women". (Manzoli, 77) It seems to be a criminal offence as she is still present in the family of her husband who himself is no more. Thus, she is considered as an inauspicious woman who is not able to save the life of her own husband. Not only in some regions of the country but in some other countries also the widowed women have been separated from the 'married' one and they are badly ill-treated by a particular group of people. Their value to the other members of the family has gradually become lesser and ultimately, they are separated from the society itself. There have been few widowed women who are remarried and are permitted to restart their new household in a new way. But the scenario is totally different in the case of a man. A widower is free to express all his desires and is free to marry again whether his wife's death is being an accidental or an incidental one. Nobody cares for the circumstances and atmosphere concerning his remarriage issue. This discrimination can be seen in every unit of the society, and nobody raises any sound against this mishappening. It is a matter of fact that widows are generally a part of our society, and they should be treated same as in the case of the widowers, yet it is not generally happened to:

Widowhood for elderly women in India may be a highly stigmatizing and potentially public experience as, according to traditional customs, they may shave their heads, wear only plain or white clothing, eat only two or fewer meals per day, and not be permitted to attend social gatherings or to re-marry. (Goldman, 17)

Similarly, the discipline and customs that the widow women must face are somewhat different from the treatment that the men face after their wives' death. They must undergo a life of rigorous self-discipline and social rituals and norms in terms of their way of life. It matters a little whether the widows are willing to perform all these social rituals. In fact, society imposes on them these customs and cultures. Our society has imposed this discrimination on us, and we have been bearing this hollow mentality from ancient time to the present day still.

In some areas of India, it is believed that woman has been responsible for her husband's death, and she is alienated from society. After banishment their lives become more miserable and pathetic in comparison with previous situation. Due to this the widows suffer from great depression and their lives become hell. Women oppression has been a part of many cultural contexts regarding Indian history and from time to time it changes its shape into various forms like *parda pratha*, 'lower caste issue', 'child marriage' and many other matters. In child marriage, the age gap between the bride and groom generally crosses the maximum limit and consequently the death of the male partner comes early in comparison with the female partner: "One of the assumption of the widowhood method is that the information should be collected from the first spouse, but due to increasing rate of remarriage the estimate might be affected".(Murugeson, 56) But that issue generally is forgotten by the family members and the blame of husband's death has been imposed on the female partner. But now a days this situation has been changed in a great number. The age of a girl's marriage is fixed. Widow women are given opportunities to live their life in a better way than the previous one and in some regions, they are also given opportunities to continue their education even after their husbands' death.

A strong indictment was raised by the National Commission of Women (NCW) against the Government of West Bengal for having done a little to ameliorate the condition of widows both economically and socially. While conducting a comprehensive survey of the 5,000 odd widows and destitute women living in Vrindavan NCW has arrived in a conclusion that they are living in a very pitiable condition depending upon either on alms given by the pilgrims or a little help provided by the Government itself. It would be fair to say that the status of widowed women in Bengal is the worst amongst the other countries and in modern times poverty is

another reason for arriving to Vrindavan more and more widows from Bengal. Same in the case of Varanasi also:

A trend as old as Middle Ages still persists in the pilgrim circuit of Varanasi-Mathura-Vrindavan as a last resort for widows. Under the pretext of fulfilling religious duties in old age, the tradition also serves as a convenient excuse for families to get rid of women they no longer want. (Giri, 42)

It is quite strange that the widows that are identified with the religious culture of Varanasi had primarily emigrated from Bengal: “The tragedy of the widows of Vrindavan and for that matter of Varanasi, Vrindavan and Mathura etc., goes far beyond the physical starvation, economic deprivation and cultural neglect”.(Goswami, 39) It was a century long practice to send a section of widowed women to a reclusion in the name of religion. Perhaps the most obvious reason behind the rejection of Hindu widows was to ensure the family property without disclaimer. Hindu Law never grants any right to property for women and if it so then not without their legal masters, the husbands:

Except some tribal and south Indian societies, India is predominantly maintaining a patrilineal society, whereby, the inheritance of property follows paternal line i.e. from grandfather to father; from father to his son and from son to his son and so on. A daughter is not supposed to get any share in the paternal property because after her marriage she leaves her parental house and go to her in-laws house and be there for rest of her life. (Pande, 87)

Therefore, the widows can be easily exploited. When others have marginalised the widows as individuals within family, the Bengalis exclude them far from the family and community. They are sent to the places of pilgrimage in Varanasi, Vrindavan, Mathura, and Nabadwip to live the rest of their life in isolation:

There exists a vibrant community life with legitimate space for widows to participate which also offers tangible resources necessary to conduct their day-to-day life in Vrindavan. Most women stated that they did not mind the hardships here since they had more autonomy relatively as compared to their homes. (Hunter, 18)

Widows are taken for granted with a few little choices. They are considered as liabilities or burdens upon the family and only few come forward to maintain this liability willingly.

Thus, they can be easy prey for social oppression – adultery, illicit relationship, increase in prostitution, abortion death – are often associated with young widows:

It is indeed a sorrowful state that so much efforts have been put in through education, judiciary acts, various government's schemes, social organization's movements from last two and a half centuries to resolve the problems of widow and to provide them justice and rights to live as an independent individual, but probably the thought of meaningless life after the death of husband is imbibed in psychology itself. (Nagchoudhury, 52)

One of the greatest perceived problems of widowhood is how to control the sexuality of the widow who have not remarried. In a society that dictates women's sexuality is containable only within marriage, the sexuality of woman can be a cause of moral alarm. Many, therefore, feel that there is a constant threat that young widows especially would become promiscuous, making them, their families and caste identities vulnerable. The widows, therefore, are pressed to abruptly cut off their sexuality, leave for lifetime their Bengali food fish and onion, garlic, and obviously rejecting the fancy of dressing up nicely.

