

## A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS OF SATI PRATHA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO LIVE

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### Abstract

*The practice of Sati, rooted in ancient Hindu traditions, has long been a contentious issue in Indian society, reflecting deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and gender-based violence. While initially perceived as an act of devotion, Sati became increasingly institutionalised, denying widows the choice to live independent lives. The prohibition of Sati marked a significant milestone in Indian history, with legislative reforms and social movements challenging entrenched customs and promoting women's rights; despite legal measures such as the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, challenges persist, as evidenced by recent incidents of coercion and pressure on women to perform Sati. However, efforts by Human Rights activists and women's movements have contributed to raising awareness and fostering consciousness against this heinous practice. Yet, the abolition of Sati did not eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Indian society. Undoubtedly, Legislative measures and initiatives promoting women's education and empowerment have made strides. However, challenges remain in addressing entrenched gender norms and ensuring equal opportunities for women. The fight for women's rights in India still continues. In this paper, the researchers have tried to focus on how the prohibition of Sati represents a significant milestone in Indian history, thereby symbolising the triumph of Human rights over entrenched traditions of oppression and subjugation. The researchers have also tried to focus on the question of how the legacy of Sati serves as a significant reminder of continued efforts to promote gender equality and foster a just and equitable society for all.*

**Keywords:** Sati, Patriarchy, Sati Abolition, Discrimination, Violence, Human Rights, Women Empowerment

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the annals of Indian history, the status and treatment of women have undergone significant transformation, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural, social, and legal factors. Amongst the most contentious and tragic practices associated with the subjugation of women is the evil practice of *Sati*, a custom in which widows immolated themselves on their husband's funeral pyre. While *Sati* has deep roots in Ancient Indian traditions, its prohibition under the law marked a pivotal movement in the struggle for women's rights and the evolution of Indian society.

*Sati*, derived from the Sanskrit word “*sat*,” meaning virtuous, was initially perceived as an act of devotion and fidelity. Its origins can be traced back to Hindu mythology, where it is sometimes portrayed as a voluntary act of sacrifice by virtuous wives. Over the period of time, however, *Sati* became increasingly institutionalised, particularly amongst the aristocracy, where it was often seen as a demonstration of a woman's commitment to her husband and as a means of preserving her honour.

In South Asian countries, including India, women have been frequently mistreated. Infanticide, child marriage, raping of women from low social classes, honour killings, dowry murders, and temple prostitution (*Devadasis*) have all been prevalent in the society since times immemorial<sup>1</sup>. In a country like India, women are considered to be the honour of the family. The practice of *Sati* was started as a means to protect their honour. The Indian society is a patriarchal society wherein men hold a dominant position. The practice of *Sati* was promoted by men to have control over women. As recorded in history, women in India were nothing more than tools for males to use. Men believed the ritual of *Sati* to be logical because, without the presence of men, women would not exist in society<sup>2</sup>.

Women were considered to be a burden on society<sup>3</sup>. They were not allowed to study or work outside their homes. They were denied access to all significant aspects of social and economic spheres. There was a prevalence of child marriage in society. Women did not have any freedom, and they were exploited in the patriarchal society. Even today, a wife is considered to be an extension of her spouse and is required to either stay chaste throughout her life or follow her

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhury, Sushil. “A Note On ‘Sati’ In Medieval India.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 26, 1964, pp. 75-83. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44140323>. Accessed 27 Aug. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Jarman, “*Sati: From Exotic Custom to Relativist Controversy*,” 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sophie M. Tharakan and Michael Tharakan, “Status of Women in India: A Historical Perspective,” *Social Scientist* 4, no. 4/5 (1975): 120.

husband until death in some cultures. The widower was permitted to remarry as often as he desired. However, the widow was not permitted to do so. Even in modern times, the practice of a widow remarriage is prohibited, and regardless of her age, it is difficult for her to remarry<sup>4</sup>. Violence against women, particularly sexual and gender-based violence, disproportionately affects these vulnerable groups. Such violence is either the outcome of the violent nature of males towards women or emanates from the perpetrator's feeling of entitlement, superiority, misogyny, or other attitudes of a like nature<sup>5</sup>.

Such type of violence resulted in various social practices that were not only discriminating against women but were also inhumane. One Such practice was the *Sati Pratha*. In the *Sati pratha* (tradition), a widow was burnt alive along with her dead husband. Hindus have long held *Sati* in high regard and few conservatives still do it in present times<sup>6</sup>. The practice of *Sati* has been a part of Indian society for ages, with its inception traced back to the time of the Gupta period. Over the passage of time, *Sati* became obligatory. Women who did not want to end their marriages and die in this way were forced to shave their heads, sleep on the ground, do hard labour work, wear a simple saree, take off their jewels, etc.<sup>7</sup> According to those who supported the *Sati* ritual, it elevated the widow to the status of a goddess, thereby recognising the power of women. Women have the chance to excel in society by performing *Sati*<sup>8</sup>. Given that her devotion would turn her into a *Sati* goddess, the question of whether or not *Sati* is a good wife remains. Does she merit veneration as a goddess? Or is the financial gain the only thing that matters for the family and the community?

