

reach these people. Already an Hon. Member has said that because of the Nagaland elections and the Meghalaya elections the Government has brought this Ordinance but I once again warn the Government to see to it that this community is protected otherwise the integration of the nation will be at stake.

[Translation]

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for calling me... (Interruptions)

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI (Mand-saur) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, his anger is directed against you but it will find vent in the form of attack on our Government. Better you restrain him.

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : If the king commits a mistake his subjects suffer and if the subjects commit a mistake in that case also the subjects suffer. Therefore, your mistake has prompted me to say so. You did not properly see my massive body. You called the other member and that is why I had to engage myself in altercation with you. This Ordinance was promulgated on 19th September. When did the State Government make their recommendation for inclusion and why was it withheld for so long a time? The House was scheduled to meet on 6th November, then why was this ordinance promulgated on 19th? Would heavens have fallen during this short period of 1½ months? If it was so, it could have been brought forward in August when the House was in session. But your officers sleep over it and wake up only when they are in neck-deep water. The same thing happened in the case of Punjab Ordinance too. That too could have been brought earlier.

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : You can continue tomorrow.

15.00 hrs.

DISCUSSION RE SITUATION ARISING
 OUT OF INCIDENT OF 'SATI' AT
 DEORALA VILLAGE IN RAJ-
 ASTHAN AND THE STEPS
 PROPOSED BY THE UNION
 GOVERNMENT TO PRE-
 VENT SUCH DEPLOR-
 ABLE INCIDENTS IN
 FUTURE

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Now we take up item No. 13 : Discussion under Rule 193. Shri C. Madhav Reddy...not present. Dr. Chinta Mohan.

DR. CHINTA MOHAN (Tirupati) : Sir, the word 'Sati' started from a herbal root which has got a feminine noun and which gives the sense of cheerfulness, goodness and some sort of sincerity. In later days, the word 'Sati' was used for a woman, more sincere for the religion and the society. From the 6th century onwards, the 'Sati' started. There are two types of 'satis' : one voluntary and another forcible. When we look into the various scriptures, we do not have any Vedic sanctions at all. Recently, I happened to look at some of the writings in Yuga Veda. In chapter 18, page 8, it is said that a widow can go for a second marriage. In Atharvana Veda also in chapter 18, page 1, it is said that a widow can go for a second marriage. It never said that the forcible 'sati' is practised. It is not given at all. Because Sati is attached to the religious sentiments. I would like to go to the Yugas and ancient culture. When we look into the Krutha Yuga, it is seen that Sati Savitri never died with her husband. When we look into the Tretha Yuga, the famous personality Sita never died with Lord Rama. When we look into the Dwaper Yuga, the famous Draupadi never died with the Pandavas. If we look into the Kalayuga, we are now seeing some instances of Roop Kanwar and other ladies. In some of the writings, it is said that it started in Vijayanagara Samrajya. Then it reached the Gangetic belt on to the Punjab and Calcutta in West Bengal.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE (Rajapur) : That's why the CPM had to take over !

DR. CHINTA MOHAN : Even when we look into the pre-British days, there are so many instances of 'Sati'. More than 2,365 'Sati' incidents had happened. After that, Lord Bentick brought a legislation in 1929 to stop this evil system. The famous Raja Rammohan Roy had also taken an active part to abolish 'Sati'. After independence, Indian Penal Code was brought and they brought a number of constitutional amendments. Article 51(a) and 21(a) has given the constitutional rights to live in this country; we have given safeguards to live in this country. Let us look into the present situation.

On 4th September, in Deorala of Rajasthan, Mr. Man Singh had died in hospital later due to intestinal obstruction. He was brought to his residence around 10.30. After 10.30, the wife of the deceased, Roop Kanwar went into the fields to hide herself to fight against sati. But the relatives of Man Singh forcibly brought her around 1.30 to the funeral pyre and got her burnt literally. This has happened in Rajasthan where the Congress (I) is ruling. Is it not a shame for the Government? I do not know why the Chief Minister of Rajasthan is continuing as the Chief Minister of that State. Is not a shame on the part of the Government to continue such things? The same thing happened on the 4th October 1980 in the same place but no condemnation had been expressed. But after 13 days, a festival called 'Chunari Mahotsav' was held where 3 lakhs people attended. The function was attended by 3 MLAs—the religious revivalistic function. The Congress leaders also attended and enjoyed the function. I congratulate the Press, specifically the 'Jansatta' who published this article in their editorial and thus brought this into the focus of this great nation. I congratulate the Janata Party and Opposition parties when they organised a function condemning sati on the 2nd October, Gandhiji's birthday. I do not know what happen to the rulers of this Government. I mean the people who are sitting in the Treasury Benches. Once the Minister of State visited the place and the people presented a propaganda saying that sati should be prohibited. Instead of condemning it directly, the Minister went inside the suit and was not able to say anything. This is the type of functioning of this Government. Later on, probably, the people in the high-

ups forgot sati. A little later, when the Press was putting some questions, they said that sati should be condemned.

15.07 hrs.

[SHRIMATI BASAVAJESWARI in the Chair]

On 4th September, the Minister of State for Welfare brought an Ordinance for inclusion of three tribes in the Scheduled Castes in Meghalaya. I am very happy about that. If not on 4th September, at least on 10th September they should have brought an Ordinance to condemn sati. Then we would have been very happy. They had totally forgotten about sati. It all goes to say that people do not have any political will; the very socialistic pattern of society is tilting towards the capitalist attitude; the Government is trying to bring religious revivalism. It all goes to say the obscurantist attitude of this Government. I condemn this Government for not bringing till today a Bill in this Parliament in regard to the condemnation of sati. We talk in this Parliament about modernisation of industries; we talk about computerisation, space research and development.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : How is it that when such a serious debate is going on, the Union Home Minister is not present? Basically he is concerned with this problem.

DR. CHINTA MOHAN : That only show how serious they are.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Madam, you can express your displeasure about the absence of the Home Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He is the senior most Minister, he will take care of it.

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI P. V. NARASIMHA RAO) : This is really super-technicality. I am Minister in charge of women and, therefore, I have a legitimate duty to be here.

(Interruptions)

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : I am not raising it in a light-hearted manner. Even at other place—I would not say Rajya Sabha—this issue was raised by a Congress

Member and they said that basically it is the Home Minister who is concerned with this.

AN HON. MEMBER : Including the Leader of the House.

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : This is a matter which can be looked at from both ways. I am concerned with the subject and, therefore, I am here. I have a right to be here: I have a duty to be here.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE (Panskura) : Madam, I express my deep concern that the Leader of the House is not present here, when such a discussion is going on.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : How are you under an impression that the Home Minister has nothing to do with the subject, when most of the issues that are coming up even the amendment of the IPC, Section 306, the Central Legislation that has to be moved, definitely affect the Home Ministry? Whenever the Women's Organisation has interviewed, they have interviewed the Home Minister and all the assurances that have been given to these organisations are also given by the Home Minister only. He has been dealing with it all the way. I am not raising it lightly. If you think that it is a light matter, I would say that is the way you take up many important subjects.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur) : Sir, how many Congress Party Members are sitting here, I would like to know.

(Interruptions)

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : I do not challenge his competence. He is competent to deal any Ministry, be it External Affairs, Home or any Ministry for that matter. But the ex-Home Minister is different from the present Home Minister.

SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI (Guwahati) : Madam, there are two aspects; one is the general case of the Sati where the Minister in charge of women can deal but the other aspect deals with the incident of Deorala, which definitely is the question of law and order. I do not think he is capable of answering some of the questions which my learned colleague has put, like as to why no law has been framed.

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : If I am not able to answer any question, the Home Minister will come to answer them.

(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please hear him, what he wants to say.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : There is certain propriety and that has to be maintained in such debate. For example if during the debate on Finance matter, the Finance Minister is not present, it is of no use. I must say, it has never happened like this.

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : The parallel does not apply here. If the Finance Minister is absent while discussion on the finance matter is going on, that is a different story altogether.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Are you connected with the Home Ministry?

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : I am connected with the subject matter of this discussion. The Home Ministry is concerned with the law and order aspect of it. That is only one aspect of the issue.

(Interruptions)

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : They are taking Parliament for granted; that is all.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He will take care of it.

SHRI M. R. SAIKIA (Nowgong) : Sir, the Opposition is providing the quorum.

(Interruptions)

DR. CHINTA MOHAN : The Government of India is talking of the space research, of modernisation, computerisation, research and development and thus are trying to take us to the 21st century. But when we look at these sort of incidents, it appears that they are leading us to the 16th century. Sir, this has never happened in all the four 'yugas', i.e. the Dwarpar, the Krita, the Treta, etc. but it is happening in this yuga. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, for whom I have great respect and admiration,

has he gone to Deorala? If he has visited that place, he can enlighten us about the incident that has taken place there. I have my own doubt whether the Government can bring a Bill to prevent Sati. If the Government is really thinking of enacting a Bill, I would like to know when that Bill will come and if not the reasons therefor. With these words I conclude my speech.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI MEIRA KUMAR (B jnor) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a very sad day today. It is sad because, the speaker who spoke before me made this serious and heart-rending subject a political issue. His was a political speech. We would debate this issue by rising above politics. This is not an issue for party politics.

I was saying that it was a very sad day today. A need has arisen today to do once again all that which was done by Raja Rammohan Roy and William Bentick in 1829. Whatever happened 150 years ago is happening again and it is very sad and shameful that the preventive measures against it are meeting the same opposition even today. Has our society, our civilization, our culture and our mentality not gone forward even a bit during the past 150 years? Have we keenly engrossed ourselves in the evil customs to such an extent that we have become crippled and are not able to retrieve ourselves from there? Now when we are on the threshold of the 21st century, shall we not feel ashamed to enter 21st century? We have to think about this.

This issue should not be politicized. So far we were under the impression that Raja Rammohan Roy and William Bentick had put a full stop to the custom of *Sati*. But now it has come to light that numerous incidents of *Sati* have taken place in Rajasthan and other parts of the country. Many of such incidents have been aborted as a result of the action taken by the administration. It is a matter of grave concern.

A dangerous mentality of selfishness works behind *Sati* due to which the relatives went to usurp the money and property of the widow after burning her. Another selfish mentality that works behind the incidents of *Sati* is that once a widow commits *Sati* in a

family, the social status of that family will go up. What an irony and what a social paradox is it that we want to raise the status of our family by burning a widow and not by dint of our virtues.'

Worst of all is a third mentality. This is the mentality of looking down upon the entire race of women by accusing them of being characterless, weak and useless and susceptible to enticement by nature and, as such, they need to be kept under control whether they are in the house of their father or in the house of their husband. When her husband having full control over her dies, she too is burned on his pyre because she is useless and no more wanted by the society. If she remains alive thereafter, she will bring a bad name to the family. This horrible mentality is working behind this custom and Roop Kanwar became victim of this mentality on 4th September.

Now we are having a discussion over it. The people are saying different things. Not all the facts are known. The inquiry is going on. Conflicting reports are coming in. Some people have said that she committed *Sati* voluntarily. Just now, an Hon. Member has said that there are two types of *Sati*—voluntary and involuntary. What are they talking? This is like making mockery of women-kind particularly the helplessness of Indian womenfolk. Do you know that there is nothing like 'woman's will' in the conventional Indian society? Her will has no importance in regard to the type of education she is to receive. Her desire has no importance in so far as her going out of and returning to house is concerned. Even in the matter of choice of clothes she is to wear, her desire has no importance.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY (Midnapore) : She has been converted into a *Devī*.