Childless widow is also a matter of headache for society. A childless widow is neither a wife nor mother, no longer a daughter or daughter-in-law. Once married, she loses her place in her father's family and becomes a wife, a mother and most obvious a daughter-in-law in her husband's family:

A widow suffers from double deprivations for her dual status as women and widow. A woman with white saree is the symbol of all deprivations. Neither she is encouraged to marry nor is a man encouraged to marry a widow. (Bhat, 29)

But if she becomes widow soon after, especially without bearing child, her place in her in-law's household becomes of less importance and she loses a place to live, a clear social identity as well. Young lower-caste widows are much more likely to be left alone with no property or source of material support other than their own labour. As discussed above, the rituals and rigorous code of conduct prescribed for high-caste Hindu widows in India are aimed at transforming the widow into an asexual being. In many ways then, widowhood - the last phase of life for most women - was like old age. The consequences of widowhood to a woman are more hazardous than to a man since the society imposes lot of restrictions on women. The widow must undergo deprivation in social, psychological, cultural, and economic terms. While remarriages for widowed women are not frequent, the same is not true with respect to

widowers. Widowhood has been a serious problem which has socio-economic and demographic consequences: “Indian religions do not treat the situation of widower as inhumanly as female widow. Hence, gender discrimination or dual treatment of the same situation is obvious in the case of widow and widower”. (Nagesh, 59)

It is rather unfortunate that though the cause of widows in our society has attracted the attention of many social reformers, society's attitude towards widows has not appreciably changed in past few decades. There is need to create a more favourable atmosphere for widow remarriages with the help of welfare organisations. The Government should also step forward in reservation of some jobs for widows and ensure self-employment for assistance and training. It is generally assumed that widows in developing countries are supported by their extended families or adult sons. At the death of their husbands, they rarely inherit their property; They are often evicted from their homes, their property is taken away and their children are taken away from them. Widows have become victims of conflict and confusion over patriarchal practices, the relationship between religious and modern law, and the exclusive relationship of local courts over family and land disputes: “It is now judicially settled that once a widow has succeeded to the property and acquired an absolute right under the Hindu Succession Act 1956, she cannot be divested of this right of remarriage”. (Ainslie Embree, 52) After becoming a widow, most widows in rural India suffer from economic decline, social isolation and associated deprivation. They usually receive very little support from anyone other than their own children and are extremely vulnerable to be neglected even when she is with one or more of her adult sons. Widows’ concerns cannot be separated from other single women or indeed from ordinary women. In the context of social science research, it is appropriate to focus on widowhood as a special cause of deprivation. And in terms of social work, it is appropriate to organize and support widows’ specific demands.

Education of widows should be given utmost priority. If possible, training for employment or compensatory job opportunities should be examined; for example, where a relative is given a job in lieu of the deceased. Smaller entrepreneurial units should be made available, so that a widow might have some means of livelihood and need not have to take recourse to migrating to Vrindavan or Varanasi or some other equally horrible place as a last resort. (Martha Alter Chen, 68)

### **Widowhood and Bengali writers:**

Since ancient time to the present age, the Hindu society especially in Bengal has become the means of torture for the women in general and widow in particular:

Widow as a specific gender construct in Indian Hindu society carries different or a specific meaning in comparison to the rest of the women community of the world. Not only is it a social construct but a construct that carries all negative connotations. (Bhat, 45)

Leading a scheduled life, inspite of being a part of the society has become their inevitable destiny. But this suppressed voice has reached to near the door of literary and filmy creation. Perhaps the whole Hindu society has been shaken having seen the real portrait of widowhood especially in Bengal. After a girl's marriage her husband's house has supposed to be her own house. As a result, after her husband's death, she generally loses her home and identity. She is sent to any religious place for the rest of her life. Even her own parents fail to give her shelter for the fear of being ostracized by the society. They are still banished from social gatherings and their presence appears to be somewhat evil. When this universal problem is depicted in literary pieces and films its appeal shakes every part of society and tends to find its solution in a better way. The situation and challenge in a widow's life have been addressed in various ways in literary writings. Sometimes these widows remain mute accepting all the mis-happenings against them. Sometimes using their intellect and consciousness they try to raise their voice against all these injustice and misbehaviour. Sometimes they are ridiculed in such a way that their self-respect is vehemently attacked. In one of the much-heard Gopal Bhar stories, a Bengali series namely *Ek ebong Adwitiya Gopal* Gopal's aunt is mocked as a miser. Being a widow, she does not eat fish. Raja Krishna Chandra challenges Gopal to bring some money from her. He plays a trick on her food. Secretly he mixes some prawn with her vegetables and charges her for violating the food norms meant for a widow. Being threatened that the incident will be made public she has to give money to Gopal. It is a bitter truth that this food habit has been an instrument of torture against the widows since ancient age. In another story *Anacher* by Ashapura Devi we find that the very Shubhas kakima hides the truth of her husband's death even six months after his demise. She does so only to save her seriously ill father-in-law's life and not to give him the shock of his only son's death. But nobody realises the truth behind her hiding the news and everybody blames her and abuses her for not having performed the strictures laid down by the society for the widows. Only the narrator Manotosh

can realise the truth behind the odd behaviour of Shubhas kakima. But the writer never portrays him as a revolutionist character. He only can understand and sees what happens but never acts. Probably he loses the courage to talk against the social norms and parameters having the fear to be abused by the society even. The prohibition can also be seen in the words of the old man when he says that if the news has been heard by the father-in-law, she (Shubhas kakima) had to stop eating fish, wearing coloured saree. Thus, in one of the Bengali short stories named *Anacher* the lines are reflected in this way. This kind of prohibition in food and dress code and many other happenings provide the examples of social atrocities upon widowed women. The writer herself fails to portray 'Shubhas Kakima' as a protesting figure against these drawbacks of the society. Rather she wants a religious remedy for this wrongdoing by saying behaving like a married woman while being a widow is tremendously unforgivable offence and questions about the Hindu religion's ability to tolerate such a sinful act. Thus, the emptiness of society is revealed through a beautiful short story by Ashapura Devi.

