

File No. R-13/5/2021-PRPP(RU-2)
NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
RESEARCH UNIT - II (PRP&P DIVISION)

Minutes of the meeting on the Human Rights Issues of Widows residing in Shelter Homes in Mathura-Vrindavan and Varanasi held on 20th July, 2021

A meeting to discuss the human rights issues of widows residing in shelter homes in Mathura-Vrindavan and Varanasi was held on 20.07.2021. It was chaired by Justice Shri Arun Kumar Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson, NHRC. Shri Rajiv Jain, Hon'ble Member NHRC, Shri Bimbadhar Pradhan, Secretary General, Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, Dr. M.D.S. Tyagi, Joint Director (Research), Ms. Winnie Singh, Co-Founder of Maitri India, and other concerned officials were present.

A presentation was made by Ms. Sakshi, JRC, highlighting the issues faced by widows staying in Mathura-Vrindavan and Varanasi. The main issues highlighted during the presentation are as follows:

- Lack of Infrastructure: Overcrowding, unhygienic living conditions, lack of basic amenities in the shelter homes for widows.
- Health Issues: No routine health check-ups, no data available about vaccination and Covid-19 testing at the shelter homes for widows.
- Lack of access to schemes for economic and social benefits: Not able to enjoy their property rights, unemployment, lack of skill training, no financial assistance, these widows are abandoned by their family and many are begging for survival. Further, widows do not have access to social welfare schemes due to lack of proper identity and other required documents.
- Lack of funds for shelter homes for destitute widows: Most of the widows' shelter homes are poorly maintained and due to inadequate funds, the living conditions continue to be sub-standard and pitiable.
- Lack of updated demographic data on destitute widows. Only limited and outdated data available about their socio-economic conditions.
- Lack of Awareness: Due to lack of awareness and education, the widows are not able to exercise their constitutional, legal and human rights.

Points emanated from the discussion are as follows:

1. Hon'ble Chairperson stated that the property rights of widows need to be restored in order to end their plight and to make a way for their dignified living;
2. Leaving widows to fend themselves has to be discouraged by making it punishable under the law to stop this practice;
3. Government can be made accountable for non-implementation of welfare schemes, if basic amenities are not provided to the destitute widows resulting in violation of their human rights including the right to food, shelter, dignity and property;
4. A ground report to understand the socio-economic conditions of the widows is required;
5. Each Shelter home should have capacity of accomodating at least 1000 widows.
6. It is necessary to ensure that widows living in Mathura-Vrindavan and Varanasi get benefits out of various central and state welfare schemes including Ayushman Bharat;
7. Widows should be made self-reliant through self-employment by way of providing them necessary skill training;

8. A research study may also be got conducted to assess their socio-economic and living conditions of widows residing in Mathura-Vrindavan and Varanasi;
9. Government need to review the amount of monthly pension to widows in order to ensure that the same is sufficient to meet their basic needs;
10. The government may like to review 'The Widows (Protection and Maintenance) Bill, 2015' by Shri Janandan Singh Sigriwal, Hon'ble M.P., so that legislations could be brought about the welfare of the widows.
11. On-the-Spot Inspection may also be made by the NHRC Special Rapporteur/ Monitor/ Research Team to make an assessment of violation of their human rights.