...(Interruptions)

SHRIMATI MEIRA KUMAR : Her will carries no weight in the matter of choosing a life partner. Her desire has no importance in any matter in her life, big or small. But if following the death of her husband she says that she too be burned with her husband, her desire carries all importance. At that time, it is said that it is her sweet will and she be burned. Her will is

accepted at once and she is burned before the police gets the news. At that time, her will assumes all the importance and it is said that she committed *Sati* voluntarily. It is a matter of great regret that the persons who support such a view are educated people and belong to the intelligentsia and they are responsible persons in the society. The editor of the "*Jansatta*" newspaper has written that that girl committed *Sati* of her own free will. What is the meaning of this "free will"? At the time of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a journal '*Samacher Chandrika*, was published in 1820-30. It was a pro-*Sati* journal. The same role is being played by the "*Jansatta*" now and my predecessor speaker is congratulating him for such a role.

Some persons have said that she committed *Sati* out of excessive emotion. What is this emotion? When a near relative of some one dies, he or she has a feeling of detachment from worldly pleasures at the cremation ground. Everyone has such a feeling at that time. If a mother loses her child, then the mother feels that she should also die. When someone loses his or her near relative, he or she also feels that he or she should also die. Is he or she also killed due to such a feeling expressed by them? No, they are encouraged to live and the feeling of detachment is removed from their minds. But in this particular case dangerous selfish interests were at work and there was an abominable tendency which was at work and that is why, that girl was burnt alive. The people wanted to usurp her wealth. They were afraid that she might be a blot on their family and they also doubted her character.

I would like to ask one more question. Our society is too religious and a fanatic society. Majority of people in India are religious minded and custom of '*Sati*' is being encouraged in the name of religion. It is a matter of great surprise and it is very unfortunate that all the religious leaders and religious scholars are silent on this issue. Why do they not say that it does not have any roots in the religion. If anybody has given any statement, then it is the Shankaracharya of Puri. He has poisoned the entire atmosphere by issuing his statement. He has said that committing of *Sati* is in accordance with the religion. That means that those of our mothers, sisters and daughters who have not committed *Sati* or burnt themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands have

committed a sin. The Shankaracharya of Puri has insulted all the Indian women collectively. He should openly apologise to all Indian women. In his own family there are women who did not burn themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands and they according to him, have also committed irreligious acts. Does the Shankaracharya of Puri belong to an irreligious family? He is talking of which religion? Three mothers of Lord Rama did not commit *Sati*. Mandodari did not commit *Sati*. The wife of Bali did not commit *Sati*. During the period of Mahabharata no women committed *Sati*. Kunti, Madri, Uttara did not commit *Sati*. In Hindu mythology there are Panch Kanyas who are considered *Satis* but they did not commit *Sati* after the death of their respective husbands. They are talking about which religion?

You may take all "*Vedas*". The Atharvaveda has been referred to here. There is mention of re-marriage in the Atharvaveda. You may take all the Vedas, Upanishadas, all the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Gita or all the main religious books of Hindu religion. I would challenge Shankaracharyas and all the religious leaders to mention even a single *Shloka* in favour of *Sati* and if they are unable to refer to such a *shloka*, then they should start making statements against the custom of *Sati* from today onwards. It is a matter of pleasure that there is nothing in favour of *Sati* in our religious books. But I would like to say here that even if religious books had been full of pages in support of *Sati*, even then on humanitarian grounds and on the grounds of justice, human dignity and the provisions of our Constitution, we would have demanded that the custom of *Sati* be done away with immediately. Does it make any difference that Roop Kunwar was unmarried or married or a widow. She was simply a girl and a human being and at the tender age of 18 years, she was burnt alive with all her dreams and ambitions.

We talk of human rights and human dignity in the world and when such type of incidents take place in our own country and when such a huge crowd gathers in support of that incident and responsible persons make statements in its support does it not lower the prestige of our country in the world? But these persons including politicians who are supporting the custom of *Sati*,

are not concerned with the prestige of the country at all. I would like to reiterate with full authority that these are the elements, which had sided with the Britishers during the freedom struggle and had not shown even the slightest hesitation in selling our motherland, how could they feel ashamed of burning alive their own mothers and sisters ?

I would like to say one more thing that many persons are supporting the custom of *Sati* out of greed, inducement, or fear and many persons who are not supporting it openly are silent either due to some fear or due to some inducement. I would like to urge such persons sitting on the fence that they should not suppress the voice of their conscience. They should listen to the voice of their conscience and rise above party politics. I would also like to submit to the intelligentsia that it should act after rising above all prejudices. I would also like to submit to the religious leaders that they should rise above the old customs and listen to the voice of humanity and should unite in its favour. This is my demand to all. The incident which happened the other day in Rajasthan is a matter of great regret. You might have read in newspapers that when the Bill was being passed there yesterday, then many M.L.As opposed that Bill but they perhaps forgot the fact that they are committed to uphold the Constitution. The directive principle 1 (A) of the Constitution says that we should renounce practice derogatory to the dignity of woman. They have even forgotten the Constitution. They are either too much horrified or under great inducement. I would like to urge them to abide by the Constitution at least. They should remember the great responsibility which has been imposed on them.

Some people say that she committed *Sati* of his own free will. I would like to submit to them that the life of the widow in the society is so torturous and so full of troubles that death is a sweet alternative to a life full of torture. Therefore, we have to think to provide rights and a life of dignity to the widow who has not burnt herself with the dead body of her husband and who is insulted at each and every step throughout her life.

In the end, I would like to welcome the Bill which was brought forward by Rajasthan Government in the Assembly and was passed.

I would also like to welcome the decision of the Hon. Prime Minister to bring forward anti *Sati* Bill in the House. I am of the view that the word '*Sati*' should be properly defined in that Bill and committing of '*Sati*' should be declared a serious crime. There should be a provision for most stringent punishment to those persons who abet *Sati* or participate in its glorification. All sorts of activities like building of temples, writing of articles, issuing of statements, holding of meetings and rallies, etc. glorifying the custom of *Sati* should be banned and stringent punishment should be prescribed for all those connected with the crime of *Sati*. There are still 12 years to enter the 21st century i.e. the new era of our civilisation. It should be our endeavour to wipe out blot on the face of our country before we enter the new era.

SHRI BALKAVI BAI RAGI (Mandsaur) :

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank all those Hon. Members through you who have raised this issue. I am very thankful to sister Meira also. Her speech was full of compassion and sensitivity about womanhood. The dignity of man was being reflected by her. There are two aspects of this issue. While making use of this forum of Lok Sabha, we can either enmesh ourselves in politics or rise above politics. I would, however, not like to misuse this forum hoping that the whole House will unanimously express its opinion on this issue which is full of compassion so that the country come to know that we are talking here about something which relates to a basic human emotion. Mr. Chairman, Sir, I will go into the Deorala incident later. I will try to take little time. But I would like to say as Hon. Shrimati Meira Kumar has said that the five Maha Satis mentioned the *Hindu shastras* never sacrificed themselves on the funeral pyre of their husband (*Interruptions*)

They never immolated themselves on the pyres of their husbands. I want to submit that the *Shastras* in which we have faith, have never misled us. I can take the name of thousands of our *Shastras* and also names of thousands of our saints and sages and quote those stories and songs which eulogise *Sati*. Anusuya, Savitri, Tara and Mandodari but none of them immolated themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands. But since this practice has started in this country it has

produced very bad results. I want to remind the Hon. Members that even today when a daughter is born in the family of the poor it is said that the goddess Lakshmi has entered our house. She is not disrespected. But Hon. Madam Chairman, when a daughter is born in a palace as we have both seen and read, she is killed so as to escape the burden of bringing her up. A poor man is able to bring her up but the rich wants to kill her. And if she happens to survive efforts are made to burn her alive. Such evil practices are garbed in religion. I do not want to specify any community in this respect.

In Rajasthan there are temples of 48 *Satis* whereas their number in this vast country is less than 100. But I will surely say that the great men of this country like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati, Subramaniam Bharati and others have all opposed this evil custom. No one has welcomed it. Are we the inheritors of these great men or of these people who are acting like brutes or inciting others to indulge in barbarism. I can definitely say with holding my head high that we are the followers of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and not of these lunatics who can burn a young girl alive.

Madam Chairman. I know that Rajasthan is our neighbouring State and we are affected by whatever happens there. I want to tell you about the report of the people who saw that incident. There was a procession of two and a half or three thousand people. I want to inform the House that I deny this basic fact this persons commit Sati of their free will. There is no question of free will. It is decided by a few decrepit and evil intentioned members of the family whether the widow is to be kept alive or not. Before burning the widow on her husband's funeral pyre she is drugged and intoxicated. She is made to drink opium mixed in some liquid and then drums are beaten loudly. Coconuts are strewn around her Madam Chairman, she becomes unconscious immediately and thus the question of free will does not arise. She becomes senseless. She is not able to move with the procession, she staggers but she is dragged along. This is what happened in Deorala. There are two reports about Roop Kanwar. One is that she was made to take opium and the other is that she was administered an injection by a

Doctor to make her unconscious. She was not in senses to express her willingness. It is being investigated and a report is awaited. It is said that she hid herself in a cattle shed and protested that she did not want to die. But people were raising slogans so loudly that her cries could not be heard. In order to ensure that her voice is not heard and she gets burnt quickly, coconuts and *ghee* are put on her and the whole atmosphere resounds with slogans glorifying her. Those who cannot take care of her while she is alive, construct temples after her death. This is how situations are created and they are held with pride. Journalists are now coming back and I want to congratulate Shrimati Manimala for her report about the incident. She said that girl was shouting *Papa, Papa*, and was trying to get out of the pyre but she was not allowed to get out and that Roop Kanwar was burnt alive. Just see, who was asked to list the funeral pyre? It was lit by a minor boy of 15 or 16 years to avoid any charge being levelled against any major one. Her father-in-law says that he was not in his senses. The person who was able to bring his son's body from Sikar says that he had lost his senses due to grief. I want to ask the Government that it should be investigated thoroughly and whoever is found guilty should be hanged. It would be a great favour. I do not want to politicise this issue. I do not want to involve any Government... (*Interruptions*)

[*English*]

DR. DATTA SAMANT (Bombay South Central): Madam, Rajasthan Government has withdrawn the bail. There is no objection for the bail in the High Court.

(*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI: Madam Chairman, I have not yet resumed my seat. I want that Shri Dattaji should say whatever he wants to say, when his turn comes...

(*Interruptions*)

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: He is in not yielding.

DR. DATTA SAMANT: You are talking something, but what is your Government doing?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Dr. Datta Samant, he is not yielding. Why do you interrupt him.

(Interruptions)

(Translation)

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI : The time is limited and I will not take much time of this august House. I want to say that a Minister of the stature of Hon. Shri Narasmiha Rao is taking down notes in the House. I want to submit that whatever punishment may be provided but we must make some law in this respect. We will be grateful to him. This will not only seal the lips of people like Datta Samant, Madhu Dandavate, Balkavi Bairagi and others but also the rest of the people of this country will also come to their senses. It should also be provided in the election rules that anyone supporting *Sati* shall be disqualified on the ground of indulging in a corrupt practice. The Minister should do us this favour.