The practical dominant force of patriarchal society is rampant in the writings of many other writers. But the writer, though they feel the plight and mental agony of the widowed people, they also fear to stand by beside them and raise a protesting voice in favour of them. A Bengali poem *Sahamaran* by famous Bengali poet Satyendra Nath Dutta is an instance in this regard. The protagonist is a widow who is saved by a Muslim boatman when she falls in a river from the burning pyre. She becomes a widow because she was forced to marry an old man to maintain her father's religious sanctity. The husband dies soon after and she is about to burn herself to perform only the so-called age old 'sati' ritual. Though her body is severely burnt yet she is saved by the Muslim boatman and loved by him as well. It is true that the poet somehow tries to present here the communal harmony, but what is the real fact behind this? Is the poet afraid of presenting a Brahmin lover at least Hindu lover for that very Brahmin girl? It is not hyperbolic that even when a Hindu girl today marries a Muslim boy the family that accepts them is isolated and alienated from the social order and status.

The widows are often treated as minor factors in familial activities and their desire, expression, wishes and even voice of speaking is marginalised in this society. This age-old tradition and the social dominance over them are evident in many writings and films available in our literary genre. As we can see in the character of Binodini in great Rabindranath Tagore's masterpiece *Chokher Bali*. It is based on the conflict of western ideology and Indian ideology centered on widowhood: "It is also about a woman who rebels against the age-old practice of widowhood and objects to follow the set of code of conduct for widow". (Bhattacharjee,72)

Here Binodini is a widowed character and though she was primarily happened to be Mahendra's wife but unfortunately Ashalata became the same. But in course of time Binodini and Mahendra falls in love with each other and they are engaged in an extra-marital affair to each other. Binodini is beautiful, thought provoking and entertains herself with Western culture and norms. She wants to express herself freely and independently in comparison with Ashalata who is shy, modest, timid, and always ready to obey her husband and in-laws also. Rajlaksmi, the widowed mother of Mahendra being a widow herself she throws away Binodini from her house after knowing her affair with Mahendra. Here everyone hates Binodini for her illicit relationship with Mahendra though the author's view regarding Binodini is quite different. He wants to portray the character of Binodini with sympathy, and she arises attention of the readers in a better way: "Thus *Chokher Bali* focuses on the widows who also are human being with flesh and blood. She has both the requirement for body one which is food and the other which is sexual gratification. Besides, it also talks about the social need to be safe and to live with uplifted status." (Bhattacharjee, 84) But though the author, in this novel, shows Binodini's character as an independent lady he somehow deviates his motif of presenting Binodini as a revolutionist character and from glorifying the illegal relationship of Binodini and Mahendra as well. Thus, he finally shows in the novel Binodini's denial of Mahendra's proposal of accepting him forgetting all social barrier and burdens and devotion of herself to serve for the destitute.

In another short story *Drabamoyeer Kashibas* by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay we can see that Drabamoyee, a widowed woman lives happily with her small house and with a pet cow and some trees in the premises of her house in Gopinathpur, a small village in Bengal. Being insisted by her grandson and 'Na Thakrun' (another widow who lives nearby to her house) she decides to go to Kashi, a place of religious sanctity, where she must share a room with Niraja. While Niraja has no complain regarding her livings of life in Kashi Drabamoyee yet suffers from homesickness. Finally, she decides to return to her native village Gopinathpur and decides to live the rest of her life there with the realisation that that native home is Gaya and Kashi to her. The author here ridicules the age-old customs of sending the widows in religious places like Gaya, Kashi, Vrindavan, Mathura and leaving them with a life of utmost misery and plight without having relations to the family members. We also have the novel of Gajendra Kumar Mitra *Rai Jago, Rai Jago* where we can see that how the widows in Kashi and Vrindavan are forced to accept the life of negritude and have become socially prey for the patriarchal society. There emerges a race for being selected by the so called rich 'jaminder'

and 'Barolok Babu' among widows and after selection of 'Badha Rarh' (paid prostitute) leading a life of economic certainty and security. In another novel by the same author named *Kothay Pabo Tare* we see that the protagonist herself after becoming widow leads a life of solitude in Kashi and in Kashi's '*Dasashwomedh Ghat*' she waits every evening for finding a 'barolok Babu', not for herself but for that girl who is abandoned by her husband and left in Kashi. That protagonist has an agony for that destitute girl of continuing and maintaining her life without guardian after the death of herself.

We find in Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Arakhhayaniya* the plight and misery of a girl of a widowed mother who is unable to give her daughter's marriage. Being economically poor she begs everyone to help in finding a groom for her daughter Gyanada. Though Atul, the rich son of their neighbouring family has some attachment towards Gyanada but after her father's death he refuses to take charge of her and accept her as his wife. Here the portrayal of misery of a poor girl and her widowed mother is commendable by the author and shifts our attention towards the age-old prohibition and ruling of patriarchal society. But inspite of all adversity, Atul finally decides to accept Gyanada. Here the author being a male in gender and identity, becomes the mouthpiece of a widow and against the age-old social order and stereotyped superstitious belief. By allowing Atul's acceptance of Gyanada in the final part of the novel the author revolts against the patriarchal hierarchy of marrying according to social status and gains sympathy of the readers in providing a happy and peaceful ending to the novel.

