

With these words, I want leave to withdraw the Bill.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : First I will have to put the amendment to the motion for consideration, which was moved by Shri Mool Chand Daga to the vote of the House.

The amendment was put and negatived.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now Shri Patil may move for leave to withdraw the Bill.

SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL : Sir, I beg to move for leave to withdraw the Bill to provide for reservation of agro-based industries for producers and workers cooperatives and to provide financial assistance to such cooperatives in setting up of agro-based industries.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

“That leave be granted to withdraw the Bill to provide for reservation of agro-based industries for producers and workers cooperatives and to provide financial assistance to such cooperatives in setting up of agro-based industries.”

The motion was adopted.

SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL : I withdraw the Bill.

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17.43 hrs.

WIDOWS' PENSION BILL ✓

[English]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN (Barmer) : Sir, I beg to move :

“That the Bill to provide for payment of pension to destitute widows, be taken into consideration.”

[Translation]

First, I would like to highlight the objects and reasons of the Widows' Pension Bill introduced by me in the House.

We have seen that often the women of lower and middle income group with no adult son become destitute after the death of their husbands. Sometimes the condition of such widows becomes so miserable due to poverty that some unscrupulous persons take undue advantage of their helplessness and disgrace them in the society. In order to eradicate this evil and to meet the requirements of the Articles 39 and 41 of the Directive Principles of the constitution, it is expedient to grant pension to the widows with a view to provide suitable financial help to them so that they may lead an honourable life.

The object of this Bill is to achieve this end. The States have formulated rules under the social security policy to give pensions to the old and the handicapped but this pension of Rs. 50 per month is insufficient. Neither the old nor the handicapped can maintain themselves with the help of this amount. We have certainly made provision for pensions to the old and the handicapped but no such provision has been made for the widows and this is very essential. Our society treat the widows with gross injustice. There has been struggle for the rights of women and they have got some rights but the condition of the widows is a blot on our society which we have to eradicate. Today the widows are looked down upon in the society. In certain sections of the society, the situation is so deplorable that a widow is not allowed to participate in her son's marriage. They cannot even apply a bindi on their foreheads. So, the widows are despised by the society. Previously, the society used to give financial help to the widows but now neither the family nor the close relatives help a widow in times of distress. In the present context the very definition of family is changing. Now besides the family and relatives, the society also does not help the widows. In the old days, if any person of a family faced some financial problem, the other members of the family used to make small contributions to help him.

I was in my constituency on the 27th and there one of the issues was that the

[Shri Virdhi Chander Jain]

condition of the widows in the society was deplorable. It was suggested that some funds should be collected to help them. I expressed my views on the issue. A high court judge also expressed his view, and it had such an impact that Rs 10 lakhs were collected on the spot. A trust was formed and a programme was chalked out to help the widows. But I notice that despite best efforts, it is not possible to make such arrangements in every section of the society.

I have introduced this Bill keeping in view the indigent condition of the widows. It becomes worse if they do not have any adult son. I have sought the cooperation of some of my colleagues in drafting this Bill and the clauses were drafted after a thread bare discussion. The most important thing about the Bill is that the definition of a destitute widow has been made after much deliberation. If a widow has no other helping hand and no relative to shelter her then only she is entitled to get help. She can submit her application to the competent authority. In this connection a provision has been made that if any widow is employed and is getting regular salary then she would not get the benefit of this pension. If she has some movable and immovable property and a house which she can rent out and arrange money then also she will not get any benefit. In case the income of a widow is more than Rs. 1200 she would not be entitled to the benefits under this Bill. If some widow is living as a wife or a concubine then also she cannot get the benefit of pension. In this way all the requisite provisions have been framed. If a widow in her application gives any wrong information, misrepresents the facts and her income is above Rs. 1200 then she will have to return the benefit drawn by her and a criminal case would be filed against her. She can be sentenced to imprisonment which may extend to six months. The minimum pension will be Rs. 75 per month and maximum will be Rs. 125 per month. This amount is, of course, quite meagre. A widow who wants to educate her minor children cannot do so with this much of money but keeping in view the condition of the country the provision of Rs. 75 to Rs. 125 per month has been made. If she remarries,

she would lose her entitlement. In case her sons have become earning hands then the benefit will be stopped. In the same way if she takes up some job and is able to maintain herself she will not get its benefit.

At present, the condition of widows is very miserable and the most important thing to meet the situation is to stress on women education. Our Government has specially emphasised the women education in the Seventh Five Year Plan. With the spread of women's education their unemployment problem would be solved. They will get jobs and would not need any help. In such a situation the number of applicants seeking assistance would gradually come down and the Government will have to spend less with the passage of time.

I am also in favour of remarriage, and it should be encouraged. I certainly do not oppose remarriage but a women who does not want to remarry should not be forced to do so as I do not approve of this thing. There can be a situation that a woman is 18 years old or above and she does not want to remarry but wants to lead an honourable life. It is very necessary to make some provision like the present one so as to help her. If no such arrangements for her living are made and her financial position is not strengthened, then it will not be possible for her to preserve her honour. The condition of widows in the society is such that they cannot lead an honourable life because due to their indigent condition they are forced to lead a life which is a blot on the society. It is, therefore, necessary that this Bill should be passed. I am not rigid about this Bill and if any amendments or improvements are needed then we are prepared to accept them. Amendments are always made in the Acts. In the Electricity Act, 15 amendments have already been made and the 16th is under consideration. In the same way the present Bill can also be amended. If need be, it may also be referred to the Select Committee. I am not rigid that Bill has covered all the problems and the situations. There may be some lacunae or loopholes which need to be removed. Amendments are always made in the laws framed by the Central Government as well as the State Governments. The purpose of this Bill is to turn the despicable

life of a widow into an honourable one. If provision is made for the payment of pension to them, they will have a place of honour in the society and we can give them social security. In many countries like U. S. S. R., U. S. A. and Britain, there are social security laws and the widows, the handicapped and the destitutes are helped under those provisions. I have introduced this Bill for the same purpose. I hope that the House will welcome it and put forward its views and suggestions so that I may know the views of the Hon. Members. I shall deal with their points in my reply.

With these words, I present this Widows Pension Bill in the House.

AN HON. MEMBER : You will be glad to know that this allowance is being paid in West Bengal since 1978.

*SHRIMATI N. P. JHANSI LAKSHMI (Chittoor) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I support the Bill to provide pension to the destitute widows, moved by Shri Virdhi Chander Jain. I compliment him for bringing this Bill before this august House. Sir, never in the history of our country, the society treated the widows with sympathy and respect. Till 18th century the practice of *Sati* was in vogue. It is only due to the herculean efforts of the reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the practice of *sati* was abolished. Since there

*The speech was originally delivered in Telugu.

centuries have rolled by. The position of widows has not changed. In 1947, we became independent since then the country is striving for an all round development. Already 30 years have gone by. But the condition of the widows have not improved in any way. A woman who has lost her husband and has no one to look after her, is still being considered to be a burden to the society. Now, the time has come to realise the fact that the welfare of a widow is the bounden duty of our society, not a burden.

Sir, 51 per cent of our population are women. We had the rare distinction of having woman Prime Minister for 17 long years. Yet, it is a pity, that even today a widow suffers the wrath of the society in the country.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : Mrs. Jhansi Lakshmi, you may continue your speech next time.

The House stands adjourned to reassemble on Monday, 4th August, 1986 at 11-00 A. M.

18.00 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Monday, August 4, 1986/Sravana 13, 1908 (Saka)