Madam Chairman, in Rajasthan it has become a fashion to court arrest in support of *Sati*. The people are willingly getting themselves arrested on this charge. They think if they would not do so, they would not get votes in elections. I want to request that such persons who are indulging in such acts, should be expelled from their respective parties regardless of whether they belong to the ruling party or the opposition. Today lakhs of people there are moving in procession carrying bare swords in their hands in support of this custom of *Sati*. They are saying that if the practice of *Sati* is discontinued, it would be against their religion. It does not matter if this Government falls thousands of times but if we are not able to protect our widows we will not be able to show our faces to our mothers and sisters. I want to say it very politely that a man is more valuable than Government and the dignity of woman is the most important thing in this country. I want to congratulate Rajasthan Government for the new law they have framed. But I want to appeal to the responsible cabinet of the Central Government, the Hon. Prime Minister and those who are listening to me that the entire legislation on this subject has been discussed thoroughly during the last one and a half months in the Rajasthan Assembly and its shortcomings have been brought to light and

discussed. I want to submit that Central Government should now frame a law after plugging all these loopholes and enforce it throughout the country. We are here today, we may be somewhere else tomorrow but in order to uphold the Constitution and in order to save this country, a law must be made and enforced in this country so that the people would remember us all as they remember Raja Ram Mohan Roy. I want to submit that you should frame a strict law after plugging all loopholes. We should also deliberate as to what to do with the old temples. Who has been arrested and on which charge should now be forgotten. I want to say that if any widow is burnt alive, it is a matter of shame for all of us irrespective of party affiliations. We may stand under any flag but we will have to think it hundred times as to whether we are fit to stand under that flag. I don't want to talk of the role played by the Press in this regard. This issue came to light when politics was brought into it. Till then, there was nothing. Now it has become a fashion of the modern time that the people seek tickets on this ground Without naming anybody, I would like to submit to my senior brother, Prof. Madhu Dandavateji that while seeking tickets of a party the members of the party would give in writing in their bio-data that they had been arrested in a *Sati*-case and therefore, they should be given the tickets. At that time, you should have the courage to deny them tickets of your party and you should tell them that it does not make any difference whether one was arrested or not. ... (Interruptions) Whosoever he or she might be, I am saying this for all.

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL VYAS (Bhilwara) : Bairagiji, they do not have the courage to expell Kalvi from the party ... (Interruptions)

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI : Madam Chairman, I would like to underline the statement of Vyasji. I did not want to mention his name. He has mentioned his name.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE (Rajapur) : I would condemn him even mentioning his name.

SHRI BALKAGI BAIRAGI : I would be very happy.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
MINISTRY OF WELFARE (DR.
RAJENDRA KUMARI BAJPAI): Expell
him from the party.

[English]

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : I will
do it if you have faith in my conscience.

DR. RAJENDRA KUMARI BAJPAI :
Thank you.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Had
I been the President of the Party, I would
have demanded his expulsion from the
party.

[Translation]

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI : Madam
Chairman, I would like to submit that the
law in this regard should be made more and
more stringent. It has to be considered very
seriously as to how the old Sati temples be
used and how the country make use of these
temples, otherwise it would be yet another
issue which may create disturbances in the
country.

A great scholar, the Shankaracharya of
Puri has said that it is in accordance with
the religion. Sister Meira has already spoken
a lot about it and I do not want to say any-
thing more about it, but I would like to go
into its background. At one time, the
Shankaracharya of Puri was the Head of
Sanskrit Department in Jaipur University,
later he became Shankaracharya. It appears
to me that he does not consider Hindu
religion of the entire country as his religion,
but he considers the religion of the Jaipur
streets and Deorala streets as his own
religion. If he wants to indulge in politics, he
should then change his own clothes and he is
most welcome to enter into politics and we
are ready to face him. He should change his
clothes, renounce his Danda and Kamandala
and he may come back to Jaipur after
taking holy water of the Ganga. He may
come to Deorala. Momasa, Mandasaur
or Bombay, we are ready to face him
at political level, but by wearing holy
clothes of a religion it does not behave him
to provide protection to an evil practice and
the big persons like him in the society should
not indulge in such things.

With these words, I express my thanks
to you for providing me an opportunity to
speak and I would like to submit to all that
let us resolve today that in future no widow
would be allowed to meet the fate of Roop
Kunwar and no widow would be allowed to
be burnt alive. We wish that Roop Kunwar
be the last widow to die in this manner.

[English]

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE (Raja-
pur) : Madam Chairman, there are moments
in the life of a Parliament when the entire
House need speak with one voice and with-
out any discordant note. You may recall
that in this very hall of the Central parlia-
ment, years back when nation became free,
late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said on that
occasion that "moment comes—it comes but
rare—in history when the soul of a nation,
long suppressed, finds utterance". I am sure,
all those women who have been suppressed
for generations will find utterance in the
debate of this House because to the last man,
this House shall stand together forgetting the
partisan differences because there will be
enough moments in which we can criticise
the Government. I shall not do that. And
if I criticise, I shall only criticise my own
colleagues whom I find guilty of a great
crime as far as the problem of Rajasthan is
concerned.

The incident of *Sati* at Deorala village
in Rajasthan is not an isolated instance. It
is the perverse reflection and manifestation
of the obscurantist mind in the country which
is sought to be cultivated by some elements.
Roop Kanwar's death on the funeral pyre is
a symbol of the mutilated dignity of Indian
women and the purpose of this debate will
be how to restore the mutilated dignity of
Indian women, setting aside all the past
traditions and the legal framework. On the
funeral pyre lies not only Roop Kanwar
but even the soul of Raja Ram Mohan Roy
lies buried below the ashes of Roop Kanwar.
Everything that Raja Ram Mohan Roy did,
is sought to be destroyed by the religious
obscurantism in this country. *Sati* is born
not out of the funeral pyre but *Sati* is born
out of the perverted obscurantist mind of the
people, and it is that mind that has to be
changed.

There are controversies regarding various features of the *Sati* practice. There is no sanction of religion behind *Sati*. But I shall go a step ahead of Meira Kumar Ji and I shall go to the extent of saying that even if some religious scriptures permit and sanction the creation of *Sati* in the country and mutilate the dignity of womanhood, I shall have no hesitation in burning to ashes such holy scriptures which will mutilate the dignity and the prestige of Indian womanhood. This is a practice violative of article 21. Article 21 very clearly says: "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law" No procedure established by law allows the women's dignity to be destroyed. On the contrary, the Fundamental Rights adumbrated in the Constitution, and the Directive Principles of the State Policy, demand that women must enjoy the Right to Equality. There is also the commercial aspect of the problem. Many delegations have gone there, women streams have gone there. They have seen what is happening. It is the economic and financial greed of the relatives and the community as a whole and of the village as a whole that also sometimes is responsible for the glorification of the *Sati*. Madam, you just go and see the site of the place where the monument is sought to be erected. Large number of shops and hoteliers are coming up as if a great samphire of pilgrims is to arrive, and they are making money.

I may be, permitted to say that according to the property rights belonging to the Hindu family, if a man dies without a son or a daughter, and if his wife also dies, the property of the man who dies goes to the nearest kith and kin. This is also a dimension that is taken note of. We have people in this country who respect property more than the human life. I am one among those who, right from the very beginning, pleaded that the Right to Property in Chapter IV on Fundamental Rights should be removed from there and should be made an ordinary legal right. It need not be treated on par with Fundamental Rights. I am glad that with the total unanimity in the House, the Constitution stands amended and right to property in this country no more empowers the right to freedom, right to sanctity of the human life, altogether that suppression has taken place and there is a question whether '*Sati*' is voluntary or involuntary. I would like to warn the House even in what is described

sometime back by some people as voluntary. What is voluntary '*Sati*' and what is involuntary '*Sati*'? It is a social compunction of a widow which makes it necessary for her to surrender her life on the life on the funeral pyre of her husband. I will come to this point afterwards.

15.55 hrs.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the chair*]

Now, if you look at the historical perspective of the experiment of '*Sati*', you will find that even in the old civilisations, the oldest civilisations, there had been certain arrangement of such practice. Even there will be groups in the Greek civilisation, these are barbarous groups. Even the position of women suffered immensely following Manu's formulation of Hindu law. I do not want to destroy anybody's religious susceptibility. But I am one among those who in my election meeting I have said that those scriptures of Manu in which it is said that any '*Shudra*' listens to the recitation of '*Vedas*', in that case molten led must be poured into his ears, if you don't give me vote I want to publicly proclaim that I am prepared to burn such scriptures of Manu. I said I did not mind if I lose my deposit in the election. I am prepared to burn those scriptures which actually permit molten led to be put into the ears of those '*shudras*', Harijans and Dalits who try to listen to the Vedas.

So, Sir, the same attitude of Manu's Hindu Law is towards women. Widow is treated as an inferior citizen. Widow is supposed to stay in the backyards of the big palatial buildings. She is supposed to take inferior food, she is supposed to move without chappals, she is not supposed to visit any religious temples, she is not supposed to attend any religious and social functions and when women is destined to that particular life, she feels life is a humiliation and she feels that the greatest gift to life is death. When she feels the greatest gift to life is death, in that case she won't hesitate to mount on the funeral pyre and other orthodox elements will push her to the pyre and try to kill her. That is what is happening. So, so far voluntary '*Sati*' is not at all voluntary because it is a compunction of the social situation that gives an impression that some women are going to the funeral pyre

with a voluntary attitude. But that is not voluntary attitude. Really speaking, it is an oppression and suppression of the entire community. Raja Ram Mohan Roy tried to campaign Against 'Sati'. It was unfortunate that apart from Raja Ram Mohan Roy not the big political leaders of this country, no matter whatever be complication, it was Lord William Bentinck who insisted that for moral civilisation, 'Sati' has no place but it is a curse and therefore Bengal Regulation of India was brought. When I went through all the documents I found that there was only Bengal Regulation. Then came Ordinance in Rajasthan which was meant only for Rajasthan. But there was no Central Legislation. We must have a Central Legislation and I am glad that the women delegation which met the Home Minister were assured that there would be a Central Legislation which has already been circulated among the Members. My only request to the Minister who is handling this portfolio, to take the constructive proposals and suggestions of the Opposition as well as the leading women organisations in the country so that they will have enough to say as far as this aspect is concerned. There is one more aspect and that is, along with the Central Legislation remember that so far at all-India level, which is the law that was utilised by the various State Governments and the Central Government?

They were utilising the Indian Penal Code Section 306 and Section 309. Section 306 talks about suicide and abetment to suicide and for that the punishment is prescribed. Sir, I have already introduced a Bill seeking an amendment to the Indian Penal Code in which I am insisting that in Section 306 we should say "suicide or resort to the practice of 'Sati' " and this explanation can be given. It will also be punishable for the same type of crime and therefore, the Indian Penal Code also should be modified.

16 00 hrs.

Sir, let the Parliament speak out with one voice. There must be a comprehensive Central legislation. I said that there are a number of research organisations devoted to social reform. They have already worked out a number of propositions. Let us see to it that we take their opinion into account

and try to see that they are helped as much as possible.

I would like to point out to the House that ill treatment of women has led to the Sati practice. I would like to point out to you, Sir, that in this country there were certain rulers and social reformers who tried their best to fight against the Sati system. During the Mughal empire it was Akbar who, through Ain-in-Akbari, tried to introduce a social reform by which he tried to oppose Sati. Even the daughter of Jodhpur King was actually saved by Akbar. These were the traditions in India.