#### **Status of widow-mother in *A Plate of White Marble*:**

An eminent academician, poet, novelist, essayist, critic and translator, Bani Basu is considered one of the most versatile writers in Bengal. From 1980 onwards, when her first novel was published, she has written on diverse topics ranging from history and mythology to society, psychology, and gender. Her numerous awards include the *Tara Shankar Award* (1991), *Katha Award* (2003) and *Sahitya Akademi Award* (2010). Several her stories have been adapted into films and TV serials including *Swet Patharer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)*, which was made into a Bengali film in 1992 directed by Prabhat Roy starring award-winning actor Aparna Sen in Bandana's role. *Swet Pathorer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)*, a film directed by Prabhat Roy starring the award-winning film actress Aparna Sen in 1992 is a milestone in Bengali Cinema for both business success and critical acclaim. The film is based on the scenario of a widow in post independent era. The film sets on the society of West Bengal that depicts the changing mind set in contemporary society. The film talks about a woman who

is a happily married wife suddenly loses her husband at the early age of 27. The immediate impact was that she had to abandon all colours from her life first, by removing vermilion and then by abandoning non-vegetarian food. But Bandana is never ready to accept all these codes and habits that a widow follows. She does not wear white saree because the doctor advised her not to do so as it is unbearable to the child and if she continues to do so it may have a negative impact on the mental health of her son. Thus, she stops wearing white saree which is the dress code of Bengali widow like many other communities. She had to go through a forced fasting which she used to find very difficult. The film as well as the book itself shows how a woman must undergo a life in her family and society immediate after her husband's death accidentally. Bandana learns to respond to these situations sometimes by avoiding them and sometimes by protesting firmly against them:

The film shows how a widow has to go through differential experience in different stages of life after the death of her husband. While she used to receive lot of care and love from her in-laws, the death of her husband brought an ugly side of their character as they used to humiliate and oppress her which included all financial deprivations too (Bhattacharjee, 121).

Initially Bandana as a human being pays much attention to her needs and wants to accept her son's art teacher Sudipta Sarkar's love proposal. She herself feels attraction towards him and wants to continue this relationship further. But soon she becomes scared about her son's reaction towards this relationship as well the family also. But this film also fails to draw a protest by going beyond the so-called social norms and codes made for the widows. Bandana also finds it very difficult to accept the proposal of Sudipta Sarkar who can make Bandana's future somewhat different from the present one. *Swet Patharer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)* shows how it is very difficult to bring change in the plight of women comes to them after their husbands' death. The situation is same to all women whether educated or working. *Swet Patharer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)* delineates the changing scenario in post-colonial period and explores the prejudices that society holds on to for the Hindu widow even in circumstances that appear modern and contemporary. The young widow gives up wearing the traditional white saree, a widow is expected to wear not because she wants to but because her little son is unable to understand the implications of his father's death or of his mother's widowhood. Here Bani Basu's craftsmanship is highly commendable as reflected in the words:

No two of Bani Basu's novels are alike, each one explores a different segment of experience where imagination is backed by research; she experiments with a variety of narrative modes, realism and idealism sometimes co-exist in startling way; she is capable of completely changing her language to suit the theme. (Mukherjee, 111)

*Swet Pathorer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)* is about Bandana's story from being a young bride married into an apparently affluent and traditional Bengali family to middle age when, at the end of the journey, she chooses to live alone with children who are orphaned like she was as a little child. *Running like an undercurrent* is an exploration of how widowhood can change the matrix of a woman's life that neither education, nor a working status, nor the security of a permanent shelter can help bring back to where it began. The forced fasting on *Ekadashi*, mandatory for widows, or the switching over to a vegetarian diet is depicted as torture. At some points, Bandana cannot take it anymore. She finds it difficult to follow the rigid religious rituals demanded of a widow. But she goes through it, incurring increased wrath instead of satisfaction from her cruel mother-in-law. One of the most important rebellions that *Swet Pathorer Thala (A Plate of White Marble)* provokes is that no married woman, widowed or otherwise, can walk out of the marital home unless driven out of it. But Bandana goes beyond this code and conduct to show her vehement protest against society. Here the voice of a single woman character becomes the voice of the film maker as well as the author herself. This merging of the voices leads the unfolding of the 'voice of the audience' that takes the film out of itself and ponders a question over its conclusion. In her world Bandana is happy with her husband, playing hide and seek with him when he was alive and her everyday household work. But she was stepped into work only because of circumstantial pressure to bring up her child Abhiroop properly. In course of time, she has learnt to perform the rituals of the widows that she hated the most because it reminds her about her husband. But she could have remained at home even in her uncle's house if she had wished to. He never asked her to search for a job. But she feels she should not be a burden on him in his old age with a growing child in toe.

This life of a working woman has changed the life of Bandana too. She became not only independent economically, but it teaches her to raise her voice against the bad. It makes her confident. She gains a sense of self-esteem which was not present when she used to live with her husband. But this atmosphere of office work was not an easy task for her to face also because the women in the office stabs her with gossiping sometimes within her hearing and sometimes behind her back. She responds quietly to the men's proposal of wrong signals without losing her temper. She has the patience to say 'no' to that people who take widow

wearing 'white saree' as taken for granted. She changes her dress coding of wearing 'white saree' though she remains loyal to her own conduct of widowhood. She has the courage to respond against the insulting comments of her son's mother-in-law with razor-sharp statements that shakes her up. But she remains calm, quiet, and in control in every situation she faces. Her silent protest against the drawback of the society is evoked in such a quite manner that there remains always a balance between the restraint and dramatic melodrama. It tries to evoke sympathy for Bandana and juxtaposes her against all the 'bad' people she has around her. She is strong and can carry on without audience's sympathy.

