

A Much Needed Free Lunch for Indians Abandoned Hindu Widows

Written by Jasvinder Sehgal

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{audio}/images/podcast/Data_200811/India_Widows_FINAL_bhs_inggris_110820.mp3{/audio}

[Download](#) Vrindavan in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is called the ‘City of Widows’.

This is where upper-caste Hindu widows, disowned by their families, come to live.

They are considered a bad omen so are forced to shave their heads, wear white clothes and to sing hymns in temples to survive.

Since two and a half years a free lunch program has given them much needed relief.

Jasvinder Sehgal reports from Vrindavan.

Lunch is being served at a home for abandoned widows in Vrindavan.

Today's menu is rice, vegetables, dhal and Indian bread.

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Before they eat the women thank God for the meal.

They also thank “Akshaypatra” the non government group that provides the meal for free each day.

54 year old ‘Parvati’ has been eating her for the last year.

“The food is very good. God is keeping me alive.”

Until last year she had to sing religious hymns in the temples and sometimes even beg on the streets to feed herself.

Her daughter in law threw her out of her house after the death of her husband.

“A Daughter-in-law is not a blood relation so there is not the same connection. I was the master of my house but good times don’t last for ever. I am struggling but at least I have access to some food.”

There are a hundred and forty other widows here for lunch today. Most of them are more than 70 years old.

Suvyakta Narasimha Dasa is in charge of the free-lunch program in Vrindavan.

“We found that there are many widows who are in really pitiable condition in Vrindavan. And that is when we thought because our core area is feeding and we have been feeding so many children in Mathura District so why not feed some, these widows also. So that is we have recently taken up of feeding these widows also and every day we send them four items to eat. We provide this one time in a day, every day, 365 days a year. As time progresses we are

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confident that more people will come forward, more supporters will come forward and we will be able to feed all the widows of Vrindavan. ”

There are more than 30,000 widows and destitute women live in Vrindavan.

The National Commission for Women in its report to Supreme Court said that these widows are living in terrible conditions without any access to government-sponsored welfare schemes and proper medical facilities.

It's against the law to deprive widows of their right to inherit family property or wealth after the death of their husband.

But in reality the Hindu belief that they are bad omens is use as an excuse to disown them.

63 year old Janaki was kicked out of her home by her only son following the death of her husband.

With tears in her eyes, she tries to express herself.

“Due to prolong illness my husband passed away eight months ago. Now, I am all alone in this world. I have to depend on the others help to survive. If you feed me, I will live otherwise I have to leave for heaven.”

Half of the women living at the destitute centre come from well to do families.

The free lunch is over.

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It's just one meal a day and far from the help these elderly women need.