Sir, I will give one illustration and I would like to tell the House through you that if tears in their eyes are yet not dried up, be prepared to shed the tears. Sir, here is an actual incident that had happened in Madhya Pradesh. And when you hear about those incidents, what happened in Rajasthan will completely go into background. Sir, in a village near Jodhpur in Madhya Pradesh one old, poor man died. He was ill for two years. His wife tried to put every ounce of her energy and the last farthing in her pocket to save her husband. Ultimately the husband died. And when the husband died, that lady found that there was not a farthing in her house for the funeral of her husband and she went to the villagers. She said, 'I have no money for the funeral rites of my husband. You please spend, and if you don't give me money, in that case vultures will devour my husband's body. I could not save him in his life time, let me save his dead body. Please arrange for the funeral. You will be surprised that callously the villagers told that old lady, 'For hundred years we had no Sati in our village. So, Madam, if you are prepared to become a Sati in this village, we shall spend on the funeral of your husband and we shall also spend on your funeral'. And you will be shocked to know that that old lady agreeing to that in order to see that the body of the husband is not devoured by vultures and dogs said, I am prepared to become a Sati. Burn the body of my husband and put me on the funeral pyre.' And when the police came to know about it, thanks to the Police Administration, they rushed to the spot, they saved that lady who wanted to be a Sati forcibly, and they finished the funeral of that particular husband. So, that is how

squarely the society is guided by the obscurantist ideas in this country, they try to do it.

Sir, the politicians sometimes are on the ores. I shall not talk of my political opponents, but I have a right to talk about my colleagues. Sir, I hang down my head with shame when one of my colleagues of the Janata Party and the Chairman of the Janata Party, Rajasthan Branch, had the temerity to praise and glorify the Sati system, and, Sir, I condemn him in no uncertain words, and I demand in my party that he should be thrown out of the party lock stock and barrel. There cannot be a place for Mr. Kalvi and Madhu Dandavate in the same Party if they have to stand on the liberal ideas for which Mahatma Gandhi lived and died. So, I have a right to criticise my Party. I do not want to criticise others. This is the politics that is going on. Why this is happening? This is because the narrow politician is not thinking of the next generation, he is not thinking about the next civilization, he is thinking about the next general election and so long as we have politicians who think only of the next election and not of the next generation and not of the next civilization, I tell you this problem is not going to be solved and if all the political parties irrespective of their political life take a firm attitude, no matter whoever may be a member of my party, if he takes such an obscurantist attitude, he has no place in the national party; other parties, caste parties may accommodate them. But there is no room for such men inside the national parties. That is the attitude that is to be there.

MR. SPEAKER : Absolutely right.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : I would like to make one concrete suggestion, i.e. Education and campaign against Sati. Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a great role in seeing that before the Bengal Regulation came into effect, the necessary climate was created by his mass campaign and mass education. That is to be carried on

Sir, what happened in Rajasthan? The conscience of many politicians was crushed under the dead weight of decadent tradition. The State Government's sensitivity to some extent was also paralysed for some time. The mass campaign against Sati and effective State intervention are needed. For that, the Central

intervention is a must. I am glad the Home Minister has already assured all the concerned that we are going in the direction. Already a draft has been prepared. I will repeat my suggestion that when that Central legislation comes before this House, take the constructive proposals and suggestions from all sections of the House and kindly take the suggestions from women's organisations. When that Central legislation comes before this House and at the end of the discussion, when you announce "Ayes" and "Noes"; I am sure, all of us with full throat and voice say "Ayes" in the House. So, that will be the cry of solidarity behind the women whose dignity is sought to be violated and behind them stand the entire House, in that perspective.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI PRABHAWATI GUPTA (Motihari) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of us are moved at the painful incident which is being discussed in the House today. On the one hand, we are on the threshold of 21st century and are raising slogan throughout the world for the women's liberation and upliftment and on the other hand, horrifying incidents like committing of *Sati* by Roop Kunwar of 18 years of age at Deorala in Rajasthan are taking place. The entire world has been stunned at this incident and it has moved our hearts. We are horrified at this incident and it has given a great mental shock to us. A girl aged eighteen years was forced to sit on a heap of wood.

16.07 hrs.

[SHRI SHARAD DIGHE *in the chair*]

Mr. Chairman. Sir, eighteen years is a very tender age. She was an innocent girl. As a matter of fact, she was forced to commit *Sati*. Through this august House, I would like to ask the Rajasthan Government that even after occurring of this incident on 4th of September, why did it not move into action and why did it remain inactive? At About 10 o'clock or 10.30 o'clock is the dead body of her husband was brought from the hospital and everything was over by 12.30 o'clock i.e. within 2 or 2.5 hours. The innocent girl burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. Our Government of Rajasthan

became active only when the High Court delivered this judgement that no *Sati* temple would be allowed to be constructed or no festival would be allowed to be held. But it is very painful that despite all these things, *chunri* festival was held with great pomp and show and approx. 2 or 2.5 lakh of people participated in it. If Rajasthan Government had desired, it would have prevented such an incident.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, the incidents of *Sati* have taken place earlier also in Rajasthan. At Deopura village of Sikar district, a person of 60 years of age died. When his wife got ready to commit *Sati* after taking the dead body of her husband in her lap, the local administration came to know of it and it took immediate action to stop that woman from committing *Sati*. I would like to praise the then local administration which took timely steps to save the life of that woman. At that time also, within 3 hours, a crowd of 20 000 people had gathered there and at the time of intervention by Police, there number had increased to 50,000. Shri Gupta ji was S.P. there he went there and acted in a very tactical manner. He delivered a speech there and said that he had come there to offer his prayers to *Sati Mata* and offer his coconut to her, but it has been provided in Hindu religion that fire should engulf the pyre of its own and therefore, we should wait till engulfs the pyre of its own. They waited till the evening, but the fire did not light up till evening. In the evening, he arrested all his relatives and told them that she was not going to commit *Sati* of her free will, because if a woman commits *Sati* of her free will, the fire should light up the pyre of its own. The crowd which had gathered there, gradually dispersed and some persons even said that women should not be allowed to commit *Sati*. In this way, a serious accident which was going to take place in 1984 was averted, because the Administration there was alert, vigilant and efficient. If the Administration here also had been alert and efficient, the present incident would have been averted. The local administration did not show any alertness. Whereas the place where this incident took place is not far off from the Police Station and the innocent girl was allowed to be burnt alive within two or two and a half hours.

During the Ramayana era, Sulochna wife of Meghnada had committed *Sati*.

Thereafter, the word 'Johar' came to be used in our history. The context was different at that time. Then women used to immolate themselves on receipt of the news about the killing of their husbands in a battle to protect themselves from the evil eye of the opponents and also to protect their chastity. This has been the history of Rajasthan :—

"Chittor champak hee raha lakhon
yaman Ali Ho Gaye,
Dharmarth Haldighati mein kitane
subhat bali ho gaye
Ham magn hein, un padmini si devion
ke shok mein."

That was totally a different matter. It belongs to an era when the women did not come out of their homes and spent their entire life in the four walls of their houses. A strong protest used to be made even at that time. At that time also, Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised a strong voice against it and Anti-Sati Act was enacted on 1st December, 1829. The people of that time denounced and rejected the practice of *Sati* and Anti-Sati law was passed at that time. Today we have to remember our foreign rulers in this painful atmosphere. There has been an old custom in Rajasthan that one or the other woman has been committing *Sati* off and on. When such painful incidents take place, that we have to make a reference to them.

Yesterday, a discussion was going on in Rajasthan Assembly on this issue. Prof. Madhu Dandavate is sitting here. On the one side were the Members belonging to his party and on the other side was Shri Kedar Nath Sharma, who opposed this practice vehemently. Whereas Mr. Bhati of Janta Party tore off the copy of the Bill and called it a black law. Whereas many other Members of B.J.P. vehemently opposed this custom and extended their co-operation in passing this Bill. We thank the Rajasthan Government for having passed it. It is our firm belief that this law would be implemented in letter and spirit and the fundamentalists and blind followers of religion would be dealt with firmly.

I would like to ask these fundamentalists and make them understand through this Sanskrit *Shloka* :

"*Sam Gachhadhwam Sam Vadadhwam,
Sam Wo Manansi Janataam*"

Nowhere is it written that the wife should burn herself by sitting on the funeral pyre of her husband. In Rig Veda it is written :

"Aarohan'u Janayo Yogtnye"

According to this if a woman is widowed, her younger brother-in-law should come in the night and marry her. Such things have been mentioned in our Vedas. 'Agre' has been distorted to 'Agnya'. In his translation of Vedas the great philosopher Maxmuller has said that superstition has reached such limits that the entire nation and the world has to hang its head in shame. This is a great challenge for us and for our society. It is a blot on our face. I hope that our Government which is a welfare Government and has done a lot for women under the able stewardship of Shri Rajiv Gandhi would enact a strict legislation.

So far as *Abhlmanyu* is concerned he was killed at the age of 16 years. But did *Uttara* commit *Sati* ? *Uttara* did not commit *Sati* and instead she was honoured. In no Veda or other scripture is it written that disrespect should be shown to a widow. It is the pious duty of our society to keep the widow in the house and show her due respect. I am sure that the Central Government will enact a law in this regard immediately, besides making the *Sati* Act of 1829, formulated by William Bentick, more stern. The proposed Act should make a provision, that those who glorify *Sati*, they would not be allowed to contest election. Dandavateji has said it rightly. But the president of the State Unit of Janata Party, Shri Rathor is participating in pro-*Sati* agitation and is raising slogans. If he is burnt or even if he gets minor burns on his fingers what will happen to him ? I am hopeful that the Government will bring forth a Bill in this regard during the current session. Provision should be made for special courts therein, so that no Roop Kanwar or a new bride is forced to commit *Sati*.

Lakhs of girls are committing *Sati* on the altar of dowry. Mothers-in-law burn them. But where was the mother-in-law of Roop Kanwar when she was burnt alive ? Women are to be blamed for the evil system of dowry to thrive. Where was Roop Kanwar's mother-in-law sleeping when this

heinous crime was being committed. We should strongly condemn her. I condemn this heinous crime. Whatever law is made, it should be implemented sternly. If anybody is burnt alive in this country, I condemn it and I feel that the entire House will unanimously support this Bill and condemn the *Sati* system.

[English]

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) : Sir, the *Sati* incident at Deorala village in Rajasthan has shaken the country to its very foundation of humane and civilized existence. This is a stunning proof that despite all our claims of modernity and taking the country to 21st century in actuality the forces of obscurantism and orthodoxy, are pulling this country backwards to medieval times. We understand that there cannot be anything more revolting than the cruel burning of the helpless widow. We all condemn this. But what is just beyond comprehension is this : that we find in our country the existence of such people who try to support this practice, who try to defend this act that has been committed and who come out in the streets and try to mobilise the people to defend their rights to kill women. We just cannot understand in what country and in which times we are living. It is a most shameful thing that is happening. In Deorala many people witnessed the burning. Many of them actively participated in this. Some of them were educated people. Then what happens to our education ? This clearly proves that education in our country has failed to inculcate scientific outlook among our people.