*A Plate of White Marble* presents a changing scenario in the post-colonial India especially in a Bengali society without raising a single feminist slogan with a working protagonist. Just to rescue of mental health of Abhiroop Bandana refuses to wear 'white saree' and maintain the social rituals that a widow must follow. But her protest these conducts of the society raises many questions regarding the social ethics and parameters of Hindu society. *A Plate of White Marble* tells us how difficult it is to bring about change and end the plight of women. The film resolves the problems, not by focussing on the issue of a woman's right to her own identity, but by emphasising and glorifying motherhood. The film centres around a widow and the hardship she faces in an orthodox Hindu family. She becomes an object of derision when she wears non-white saree (to please her small child who used to see his Mother in colourful sarees) both at home and when she goes out to work in some sequences. Regarded a classic of Bengali literature, the film is one of the early texts to have talked about the agony, struggle, and liberation of the oriental woman.

Probably the male authors of the early twentieth century could not imagine for any alternative lifestyle which was not in the case for Bani Basu, an author of the late twentieth century. Her Bandana started to live an austere widowhood. With the intervention of her uncle, she was 'rescued' and began to live the normal life with occasional interventions of conservatism. Unlike her counterparts Bandana, the central character of *Swet Patharer Thala* (*A Plate of White Marble*) realizes that observance of some customs merely leads to cover the unalterable truth of widowhood. Finally, her decision to get married was not supported by her University-educated son who however, later bargained with her regarding her remarriage in exchange of his marriage with an upstart girl. In the climax the educated, liberated young daughter-in-law humiliated Bandana by questioning her liberal attitude towards food and dress code. The author here shows that the superstitious belief has not limited within the backward people of the society but also has broadened its way to the modern ethnic class also. Social

humiliation of the widows is a permanent feature of contemporary Hindu society, and it is closely related to the mindset of the better positioned, powerful milieu irrespective of gender, class, and cultural background:

The house at Number 45 Shyambazar Street had its date of construction engraved right at the top of its façade. From this, it could be learnt that the house was not built in this century. If not a hundred, it was close to eighty-five years old. Thanks to the moist winds from the holy Ganges in its proximity and the salty winds from the Bay of Bengal within 105 kilometres to the south, houses in Kolkata do not survive if the rich, traditional manor houses of England do. However, first-class materials from the British companies - marble, pillars, arches, tiles, original Burma-teak windows, doors, rafters, and the limestone-layered, twenty-inch-thick brickwork - continued to ostentatiously preserve the antique glory of these homes till today. This carefully polished old heritage, going by the name of 'aristocracy', may well be called stiff-necked orthodoxy, with all its evil fallout. (*A Plate of White Marble*, 7)

Translated ably by award-winning translator and litterateur Nandini Guha, the book maintains the essence of its Bengali original by retaining kinship terms and other common words in Bengali parlance. After her husband's death Bandana must perform the rules and rituals of widowhood, and she must follow a life of colourless identity as the so-called Bhattacharjee family is an orthodox one and never spare Bandana for performing the rituals. Savour these lines of Bandana's mother-in-law and her appearance: "Serving Atap-rice on the plate from a small saucepan, the middle-aged, heavily built mother-in-law suddenly broke into wails. "Where are you gone Khoka, Come and see, come, and see my suffering for once. How can I possibly serve this child with such food?" (10)

But for a widow this type of rigorous rituals is very painful to perform and maintain: "The prescribed meal of a widow's broth of boiled rice, potato, and green banana — just would not go down Bandana's throat today". (139). There are abundant references of her plight where the author portrays the wretched, helpless condition of a typical widow: "In the depths of night, when everyone else was sleeping peacefully unaware, the relentless fire of her stomach would keep her awake" (48). Combined rage, mortification, and a sense of disgrace caused the food to turn into a coagulated lump in her throat. She revolts against this:

The young woman, who had just entered the room for a meal, after the tiring barefoot walk down the long, cold verandas, her toes blotched by the cold, her body in shivers

for weakness and unexpected agitation, suddenly spoke up, 'Why not serve then something that does not pain you Ma, something that I can eat? Why this daily ritual of crying? To tell you the truth, I can't eat this anymore, I just can't...'. (11)

Through the character of Bandana, the traditional condition of the society especially the condition of the Bengali widow is very clearly reflected and even 50 years after (this book is set In 1955) the publication of the book the condition and plight of the widows is not changed wholly: "Koli's mother did not want a widow's touch in any of her daughter's wedding rituals." (92) The novel has several dimensions- how even an educated and modern woman becomes helpless when she is thrown to be a widow by destiny at the tender age of twenty seven; how she is forced to lead a life of austerity as a 'virtuous widow', by her in-laws and how she eventually comes out of the shackles and stops conforming to the conformist traditions that were forced upon her: "The aunt-in-law's face, her tears drying up, looked bewildered, as though someone had slapped her with an open palm." (11). Even when she begins to live a new life, she had to face difficulties, though she bravely fights the battle for a liberated life. The translation has impactfully captured the essence of Bandana's numerous roles; a wife, a daughter-in-law, a widow, and a mother who is hell-bent on bringing up the child even if it meant sacrificing one's own comforts. Bani Basu's original novel and the translation magnificently throws light on the age-old customs, the gender-based discrimination in a patriarchal society that doesn't allow women to come out of the shadow of a man, the superstitions within and outside the home. We see Bandana through the years, we see her as a new bride and a young widow, a young mother, a working woman and an older independent woman. Her life journey is incredible, and it feels like we were right next to her and walking along side with her: "for the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor, having once been, does she ever cease to be." (47)