The incident in Deorala is the most symbolic reflection of the fact that secularism in our country has been weakened over the years. In a normal time, those people who took part in the burning of the women in Deorala, they would refrain from committing a murder, they would stop somebody from committing a suicide. But motivated by the commercial interest, by profit motives, they used religion and committed the most barbaric crime and the illiterate people those followed, they were blind by religion. But how is this that in our country, when we are approaching 21st century, religion is used to enact this kind of inhuman activity ? Here, I must say that in the days of very

recent past, the atmosphere of our country has been so vitiated that the fundamentalist and the reactionary forces, dare to do anything they like. They demand impunity in the name of religion. I want to remind this House about the debate during the Muslim Woman's Bill. At that time, we warned the Government not to enact that Bill. We said that this will encourage every sort of fundamentalism to raise their heads. But our opinion was nullified. What we heard at that time this Government, their leaders, they said, "We cannot interfere that thing which comes in the name of religious practice." Now these sword-wielding youth, they are saying, "do not interfere in our religious practice." Who is to pay for all this? If we had political will, if we are not blind, we can just set things right and motivate our people. But we must also search our soul. We have to understand the blunders we have committed. Today, a situation has come where these fundamentalists and the reactionary forces have adopted a very aggressive posture. I do not think that things have gone out of hand. We have still ability, we have still that resources to tackle that. For that, we require that kind of political determination that kind of will to make a campaign which should be participated in by all political parties.

Professor Dandavate has condemned Mr. Kalvi his own partyman who actively propagated the sati burning. I wish him all support that he will succeed in throwing him out from his party. But then, that is not the only question. There are many other things. What have they said? What action have you taken maybe, as a Central Government, as a ruling party, when the Rajasthan Government had failed to stop the 'Chunari Mahotsava' despite the High Court order? What action did the Government take to prevent it? Why have they failed? Now I can quote one press report from the 'Navbharat Times' of 19th September, which is in Hindi.

[Translation]

"The Chief Minister summoned the Cabinet yesterday-which was not termed as a formal Cabinet meeting-to discuss the 'Chunri Mahotsava Ceremony'. It is believed that most of the Cabinet

members were in favour of allowing the Chunri Ceremony."

[English]

Nobody contradicted this.

[Translation]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN.
(Barmer) : This is not true. We contradict it. This is wrong. Which newspaper is this?

[English]

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : I condemn Jansatta for their editorial.

(Interruptions)

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW (Dum Dum) : I will show you that even in West Bengal which is supposed to be one of the most progressive states, you had not taken any steps to stop glorifying Sati.

(Interruptions)

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE :
You search your soul.

(Interruptions)

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY :
Everybody has said that everyone will rise above politics. Now when I tried to tell the facts everybody is shouting on everybody else. What action did they take? They have to answer to this House and to the people. It is not a simple thing. In any civilised country that kind of Government would have been sucked. We are having a Government with hypocrites and fools in it.

What are their arguments? They said that many of them would participate in the Sati Mela. Glorification of Sati has been going on. Government put up stalls in the Melas. This is happening; If this is the situation, then only by law we cannot stop this. We require a popular campaign.

I am pinpointing my speech also on the role of the political leaders. Because if we do not set up examples, how will others follow? This kind of a situation was not there five years ago that somebody would

burn a widow, commit a murder and try to glorify it and say 'don't touch me'. This kind of degeneration and deterioration was not there.

I wanted very much before speaking here that the newly appointed general secretary of the Congress (I) Mr. Naresh Chandra Chaturvedi to be here; but he is not here...*(Interruption)*. . . I quote from the Times of India in which he has said :

"Rajasthan Congress leaders have not condemned the incident because they have to live and work in the State"

(Interruptions)

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN : We condemned it in toto.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : He had to issue a rejoinder; otherwise how will I know ? So, to work and live in Rajasthan, you don't speak out your mind and to rule India you spoke out your mind only three weeks later.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur) : The Prime Minister spoke three weeks later.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : You tell me whether anybody has countered it. Why did he not speak out his mind just after that incident, will you tell me ? Did not this create a revulsion in everybody's mind ? Now we are talking of so many big things.

Even now Mr. Chaturvedi is trying to say that it was a voluntary act. What is a voluntary act ? Roop Kanwar committed Sati voluntarily; What does it mean ?

More than 150 years ago-if I can quote from Raja Ram Mohan Roy-in a petition to the then Governor General of West Bengal in August 1818, he wrote :

"Your petitioners are fully aware from their own knowledge and from the authority of credible eye witness that cases have frequently occurred when women have been induced by the persuasions of their next heirs, interested in their destruction to burn themselves on the funeral piles of

their husbands, that others who have been induced by fear to retract a resolution, rashly expressed in the first moments of grief of burning with their deceased husbands, have been forced upon the pile and there bound down with ropes and pressed with bamboos until consumed with the flames, have been carried back by their relations and burnt to death. All these instances, your petitioners humbly submit, are murders according to every Sastra, as well as to the common sense of all nations."

Sir, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was not wrong. Who says it is a voluntary act ? Voluntary concept is a myth. What Mr. Balkavi Bairagi has said is correct as to how she was administered drug. She tried to escape; how so many people were there but nobody tried to help. What kind of inhuman situation it has become. It is religion or no religion, I do not know, but we believe in the religion of humanity and that should prevail in our country. We just cannot allow this kind of thing to happen any more in our country.

Sir, laws are there. A new law has been enacted in Rajasthan and we are going to enact one at the Centre. I do not know whether that will cover the Deorala incident or not but then we have the regular law which can take care of the Deorala people who have committed crime. They should be sincerely tried on charges of murder-murder of the most foul type. There should not be any laxity in the action of the Government.

Further, Sir, when the Bill is drafted one thing has to be kept in mind. That in any case of Sati-burning of a widow—those who are going to benefit property-wise they should be made the suspects and they should be tried and onus of proof should be on them that they have not committed the crime

Sir, I do not want to take much time of the House but this law that will come, that should be very fool-proof and it should be an all-India law. It should take care that no glorification of this barbaric crime in any manner whatsoever is permitted. Further let us take up a campaign. Only law would not do. Law is necessary but coupled with this the need is that we all take part in a campaign. We have so many other problems.

We have the fear of dis-memberment of our country by the conspiracy of the agencies of Imperialism but I keep it in the secondary position and would like to give this problem the primary position. With this seriousness we should take part in this debate and in the coming days we will take part in the campaign. With these words I conclude.

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW (Dum Dum) :

Sir, it is very unfortunate that when we are standing at the threshold of 21st century we have to discuss certain barbaric actions committed by certain people in Rajasthan. It is very unfortunate. I can understand and appreciate the anguish and anxiety expressed by our lady Member. This evil of the society was banned in 1829 at the instance of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal. History shows that even during the Muslim rule the Sultans of Delhi once tried to ban this heinous act of religious evil. There after Humayun also tried and thought of absolute prohibition of Sati. The great emperor Akbar made an attempt to prohibit this Sati. Then Jehangir followed it. Aurangzeb also tried. But ultimately it was Lord Bentick who totally banned it by legislation in 1829. But in 1987 in the month of September for the first time we have heard of such a barbaric act committed at Deorala village of Rajasthan.

Sir, we all condemn about this sort of barbaric action which is not only against the humanity but is also against all principles. I feel that only by legislation we cannot stop this sort of our practice. The proper education, proper propaganda and proper preaching in the society can really bring in an end to this sort of evil practice in the society. A young girl of 16 was forced to die. It has been glorified now. I request the Government to enact central Act. By that Act, any glorification of 'sati' should be stopped. It should be considered an offence. I hope then there will be no further repetition of this sort of tragic tales of young girls committing 'sati' in our country in future. In any such event-particularly in this case- the father-in-law and the mother-in-law of the girl should be punished. In future, if we are so unfortunate to face any such incident, a law should be enacted and serious action should be taken against not only the father-in-law but also against the mother-in-law of the victim. They should be given the maximum punishment. Forcing any young girl to commit 'sati' amounts to committing a murder under

section 302. Even if I assume that a girl voluntarily goes and sacrifices her life, that also is a crime under the Criminal Procedure Code as suicide is also a crime or offence under our criminal law.

Sir, another thing which calls for attention to bring an end to this evil system in our society is that we do not pay proper respect or proper rights to the women of our country. It is very sad and strange. Forget about the urban areas or metropolitan cities. Every Member knows about how the villagers differentiate between women and men. Time has come and this thing has to be stopped. Hundreds and thousands of widows of different States are still suffering in Hardwar, Brindaban and in Kashi. They are leading a wretched life in those places. They earn only Rs. 2 per day and they are exploited. Now the time has come. If we do not give them proper respect, if we cannot make these women understand that they are equal or are at the same footing with us, possibly in future we will not be in a position to remove all these evils from our society. Therefore, I request the Central Government that at the time of making any Central legislation, certain things have to be incorporated. The Government should at least consider those things. The definition of sati should be placed at par with suicide in the Indian Penal Code and it should be considered as an offence. Secondly, glorification of sati should be considered as a great offence which should also be treated under it.

Thirdly, in case if there is any such incident of sati, the Government should confiscate all land and property of that man against whom the complaint has been made. If anybody collects funds to glorify sati those funds should be confiscated by the Government.

Fourthly, Representation of Peoples Act should be amended to the effect that propaganda in the name of *sati* or to glorify *sati* in any election or election campaign, should be considered a corrupt practice. Only then, people cannot take political advantage out of *Sati*. Unless and until we give proper rights to our women in the society, these evils cannot be removed. Just now the Marxist friend was referring about the inability and incapacity of the State Government of Rajasthan in spite of the High Court order. Does the Marxist friend want the

Government to open fire before lakhs of people? That is what they want to be done by the State Government of Rajasthan. Only innocent people were misled by the so-called religious superstitious belief. They want to open fire on those lakhs of people who are living in that village. About those who are claiming themselves as champions of progressiveness, may I say what a publication dated the 11th November published in the heart of the city of Calcutta, where Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought against these evils, has said? Even today sati melas have held in Belghata to glorify sati on the 15th of this month, i.e., on Sunday. It is mentioned in this paper. There is no reason for the State Government to keep silent on this till today *(Interruptions)* .. Please make yourself more wise and get further information from the State. The progressive cannot stop them from holding melas at Belghata, at the heart of Calcutta on the 15th of this month.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : What is that? Will you please read it?

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW : I will read it, it is in Bengali.

"Kolkata te Sati Mandir, Sati Mahatya procharer mela. Rajasthaner taruni badhu Roop Kanwarer Sati hobar ghatanar par, gota desh jakhon ek-dike, protibader jhar utheche, tokhon khod Kolkata tei Sati ghatanar birudhhe meeting Choleche, tokhon Bele ghata anchale Sati mandire aagami 15 November Sati-melar anus-than hote choleche."

(Interruptions)

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : Translate it into English.

(In interruptions)

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW : Let them understand that they should not bring politics into it.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : The Chief Minister of West Bengal declared that there is not going to be any *mela*.

(Interruptions)

AN HON. MEMBER : That is the Congress (I) culture.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : It has a false implication.

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW : Sir, I would like to know has any attempt been made to stop these Sati Melas, to glorify the Sati? Let them deny this fact.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : The people of Calcutta, the Chief Minister of West Bengal has declared to stop this mela by all means. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW : Sir, they believe that they are above the Government. above the party.

(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Do not try to misuse the floor of the House.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : Do not try to mislead the House.

(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN : He was quoting from some Bengali newspaper and then you asked him to read it. Now, he has read it and it has come on record. If he has misled the House, whatever action you want you can take later on.

(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : You know about 'suggestio falsi' and 'Suppresso veri'? *(Interruptions)*

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW : Sir, I would like to tell my hon. friend that it is a matter of national interest. It is a question of humanity. For the sake of humanity, for the sake of the women of our great country, I would request my hon. friends, let us not bring politics in this matter. Let us find out some way to remove this social evil. Let us find out some way to solve this problem. Sir, I would like to conclude by quoting few lines from The Tagore poem and I will translate it in English :

"Oh Lord, why not give the women the freedom to decide and conquer her own further and destiny."

Sir, this eternal question is coming in everybody's mind. Give them the right which

is due to them. Give them proper respect. Sir, in our religion we call women as 'Mata', the mother. So, I would request that this social evil of Sati or for that matter any other such evil should be completely removed from our country. With this request, I conclude my speech.

[Translation]

SHRI YOGESHWAR PRASAD YOGESH (Chatra) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank you for providing me an opportunity to speak. I rise to support the subject under discussion which is against the *sati* system. Some Hon. Members have tried to make political capital out of the public opinion against the *sati* system. Those who have done so, they themselves are not against the *sati* system. I would like to tell them that soon after the Deorala incident, Margaret Alva strongly condemned it on the Television and discussed the strong measures that would be taken against it. The attitude adopted by the Government in this respect is not an ordinary one. All of us have to come together and wipe out this evil against mankind. Today when we are talking of entering the 21st century, I feel that this House is still in the 19th century because we are discussing *sati* system. There was no *sati* system in India nor is it prevalent today. When we come across such an incident today we think that it is a heinous crime. Nothing more can be said about it. As man used to feel happy by torturing other animals during the primitive age, similarly, even today incidents of far uglier nature take place which are a blot on the face of our society and are causing concern.

The Hon Prime Minister has said in this regard that it is a matter of shame for the entire nation. Even today women are burnt alive in the name of *sati*. No religion has ever preached it. This has been continuing either because of politics or because of economic frustration. Women have been given exploited through this practice and in order to hide this sin it has been given a holy name in order to mislead the people. The meaning of the word *sati* as defined in the holy scriptures is nowhere associated with burning of the widow on her husband's funeral pyre. There was no question of *sati* system during the Vedic period nor is it mentioned in the Ramayana or the Mahabharata. The word *sati* that has been men-

tioned in the Ramayana by Anusura does not mean the woman who burns herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Nor has she mentioned that *sati* should be glorified. What she means is different :

*Patl achhat par patirat urat,
Raurav narak kulpsat paral.*

That is if a wife commits adultery even when her husband is alive, she is committing a crime. But nowhere has it been mentioned that she should sacrifice her life and atone for her sins. Famous among the *satis* has been *sati Savitri*. But even she did not burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Through her devotion and power acquired penance she brought her husband back to life. The way *sati* has been described by *Anusuya* in the Ramayana it does not mean that the wife has to sacrifice herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. The meaning changed at the time when India was invaded and the Rajasthan women took the vow of *Johar* and burnt themselves in order to protect their chastity. But we feel that even this is improper. It cannot be justified in any way. Maharani Laxmi Bai was also widowed during that period but she turned out to be a great warrior and laid down her life for the motherland while fighting enemies. Had the Rajasthan women fought like Maharani Laxmi Bai and not committed *Johar*, the history of India would have been quite different. The women of India would not have suffered in the name of *Johar*. The evil system of *sati* took roots in the Indian soil because of *Johar*. This is a shameful incident. On the one hand we come across such incidents in Rajasthan and on the other we have tales of Meera's widowhood. People have not forgotten those tales even today. We will not forget her for many centuries to come. Meera considered herself *sati* of high order. Anusuyaji has defined thus :

*"Uttam ke bas asagun mahil,
Sapnehun aan par purush jug naahin".*

According to her, *sati* of exceptionally high order is one who believes that there is no other man in the world except her husband. Meera was an example of such a *sati* of exceptionally high order.

A luminous celibate saint who worshipped *Krishna* as a father once visited Vrindavan. When Meera expressed her desire to see that

saint, his disciples told Meera that *Gurudev* did not meet any woman. Thereupon Meera replied that in Vrindavan, there was only one man and that was her *Krishna Kanhaiya*; wherefrom that second man had come. When the disciples narrated this to the saint, he was so impressed that he came running to Meera and bowed his head on the feet of Meera. The reason was that Meera accepted *Krishna* as her husband and since the saint worshipped *Krishna* as his father, he considered Meera as his mother. So there had been such widows in our country who are, in fact, adorable. Our Vedas and Shastras have highly praised women thus :

*"Yatra nariyastu pujayanti ramante
tatra devata"*

It means that gods become happy where women are worshipped. But those who force a woman to sit on a burning pyre and amidst the noise of drums and bugles, manage to get her cries drowned in the din, should be condemned as much as possible for such a heinous act. We must pay our attention to it. According to the information which we have received about the heinous incident of Deorala, that the crying woman was not allowed to come out of the pyre. When she tried to jump out of the pyre she was again pushed on the pyre with the help of bamboo sticks. Such acts make the entire society to hang their heads in shame. This confronts us to a very serious question. Today a feeling of rage is there among all sections of the House against this incident. Therefore, the Government should be careful and should take stern action. The way this brutal act has been committed in Deorala, I demand that most stringent punishment should be meted out to the culprits. The custom of *sati* is continuing because we are not yet out of the narrow feelings. Some vested interests want to re-establish the wrong traditions by taking undue advantage of the sentiments of God-fearing people in the name of *sati* whether it is in Rajasthan or in Bengal. We shall have to expose their designs by the kick of our boot. In this modern age, when there is an Act even for the animals, known as Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, occurrence of such an incident is highly shameful. Although legislations are already there, yet the time has come when we shall have to implement them rigorously. I would suggest that all the members of a family in which an incident of *sati* takes place should

be held guilty and the whole of their property should be confiscated and acquired by the Government. Those who commit such a crime deserve most stringent punishment. We shall have to pass strict regulations to check such acts. The people who want to take undue advantage by provoking the sentiments of the fanatics should be socially boycotted so that such incidents do not recur in the country. In our scriptures, we come across a number of instances where the dignity of women has been glorified. For example :

*Yas grihe mata navti bharya cha
priyathadini
aranyam te na gautavayam yatha-
ranyam tatha griham.*

In a society where the woman has been given so much dignity, if some frustrated men continue to give their atrocities a new form and try to describe their acts as justified by taking the shelter of religion, where shall we had towards ? Therefore, I would suggest that we should remove the words like '*sati*' and '*Sati Pratha*' from our dictionary so that the future generations could not know that such heinous acts used to be committed in our country. The deeds of Tara, Mandodari and Kunti are adorable and all of them have been considered *sati* of exceptionally high order because they presented examples of high order before us. Even if they got remarried, they did not allow their dignity to be blemished. By their deeds, their dignity got enhanced amongst *satis*. When Bali was killed, Lord Rama told Tara :

*Prakat so tanu aage sawa,
Jeeva nitya kehli lagi tum rowa.*

If you have a desire for the body of your husband, then it is lying before you, but if you think that life is eternal, then it can never die. What for is this wailing then ? He did not advise her to commit *sati*. I would like to tell you about an incident of Mahatma Gandhi's time.

When Jamna Lal Bajaj passed away, his widow came to Gandhiji and told him that she wanted to commit *sati* on the pyre of her husband. Then Mahatma Gandhi told her that she should not commit suicide in the form of *sati*. If she really loved her husband she should resolve to complete his unfinished works otherwise her devotion to her husband would not be complete.

17.00 hrs.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, such prejudices and conservative things should not be allowed to happen. Such things are happening in our country, when we are on the threshold of the 21st century. These should never be encouraged.

I know the Hon Minister. He is a very capable man and I am sure he will enact such a law in the country which could help in wiping out this evil custom for ever.

[English]

SHRI K. R. NATARAJAN (Dindigul) : Mr. Chairman, Sir. On behalf of AIADMK, I would like to participate in the discussion on *sati*. This barbarous incident of *sati* took place on 4th September 1987 at Deorala in the State of Rajasthan. Roop Kanwar was a Matriculate. Her husband was a B.Sc., a graduate. Her father-in-law is a school-teacher. Unfortunately, being a school teacher, he did not come forward to avert the incident. On the contrary, he took a leading role in this *sati*. The *sati* took place in the presence of about 5,000 people. No one came forward to save the girl. She was put in the funeral pyre and the pyre was lit. Unfortunately, after 30 days, lakhs of people gathered on the spot, and they glorified the incident, saying that she was the 'Sati Mata'. This was reported in almost all the papers, and the press thus brought the message everywhere.

Almost all the leaders have condemned it as one man. Here, I would like to say one thing : Raja Ram Mohan Roy had fought against this pernicious evil in the 19th century. The then Governor-General abolished *sati* in Tamil Nadu. 'Thanthai Periyar' E. V. R. fought against this pernicious evil of superstitious beliefs. He became successful. These superstitious beliefs have vanished today there. Another 'Periyar' should emerge in the North, to fight against this pernicious evil of superstitious beliefs like *sati*. I hope that our Government will come forward with a comprehensive legislation, punishing those involved in *sati*.

Thank you.

[Translation]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN (Barmer) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, all the Hon.

Members who have spoken on *Sati* have described it as a social evil and have expressed their views to root it out.

The incident that took place in Deorala village in our Rajasthan hangs our heads in shame. The information about the Deorala incident was received through Dilwar and the Head Constable registered the F.I.R. The Head-Constable reached there by 2.30 in the afternoon the same day, but by then Shrimati Roop Kanwar was no more. When the Head-Constable reported the matter back, the S.H.O. accompanied by a Sub-Inspector reached the spot. The Deputy Superintendent of Police also reached there the same day. The Collector of Sikar District, who is also the District Magistrate, reached there on 5th accompanied by the Superintendent of Police. My submission is that when the Sub-Inspector and the Deputy Superintendent of Police did know about it and a case under Section 306 was registered, when the Collector and the Superintendent of Police both had reached there on the morning of 5th, the steps taken by them were not commendable because that was for carrying out investigations. Had they arrested the culprits then and there the episode would not have gone to this length. When a case was already registered under Section 306 and the S.P. had the indication that the case could be registered under Section 302, he could have arrested the culprits. The names of five accused were mentioned in the F.I.R. The incident was turned into a *Sati* case only because the Superintendent of Police and the District Magistrate who had reached there on 5th, did not arrest the culprits and subsequently they were able to hold the *chunri* ceremony. Had the police taken action right then, the present situation would not have arisen. The only action that the Government of Rajasthan has taken so far against the Superintendent of Police and the Collector is that they have only been transferred. My submission is that for such a serious matter, they should have been suspended. They failed to do their duty. They could have collected the ashes had they so desired. They did not do that and failed to collect evidence on the basis of which the culprits could have been arrested. As a result thereof, the situation reached such a pause that they were able to find out a way out to save themselves by observing *Chunari* ceremony. I am clearly of the view that though Rajasthan Government as well as the High Court had issued directions

regarding the *Chunari* ceremony which was attended by lakhs of people, yet it would have been a hazardous step had the police taken action at that time because there would have been more casualties on the police side too. Therefore, it would not have been a wise step. The steps taken by the police at the time of *Chunari* ceremony cannot be described as wrong.

Now the question that arises is that in such incidents, it is very essential to prove such cases. If the police fails to prove them, it carries a detrimental effect. In such a situation, the witnesses should be given protection.

The situation today is that cases filed against terrorists in Punjab are not successful because no one dares to give evidence against them. Although, chaulas have been presented but the accused doctor is absconding. I mean to say that the State Government should provide protection to those who have made statements under section 164 of the Cr. P.C. The Central Government can also come forward in this respect and provide necessary protection to them. If this case is not dealt with properly and the guilty persons are able to go scotfree it will adversely affect our party and Government.