Even as the novel dwells starkly upon the horrific treatment of widows in India, it offers rays of hope with assertions of the human instinct to survive and grow towards the light:

However, whether she was given permission or not, Bandana never ever wore the bangles which she had worn earlier, with a thin chain around her neck. She wore pearls in her ears, and the diamond ring that Abhimanyu had first gifted her. (47)

Like any ordinary Indian woman, she internalizes the lowly position granted to widows in society and families, and it takes many years of mental and emotional upheaval to even aspire to personal joy: "The world with its society and its homes and hearths was a vast

turbulent ocean. Amidst this endless desolation she was but a wraith in a solitary cell on a solitary island.” (43) A woman adorns so many roles during her lifetime. From being a daughter to being a mother, from being a daughter-in-law to being a mother-in-law, the list is endless for the various lives she lives. In playing all these sometimes she forgets who she is. What’s her real identity. Coupled with endless traditions and discriminating customs whatever is left inside her just suffocates. Bandana, retiring from life has decided to leave her household and to serve for the orphan children. Bandana said:

I will go to the richest countries. Do you understand Koli! Sweden, Denmark, Holland, France. Once I reach London, I will see what schedule they have arranged for me. Let them do something for our children! They are spending most of their excessive wealth on gourmet food, clothes, education, but after that, a lot is also being used for pointless, selfish indulgences. That those who come into this world mentally challenged are also their responsibility, is something they must be made aware of. It isn’t only a question of money! We need technological inputs, information, debates, a lot of patience, hard work, and dedication! They will understand. You know how many people it takes to look after all those children! We are so very acutely short of staff, Koli. If you would only join us, it would be such a great help! (323)

These are the last lines of the novel where Bandana finds a new meaning of her life and devotes herself to the benefit of the destitute.

Bani Basu masterfully, through Bandana, portrays the plight of the Indian woman in society, more so when one becomes a widow:

While a guest partook of a variety of fish dishes, this twenty-seven-year-old, semi-conscious, half- demented woman, whose marital bangles had been smashed, iron bangle removed, hair parting wiped clean of vermilion, face wan and pale, lay in one corner, wrapped in a white sari- like the body of an abandoned beggar woman. (18)

Elsewhere in the novel the author states it through Mili: “Widows are not supposed to wear anything in their ears, as it leads to misfortune for the family.” (58) Though the story is based in 1955 and written in 1990 we will find so much of it is relevant even today. Meenakshi Mukherjee in *Bani Basu’s Novels in Muse India*, writes:

...the mask of men is easier to penetrate than those of women. Each identity of yours is an individual mask – mother, wife, daughter. In all of these attributed identities there

exists another person, an essential being, which remains hidden. You can catch it only in loneliness or solitude. (72)

Bandana's realisation about the so-called age-old domesticity shatters the door of patriarchal society. Possibly the punishment of leading a lifetime of deprivation is more acutely felt than the grief and suffering caused by the loss of a dear one. Elsewhere in the novel Bandana says: "...I am deeply convinced that human life was not created for grief, murder, jealousy, mayhem, malice or inertia." (226). Bandana is never tiresome about her life, but she is irritated by society's behaviour and her comments regarding life and death of a soul is highly commendable.

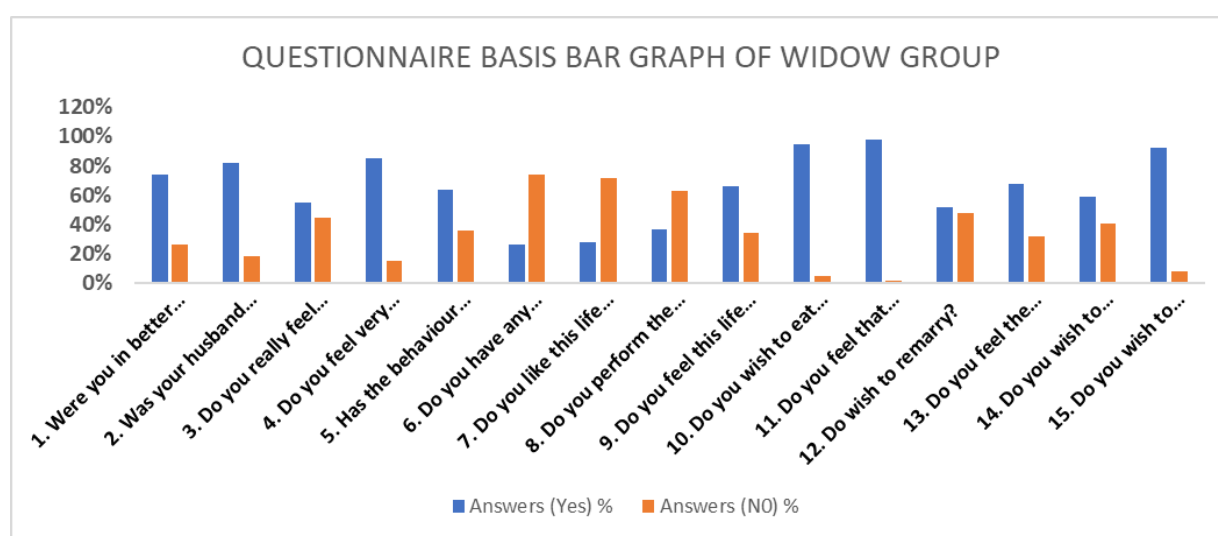
The novel has an uncommon flavour, and despite the heavy subject, it manages to depict sorrow and injustice without melodramatic prose or pathos: "Bandana fought shy of telling anyone about her own sorrows. She had raised her own self respect to such a high level that she could not appear weak before anyone." (288) The triumph of the novel lies in the brutally relatable humanity of its characters, especially the protagonist Bandana:

On some days, Bandana tossed restlessly on her bed. All the long years she had taken to attain her independence with great difficulty, the freedom to enjoy her retirement, the care with which she had maintained the pure and disciplined atmosphere of her home were collapsing like a house of cards. (304)

Having lost her husband, she may have been a victim of cruel social injustice, but she is not quite ready to submit to the will of just any man, not just yet, as Anupam appreciates Bandana: "I know you as a rebel against social norms. I respect You. I am strongly attracted by your conduct and personality." (226) Whether a suitor or her own rebellious son, she gradually learns to assert herself as she grows older, until she finally reaches a state of consummate independence: "What is the benefit in converting life into a chain of a meaningless rituals? I was to give you the belief that every day, from what you will invest, you will get back benefits more than you could ever have expected." (322)

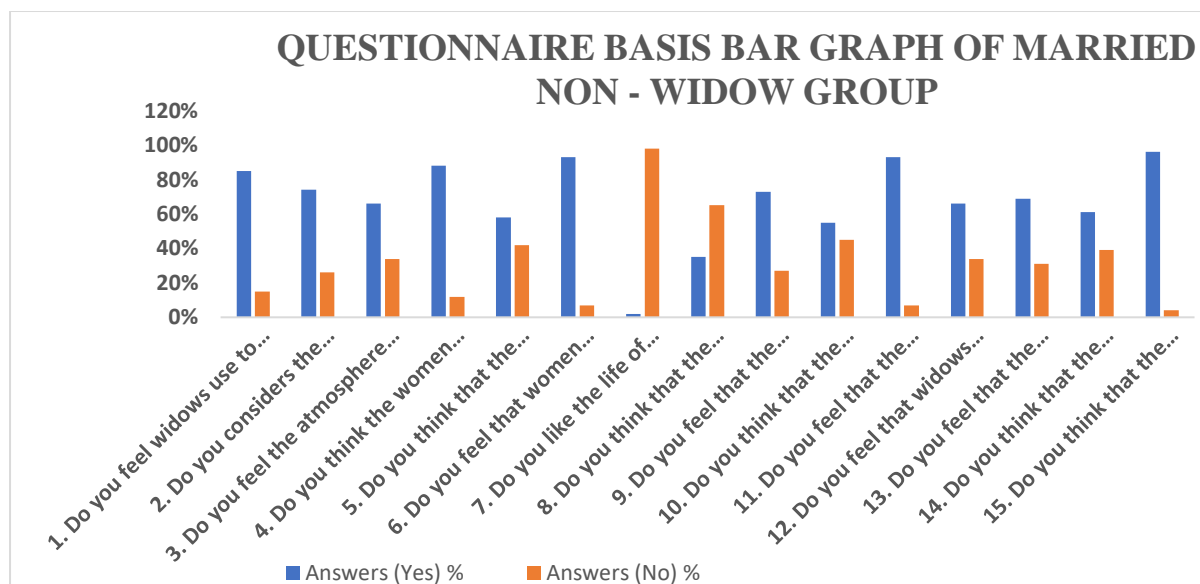
A surveyed was made over a group of twenty-five widow women and a group of twenty-five married non-widow women and the result is summed up.

Types of Questions (Widow Group)	Answers (Yes) %	Answers (NO) %
1. Were you in better condition in comparison with the present one ?	74%	26%
2. Was your husband supportive ?	82%	18%
3. Do you really feel the atmosphere has been changed drastically ?	55%	45%
4. Do you feel very lonely?	85%	15%
5. Has the behaviour of the rest of the family members been changed?	64%	36%
6. Do you have any financial support other than your husband?	26%	74%
7. Do you like this life of reclusion ?	28%	72%
8. Do you perform the rituals of widowhood willingly ?	37%	63%
9. Do you feel this life is a burden to you ?	66%	34%
10. Do you wish to eat "hot food" like fish, onion, garlic etc. any more ?	95%	5%
11. Do you feel that the husband and wife are integral part to each other ?	98%	2%
12. Do wish to remarry?	52%	48%
13. Do you feel the vacuum of being lonely?	68%	32%
14. Do you wish to lead the rest of your life in religious devotion ?	59%	41%
15. Do you wish to work and get financial security?	92%	8%



QUESTIONNAIRE BASIS BAR GRAPH OF WIDOW GROUP

Types of Questions (Married Non-Widow Group)	Answers (Yes) %	Answers (No) %
1. Do you feel widows use to be in better condition than previous one ?	85%	15%
2. Do you considers the husbands to be supportive ?	74%	26%
3. Do you feel the atmosphere happens to be change after one's husband's death ?	66%	34%
4. Do you think the women become lonely after their husbands' death ?	88%	12%
5. Do you think that the behaviour of the other family members uses to be change a	58%	42%
6. Do you feel that women should have financial support other than husbands ?	93%	7%
7. Do you like the life of reclusion without husband ?	2%	98%
8. Do you think that the widows perform the religious rituals willingly ?	35%	65%
9. Do you feel that the widowed life is a burden ?	73%	27%
10. Do you think that the widows should eat "hot food" ?	55%	45%
11. Do you feel that the husband and wife are integral part to each other ?	93%	7%
12. Do you feel that widows should remarry ?	66%	34%
13. Do you feel that the women become lonely after their husbands' death ?	69%	31%
14. Do you think that the widows should lead the rest of their lives in religious devo	61%	39%
15. Do you think that the widows should work and get financial security?	96%	4%