I had brought forward a widow Pension Bill which was very comprehensive. I had said that if you wanted the widows to live in our society with dignity and respect then it was essential to make such provisions. You cannot provide them employment because you already have educated unemployed young men and women having degrees and diplomas to their credit. That is why suitable provisions should be made for payment of pension to widows. It will help in improving the economic condition of widows and they will be able to live honourably in society. If you want then you can provide for payment of pension to widows after making necessary amendments to that bill.

17.11 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the chair*]

At that time our Hon. Minister Shrimati Margaret Alva had stated that such widows should be admitted in hostels and *Nari Niketans*. We have seen the condition of the hostels and *Nari Niketans*. No one likes to live at these places I will reiterate that

pension should be paid to them for improving their economic condition. I had made many good propositions in the Widow Pension Bill. One provision was that any widow who is childless or whose son or she herself is employed somewhere, should not be granted any pension. You can also bring forward a Bill with similar provisions.

An environment should be created for their remarriage as well. It is a question of bringing about a social revolution and awakening the people in this regard. The law passed by Rajasthan Assembly in this regard is indeed laudable. I want that the Centre should also adopt that law. If there are some shortcomings in that law, necessary amendments should be made in consultation with the Opposition. This law should be uniformly applied in all parts of the country so that this evil practice is wiped out for ever and such incidents never take place again.

The Rajasthan Government has also taken this step to remove age bar for widows between 40 to 45 years of age in matters of employment. This provision is praiseworthy. Other State Governments should also follow this example. It should also be provided that any person who indulges in glorification of Sati shall be disqualified for contesting elections under the Representation of the People Act. Such a step will go a long way to abolish this custom of *Sati*. We must strive to bring about a social awareness to root out conservatism and fundamentalism in our country. We must also take steps to enlighten our people about the true meaning of religion.

Without knowing the true meaning of religion, the terrorists in Punjab are laying down their lives aimlessly. Their minds are poisoned and they are misled. In the case of the *Sati* custom also an atmosphere is created which influences the widow and she begins to believe that a widow has to lead a miserable life without any dignity, self-respect or grace and finding that there is no other way out she is then compelled to commit *Sati* or suicide. There is therefore need to create such a situation in which a widow is not compelled to accept this way out. In this connection, I would suggest that my Widow Pension Bill should be accepted by the Government and passed after making necessary amendments therein. We have to

create a conducive atmosphere so that women are able to live with dignity and self-respect.

[English]

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE (Panskura): Sir, before I participate in the debate proper, allow me to remove one disinformation which has been given to the House by one Hon. Member with regard to the West Bengal Government's attitude, etc. Sir, I would like to tell you here that on the 11th of November, a news appeared in a newspaper called 'Aajkal', which says that there are some temples organised by people who hail from Rajasthan and in one such temple, the *mela* is being contemplated to be held where this glorification of sati might take place.

This is the newspaper of 12th November, that is today. In yesterday's newspaper, that news has appeared. He should have been here and he should have had the political sagacity to quote the same newspaper of today which clearly says that the West Bengal Chief Minister has said that in this *mela*, if it is held, we will not allow any glorification of sati and he has instructed the Commissioner of Police of Calcutta to take necessary action. He has said clearly that we do not want to interfere in anybody's religious function, whether it is *mela*, but no glorification of *sati* in the name of religion will be allowed in any such *mela*, and if that is done, proper steps will be taken. Anybody would think that those who are really concerned about this evil practice, would put the whole truth in the House. For everybody's reference I would like to present, with your permission, the same paper to the Minister.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Not necessary.

SHRI G. M. BANATWALLA (Ponnani): You must read it in Bengali itself.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE: Honestly speaking, I have to hang my head in shame as an Indian woman but no less as an Indian citizen. I really never thought—I do not know why—that I should have self-criticism of myself, that this House will have to debate the glorification of *sati*, burning of a young widow in the name of *sati*, as

everybody has mentioned, after 150 years of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Since I have been in this House, I have taken part in many debates, as you know, on women rights. I was one of those who always appealed the people to rise above political partisanship on such questions.

Here today the debate has taken place where I would like to make a few observations on this question. Before that, really speaking, what is all this non-sensical debate about whether she was willing or she was forced. Who cannot understand that in a society that we are in where women have an inferior status, there this question is irrelevant though in this case we know from various sources that this girl was forced, this girl was drunk. Is it not a fact that in those societies, widows are made common properties of the other male members of the household? And it has happened several times that such innocent widows are violated by the family members and later on when they conceive, then it happens that the servant of the House was accused of being in collusion to produce the child. This is the atmosphere which we still have in this country. Do you not know that? In such a situation what this debate is about voluntary or involuntary? All such acts are involuntary basically; cannot be otherwise. That is the first action that all of us have to admit and proceed from there.

Really speaking, I am really feeling very much crushed. What has anguished me is not only the incident in Deorala, but the most distressing thing is—this has really taken this whole thing to a qualitatively new heights than any other debate we had earlier on women rights question—that there is an aggressive move for defending this heinous custom and for putting Indian women for perpetuating in this situation. I fully support Saifu when he says that this is a new dimension. And it is also true that this dimension tortured us during the Muslim Women's Bill. This is most disturbing. Anyone in this House having any conscience should answer why it is so. We cannot escape this. Let alone Deorala incident, today itself in Delhi, after thirteen years of married life, one woman has been killed for dowry. So, Sir, if that is A, this is Z—zenith of the same line. But what is new is this glorification and its defence in the name of religion. What is new is religious fundamentalism

showing its various facets endangering our country. This is not a question of women's right only, to my mind, as a citizen, it is a question of our national integrity, our national honour, our humanitarian existence as a nation. Therefore, this incident should raise us to a different height to fight it out.

Now, Sir, a question has been raised of rising above political partisanship. I started saying that in many debates—they are on record—whenever I have participated in such a discussion, I have always appealed to all our Hon. colleagues across the parties to join hands. I do the same even today. But in the name of political non-partisanship, I cannot dismiss the question of political responsibility because one cannot rise above partisan politics unless one discharges the supreme political responsibility towards our Constitution, towards humanism, towards the dignity of our women. With that end in view, I will raise a few questions. If that hurts the other friends on the opposite side, with folded hands I shall ask them to be patient and search their mind.

We Communists believe in criticism and self-criticism. Before I go in for anybody's criticism, I for myself would go in for a little self-criticism. Not on the Deorala's score but thinking back, when some two-three years back there was one incident of *Sati*, we did protest. But we thought that that was an isolated incident. It did not occur to me at least that this was not an isolated incident it was the forerunner of a very big thing. And there I criticised myself that we were not well aware that this is going to come. We could not put up a file. We did put up a file but that was not taken to its logical limit. So, I do criticise myself. At the same time, I would like humbly to state that as soon as the Deorala incident took place our party's General Secretaries themselves immediately came out with absolute condemnation of the event. That should also be put on record. But that does not absolve me from my self-criticism which I have offered here. But I would like to know this question that I find that on the 4th that Deorala incident took place and on the sixth itself three women's organisations of Rajasthan went to see the Rajasthan Chief Minister and wanted an interview with him so that this *Chunri* thing could be stopped. Those women's representatives said that Rajasthan Chief Minister dismissed

them within less than two minutes and then they had contacted the S. P. of Sikar. Is it any attitude, Sir, the responsible political attitude if I may ask? Will that be challenged as the political partisanship? There are many more things the latest one. I am really shocked to read in *Times of India* that yesterday in the Rajasthan Assembly. After this Ordinance was debated in the Assembly, this was carried with a voice vote. So the Ordinance was carried. But during the debate, there were two Divisions. Naturally there were some clauses. But the *Times of India* stated that apparently 34 MLAs had violated the whip at the time of the first Division in the House and 42 did so during the Second Division. It says that the Assembly had 115 Members and out of them the Opposition Members were 85 and the rest were Congressmen. Now, how did so many Members violate the whip? I tried to understand on what clauses there were Divisions in the Assembly. I could not know. The Rajasthan Assembly Speaker was here. I had asked him to tell me the position. But he could not tell me. But I understand that the clause was on the question of shifting the onus of responsibility of proof on the accused—the question of abatement to 'sati'. I implore this House to recall the debate here in this House on this very question of shifting the question of onus of the responsibility of proof. We the women voiced our opinion in the Select Committee and here also that the onus of responsibility of such social crimes as rape and dowry murder should shift on the accused and this House did agree with us ultimately. but not all our suggestions were taken. So, Sir, this is a very important question and the political responsibility is this that so many violated the whip. Further, the *Times of India* says that during the second Division, this is what happened. Shri Nares Chaturvedi was arriving at the Jaipur Airport and the MLAs went to receive him. Which is to be given priority, receiving Mr. Chaturvedi or being present in the Assembly when the Bill was being discussed in the Assembly?

Sir, standing here even at this late hour, we have some reservations about the Rajasthan Ordinance. We want to improve it. But whatever has been passed in the Assembly has this political will. Sir, with this anguish in mind, I would say with full of sadness that the nation owes explanation from our young Prime Minister. Why did

he not open his mouth after 20 days of this incident? Sir, I am a mother and I am here to voice my political feelings. He is a young man and everybody might have noted that his nature has been generally not that biting but politically 'Yes'. But really even then I feel that this is absolutely unbecoming of the leader of the House who has to give a lead to the country to fight against such things. It is not a matter of joke that this can be fought with a single political will and that must be really honest and above all petty political considerations. I am yet to bear a self-criticism from him on this score. In the beginning I said that he should have been present here because when such a thing is debated, the leader of the House should be present here. There is no use that one should go on crying at the top of his voice without any fight or result. I would like to ask whether there is any political response to this question. Prof. Madhu Dandavate professed something and I fully appreciate and I wish that we will be able to do something in this direction with all our might with all the Opposition parties getting together. I do not want to speak about the B. J. P. whose role is well-known. In the morning and in the day they give lecture and in the evening inside their house they practice another thing. This kind of political duplicity will not do much. They should know that this has direct relationship with the religious fundamentalism which is being pursued. Therefore, I would say that the question of political responsibility has to be shared squarely.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : I said the same thing at my house also.

SARIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : Yes, absolutely. As far as Dandavateji himself is concerned, I have nothing to say. He is all right. But in his Party there are very many people...*(Interruptions)*... The Ruling Party must really—it is not a question of biting, it is a question of band on heart; search your heart and see what you can do. What you are doing in Rajasthan is not only inadequate, it is a duplicity. It is not only a political failure, but a political duplicity. It will not carry anybody behind you if you really say this is religious fundamentalism. And I also said during the Muslim Women's Bill that capitulation started in the social sphere and this has gone forth. Therefore, Sir, on this question...

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Banatwalla is behind you.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : Yes, Banatwalla was here at that time itself.

SHRI G. M. BANATWALLA (Ponnani) : She cannot be consistently relevant. We know this.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : Absolutely consistently relevant.