QUESTIONNAIRE BASIS BAR GRAPH OF MARRIED NON -WIDOW GROUP

### Conclusion:

Vrindavan survives two things-temples and widows. But the most interesting matter of fact is that one is totally opposite to other. In one hand one is the embodiment of sacredness, piousness, and auspiciousness on the other hand the second is an emblem of inauspiciousness and impiousness. But there exists a paradoxical relationship between the two as they closely interrelated to each other: Rajan in *Representing Sati: Continuities and Discontinuities in Real and Imagined Women* writes:

...thus, there exists a paradoxical relationship between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness associated with widows in Vrindavan. They are an active part of the cultural and spiritual economy of Vrindavan, partaking in everyday negotiations and bargains to survive. (45)

The above discussion regarding the condition of widows focuses on the perspective of reviewing and rejudging about the social status of women. What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow – a statement made by Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale somewhere around 1907 is still a lesson for all the Bongs. In *Who Sows? Who Reaps? Women and Land Rights in India*, B Agarwal says: “Pro-women measures', which would benefit widows as well as other women, e.g., female education, enforcement of laws relating to minimum age at marriage, and protection of women's property rights.” (86) Through the discussion of *A Plate of White Marble* and the survey that has been done it can be concluded that the society for its own sake has implemented some rules and regulations and these rules and regulations by no means can

be suppressed upon widows. In various parts of the society the rules and regulations vary but the internal codes and conducts remain the same. According to Sample Registration System widows represent over 8 percent in compared to total female population. Census data on recent incidence on widowhood reveals following patterns- Firstly that the rate of incidence of widowhood is slowly declining in recent few years and secondly that the rate of incidence of widowhood is lower in northern states in comparison with southern states. By way of conclusion, we would like to reiterate that the concerns of Indian widows cannot be dissociated from those of other single women, or indeed from those of women in general. A Bhaiya in *Single Woman: Shifting Contours of Identities interwoven Marginalities* writes: “The fact that mortality rates are higher among widower men than widowed women and their married counterparts should not be interpreted as definite indication of a causal link between widowhood or widowerhood and increased mortality.” (72) And in the context of social action, it is right to organise and support widows in their specific demands (e.g., relating to pensions, property rights and other entitlements). As the studies and personal testimonies summarised in this paper amply demonstrate that there are intimate links between the predicament of Indian widows and a wide range of patriarchal institution and the cause of widows must be seen as an integral part against gender inequalities: “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 as a social stigma”. (Chandra, 124)

### Works Cited:

- Agarwala, S.N., *Widow Remarriage in India*, Medical Digest, Vol. 30(10), 549-58. 1962.
- Basu, B., *A Plate of White Marble*, Translated by Nandini Guha, Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2020.
- Bhat, V. N., *Status of Indian Widows: Historical Accounts and Contemporary Scenario, Problems of Widows in India*, New Delhi: Swarup and Sons, 29, 2004.
- Chen, Martha. *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, New Delhi, Sage 456, 1998.
- Chen and Dreze, *Recent Research on Widows in India: Workshop and Conference Report in Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(39), 1995.

- Chandra, A., *Vulnerability of widows in India: Need for inclusion*, International Journal of Social and Economic Research, 2011.
- Dandekar, K., *Widow Remarriages in Six Rural Communities in Western India*, Medical Digest, Vol. 30(2), 69-78, 1971.
- Dyson, T., *Excess Female Mortality in India*, Dynamics of Population and Family Welfare 1987, Bombay: UPS., 1987.
- Ghosh, A.K., *The gender gap in literacy and education among the scheduled tribes in Jharkhand and West Bengal*. Sociological bulletin, 2007.
- Hajnal, J. *Age at Marriage and Proportions Marrying*, Population Studies Vol.7, 111-136, 1953.
- Jamadar, C., Melkeri, S.P., Holkar, A., *Quality of life among widows*. The International Journal of women welfare, 2015.
- Kodoth, P., *Fostering insecure livelihoods: Dowry and female seclusion in left developmental contexts in West Bengal and Kerala*, Economic and Political Weekly, 2005.
- Lamb, S., *The beggared mother: older women's narratives in West Bengal*, 1997.
- Lahiri, T.K., *Recent Levels and Trends in Mortality in India and its Major States*, Dynamics of Population and Family Welfare 1987, Bombay: IIPS, 1987.
- Lamb, S., *Being a widow and other life stories: The interplay between lives and words*. Anthropology and Humanism, 2001.
- . *Aging, Gender and Widowhood: Perspectives from Rural West Bengal*. Contributions to Indian Sociology, 1999.
- Mondal, R.W., *Health care of elderly tribes: A study on the lodha women of Jhargram district, West Bengal*, 2021.
- Nicholas, N.W., *Economics of family types in two West Bengal villages*. Economic Weekly, 1961.
- Padhy K.S., *Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi, PHI Learning Private Limited 71, 2011.
- Parvathy K.A., *Widowhood: A Gender Perspective* in A Reddy op. cit. 7-11, 2004.
- Reddy P.H., *Demographic Aspects of Widows in India* in A Reddy, op. cit., 12-21, 2004.

Sinha, A. P. *India's Population Problems*, Bombay: Tata, McGraw Hill Publishing Co. Ltd, 1985.

Sinha, R.K., *A Study on Marital Dissolution in India*, Bombay: IIPS, 1990.