(Interruptions)

SHRI G. M. BANATWALLA : The difficulty is, they cannot be consistently relevant. Everywhere politics is brought into to divide the nation.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : Sir, naturally we alone can be consistently relevant on this question because we can take a purely secular stand irrespective of all religious fundamentalist preachings. Religion is a private affair, but this fundamentalist preaching has a different connotation. That is really destroying our country. Can this sati episode be isolated from the communal riots that are taking place today? Can this sati episode be isolated from the extremism, I mean Khalistan extremism, that is raising its head today? Can this sati incident be isolated from many such other factors today which are threatening to destroy the very fabric of our national integration? To my mind it cannot, and that is the new height that this fight is calling for. In one way I am glad that our women's rights question has really opened your eyes where either you have to defend women's rights or go down in the history for being dismembering our country, for disintegrating our country. That is the challenge which we are facing. So, to face that challenge we have to take a specific stand in each sphere, in the women's rights sphere, in the political sphere, in the legislative sphere, in the education sphere and in the mass campaign sphere. From that end, Sir, I do remark that all political leaders of consequence will have to search their hearts and be self-critical and admit before the nation if they have failed on any count. This is one. Secondly, Sir, the Rajasthan Government will have to be dismissed on that score not because it is a Congress Government, that is not my contention, but the question is, the

way they have dealt with is axiomatic. Since many of my earlier speakers have already referred to it at length, I am not going in for substantive proof because that has been amply proved by the already published incident.

Then, Sir, all political parties will have to expel such activists or leaders who are taking part in defence of Sati wherever they are, and I fully support the contention that while giving nomination, they will have to be stopped and asked to get out. So, that will come during the time of nomination.

Then, Sir, the Central law should be definitely promulgated. Now, here is the question that if there was no law, how could the Rajasthan Government do anything. Already, of course, under Sections 306 and 309 of the I. P. C. it could have been dealt with. Even then, Sir, they cannot absolve themselves of their responsibility because this law was not there. The law of the land, the Constitution, is already there. They could have taken action if they so liked. Even then, Sir, on such an occasion a specific law again has to be enacted if even the Penal Code covers these things. Therefore, this law has to be Centrally administered. In the ordinance, one thing is very funny. About the sati glorification, the date is such that Deorala Mandir and Rs. 50 lakhs—I do not know how much—that this trust has amassed cannot be touched. It is very funny! The latest heinous incident has been kept under shade. It will not be touched. Only in future nobody can do it. Why? This must be covered. This is one of the challenges before the nation. This fund must be confiscated. That kind of thing cannot be allowed. Therefore, what law we may pass, that has to cover at least the latest incident. Otherwise, it is succumbing to the incident. A serious drive must be made for separation of religion from politics without which, this evil cannot be stopped. All the necessary steps for ending discrimination against women must be examined and re-examined and taken. Here, I would fully support Mr. V. C. Jain about widow's pension. But all the social laws which we have passed are not being implemented and violated. Women should be protected. Economically women's status must be changed, if we want to fight against it.

Last but not the least, with a self-critical attitude, the entire secular forces have

to start a frontal war against this kind of religious fundamentalism. That is the least we can do to avenge the death of Roop Kanwar who is now the epitome of the inferior status of womanhood that prevails in our country. It is really a galore of national shame which we have to undo in her memory, if we want to do anything. This should be taken in right earnest. With these words, I hope, everybody will take proper steps to see that such things do not recur.

PROF. N. G. RANGA (Guntur) : When is the Minister going to reply? It is question of time. Many of us would like to speak and support this motion.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are welcome.

SHRI G. M. BANAIWALLA : We are having this discussion under rule 193. Instead, we must have a motion, a resolution of the House to express our indignation and condemnation. What is this, only discussion and then reply? There should be a resolution to express our indignation and our condemnation and a demand for a comprehensive legislation since the demand comes from the entire nation. That must be the direction that should be taken instead of mere discussion under rule 193, expressing views by a few Members. Let there be a resolution.

[Translation]

SHRI KEYUR BHUSHAN (Raipur) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, although our number is small here but our Parliament is represented by every section and every religion of our country where an important discussion is going on which will change our way of thinking. What I mean to say is that human values are gradually declining in our country. This situation calls for our immediate attention. It seems that the situation today is like what existed two thousand years ago. Today we have talked much about our religious texts and religious people. My opinion is somewhat different from this. I think we are not following our religious texts in letter and spirit. We are interpreting those religious texts in our own way to serve our own ends. If this state of affairs continues we would never be able to root out evil practices, like *sati* from our society. This is a result of a vicious tendency. Therefore I want to present this as a challenge.

Why people have recognised or glorified it as a sacrifice by saying that religions sanction is behind it. The ashes of our sister/daughter who has been burnt alive, should open the eyes of our political and religious leaders. If so happens then our people will get deliverance and our country will make progress. But this is not happening. A lot of discussion is going on here. If we are able to make people appreciate and understand even one fourth of what we have discussed here then we can bring about a change in this situation. I want to say specially to the religious leaders and God fearing people that the respect which followers of Prophet Mohammad used to enjoy during the life time of the Prophet does not exist any longer. Roop Kanwar would not have met with such a miserable fate even if she was born during the times of Lord Rama. Whatever may be my view but no one has ever dared to go against the rights of human beings in the religious texts. Even during the days of Lord Rama Sita, the pious woman was subjected to a sever test to prove her chastity and was compelled to spend her life in exile. The position of woman is even worse now. I want to challenge it. Lord Buddha accepted Amrapali but no politician or religious leader can have this courage today. Our way of life has become so backward. You may look anywhere. During the life time of Mahatma Gandhi, the fervour with which we could raise the problem of Harijans, we cannot do so today. If we raise the question of their social rights, we will either be attacked or we will not have the courage to take such initiatives. We should follow the right path to bring about a change in the atmosphere which is prevalent in this country today. This is our backwardness and degradation. I want to challenge the opposition that irrespective of which party they belong they must strive to change this way of life. I want to say that today religious leaders and religious texts should not be followed any more, instead a new religion should be founded. Karl Marx is no more but the Communist Party of India and the communist opinion in the country should have the courage to voice its way of thinking. These religious texts are like opium. It is being said that religion is a personal affair but if it is followed in this way then many incidents like that of Roop Kanwar shall occur and we will not be able to do anything except shedding tears here. The entire way of thinking has to be radically

changed. In order to do so we will have to make a new history. We cannot follow only those traditions set by Lord Rama who made an innocent woman suffer extreme difficulties. We have to create a new Rama who can uphold woman's rights and women will also have to change their way of life. We will have to make a new history. The whole concept about *sati* will have to be changed. If the husband is licentious and the woman spends her entire life with him then she is considered a *sati*. If some woman keeps on living with an ailing husband, a leper husband or a husband who has venereal or some such other disease, then she is termed as '*sati*'. If even after knowing all these facts she goes on bearing all these sufferings, she is called '*sati*' but if she wants to leave such a husband, she is dubbed as bad woman, a woman who has brought a slur on the name of the family. We will have to change such a concept in this modern era.

Gandhiji too was of the same view that if the feelings and thinking of a wife and husband are at variance, they do not think on the same line, the husband commits atrocities and cruelties, the wife can leave such a husband and can marry again. Mohammad Saheb was also of the same view. But today our culture is heading towards something different. Here an orphan or a widow is given the scant respect and is rather humiliated. No one wants to take her name even. In such matters we want to stick to our old way of life but where we have some vested interest, we go into the background of the family, see the beauty of the girl and also seek matches from where we can get money and luxury items. At that time we forget all about our old way of life. That is why I say we all will have to change this concept of living. Our sisters will have to accept this challenge. Now the time has come when we should change the history written by men belonging to the affluent class in which there is no place for the poor and in which no respect is shown to women.

Come, let us write history according to the new era. So long as no change is brought about in the present age and we go on treading the beaten path and following the obsolete traditions, we will not be able to remove such stigmas. We will have to help women to progress and to get their rights. The women cannot march forward on the

basis of the history written by males or by following the old scriptures. The history of women will be created by Shrimati Meera Kumar who has cleared everything, who has opened our eyes has set an example before us by sacrificing everything. Her views are the views of today's woman.

Even after seeing all these things we are not waking up and we keep on reiterating the old and obscure values. It is a matter of serious concern for us. We will have to come forward rising above the party politics. Though we pass many resolutions but it seems that we do not have the courage to speak out openly. Who can challenge that our present laws are wrong, the reservation for Harijans and Scheduled Tribes is illegal? We form an immediate consensus on such matters. If people are not showing maturity on any matter, we will have to come forward with some new ideas. We have examples of Maitrayee and Gargi before us who had challenged big scholars to discuss the scriptures with them. Unless the same feelings arise again, unless our sisters become self-dependent and rise against the malfeasance, the country cannot progress and the world too cannot march forward. After all, on what basis do we raise an outcry for our old scriptures that have been the cause of our downfall. We will challenge them. Mrs. Meira will challenge them, our Harijans, tribals, backward communities will challenge them and will renounce them. We will have to resurrect Karl Marx in India who may say that the religious books have toxic effect like opium.

You may keep them in a museum. When we create our history, we will see at that time as to how our country used to be and how much progress we have made since then. That will be our history and we will measure our progress on that basis. We will not like to follow the old values; we will look into the present and march forward according to the present values and will shape the country accordingly. I would request that we should not forget the ashes of Roop Kanwar and should swear by it that we will change the world. We will have to come forward to change the rotten system. I can say with challenge that if that era had not dawned, we would not have seen those great men who created history. I request all of you to march forward unitedly to change the world and the rotten system that has crept in our society. Not only this, we will have to

change the thinking of the people. Every party, I am not talking of any one party, wants to achieve political recognition without hard work. If I am a trader, I do not want to progress on the basis of my trade, if I am a scholar, I do not want to progress on the basis of my knowledge and education and if I am a social worker, I do not want to progress on the basis of social work alone. I want to gain through politics, which has become an easy and cheap way. If a man is not able to fulfill his desire through one party, he joins another party and if he does not gain from that party also he joins another party. Somehow or the other he wants to march forward. In this way people have found an easy way of fulfilling their ambitions and to enhance their status. All the parties are trying to achieve their goal through this easy path. We do not have the courage to take up the challenge. We have left that path. We will have to follow our earlier path and will have to launch a crusade against communalism. We will have to fight without fear against casteism, obscurantism and atrocities on women and for this we all will have to come forward unitedly. As during our freedom struggle we had sunk our differences based on party and religion and had become one, we should march forward unitedly once again in this reconstruction of our nation. I want to assure you and there is no concealment and reservation about it, you have got the leadership—this I am not saying on personal basis, I am saying this on the basis of the experience of those who have influenced my life and he wants to take the country to 21st century and the country is fully prepared for it. He is ready to take the country to commanding heights and for that he is ready to sacrifice any thing like his mother. Therefore, I want to request you to come forward and do this work unitedly without taking into consideration the party affiliations and without any affectation.

In conclusion, I make you swear by the ashes of Roop Kanwar who has opened our eyes that her ashes should not go waste. This is my appeal to you.

SHRI RAM BHAGAT PASWAN (Roser): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the *sati* episode has been a very unfortunate incident due to which today, every one in the country is restless. It is a matter of regret that as science has been making long

strides, humanity has been stooping down with the same fast speed.

To know about 'Sati' system we will have to go into its depth. There is no religious sanction behind it. No religious book has given recognition to it, be it the Bible, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana or the Quran. What is it after all? There is selfishness behind it, greediness and a will to acquire more money are the reasons behind it. That is what we have been observing.

I was reading a book on Sati system in the Parliament Library. Till date no woman has committed sati on her own volition. The widow on her husband's death used to be brought forcibly at the gun point or at

the tip of the spear from her house, even if she was a mother or at any stage and was forced to commit sati. No compassion was shown to her even if her children were crying. She used to be burnt on fire.

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : You can continue tomorrow. The House stands adjourned to meet at 11 a.m. tomorrow.

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned till
Eleven of the Clock on Friday,
November 13, 1987/Kartika
22, 1909 (Saka).*