In the present society, we talk about equality and equal rights of men and women. Various laws in India have been made to promote equality in the country and to stop the evil practices of the past. Modern India has seen significant changes in the status of women. She holds a social, economic, educational, political, and legal position that is at par with that of males in contemporary Indian society. *Sati*, child marriage, and the practice of shrine prostitution have somewhat diminished from their former levels of prevalence. The evolving status of women in the framework of society's transformation at a time when most people are still coming to terms

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<sup>4</sup> Pramila Dandvate; Ranjana Kumari and Jamila Verghese, *Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women in India*, New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1989

<sup>5</sup> Arya, Sunaina. "Theorising Gender in South Asia: Dalit Feminist Perspective." *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2020, pp. xi–xxiv. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48643560>. Accessed 29 Aug. 2023

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad, "Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio-Legal Examination," 6.

<sup>7</sup> Nehaluddin Ahmad, "Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio-Legal Examination," *Web J Curr Legal* 29, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Dell, David. "THE SATI THEME." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 12, no. 3/4, 1977, pp. 55–65. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40872154>. Accessed 29 Aug. 2023.

with changes happening in all areas of life. The old joint family structure is in trouble in the rapidly modernising Indian society, and there are more single women, including widows and divorcees in both urban and rural areas. Despite the fact that women in contemporary society are treated equally to males, they do not demand such rights. Women enjoy the same rights as men. However, these rights are only found in writing rather than in practice.

The evil practice of *Sati* was practised in Ancient India according to various existing religious traditions. The origin of *Sati* is attributed to the subordination of women in the patriarchal society. Besides, there were other factors that interacted with significant factors like bride trade, bride pricing, and the problem of inheritance. In the patriarchal society, the woman is expected to move to the house of the husband, and there, she is treated as an alien or a stranger and is debarred from having the claim of inheriting the property of the husband.

Women were considered commodities, and they had no role to play other than serving their husbands and giving birth to a son. After the death of the husband, the condition of the woman becomes miserable. Moreover, to protect the honour of the family, as argued in favour of the *Sati*, this practice was considered valid. Furthermore, the important reason for this practice could be that it demonstrated control over female sexuality. As in this practice, women had to die with their husbands, but there was no such rule for the males. Thus, it demonstrated the domination of males over females.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it became more acceptable in the patriarchal society to continue with this practice. It was considered that the main job of the woman was to serve her husband. In traditional religious texts, it was mentioned as *Stridharma*.

According to Hindu Law, *Stridharma* was the duty assigned to the woman and was considered her *Dharma*. Here, *Dharma* stands for a woman's duty, responsibility, or specifically moral responsibility. *Stridharma* for women is devotion to one's spouse; a woman's husband is compared to God; in fact, the Sanskrit word for "husband" (*Swami*) literally translates to "Lord and Master." The word "husband" (*Pati*) itself means both "husband" and "lord;" therefore, in a sense, he is her "lord." Once her spouse passes away, she continues to be devoted to him and passes away alongside him, which is known as *Sativarata*, or after-death devotion<sup>10</sup>. She is elevated to a higher plane by her devotion and perfection, elevating her to the status of a goddess. According to Hindu mythology, "the Wife has to live for her husband and remain chaste during

<sup>9</sup> Thapar Romila, "The past as present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History" Aleph book Company, 2014, pg. 278-292

<sup>10</sup> Narasimhan Sakuntala, *Sati- A Study of Widow Burning in India*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., Viking New Delhi, 1990

her lifetime”. Due to such beliefs, it was believed that it was the wife’s *Dharma* to live with her husband and to die along with him.

The Brahmanical books contain references to Sati’s evil practice. We have no concrete idea about the exact time and place of how, when, and where it started. This practice has a few references about it in historical and religious texts. The earliest hints of these rituals are found in the *Vedas*. The *Rigveda* mentions a practice similar to *Sati*, known as *Niyoga*. Thus, a different practice was mentioned in *Rigveda*, which is contrary to Sati’s practice. In this system, the widow lays down with the husband in the pyre, and the relative or the brother of the husband raises her from the pyre and marries her. The widow was allowed to marry her husband’s brother. Later on, various texts and societal acts changed this practice and started the practice of *Sati*, which was inhumane and subjugated women. It was predominantly practised by the upper-caste Hindus. Historical texts such as *Dharmashastras*, *Manusmriti*, etc., have given a very low status to women, and she was not given any individual identity. Thus, the practice of *Sati* was justified by the people using such arguments.

The other important reasons for the prevalence of the *Sati* practice could be illiteracy amongst women, suppression of women by male counterparts, and lack of freedom to work and earn. Thus, the women were dependent on someone even for their basic needs. After the death of the husband, the widow was considered a burden on the family as she did not contribute to the family income and was represented as a drain on the family’s income. She was not given any share of her husband’s property. There was no individuality of the women. She was considered as the personal property of the husband. It was a misfortune for her to become a widow, and she was treated as an ill omen. She was a dead weight on the in-law’s family. Without the husband, women were intolerable and were considered to be a burden on the family and society<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the practice of *Sati* started, and the sacrifice of women or widows was given the name of tradition and a deed for religious purposes.

The practice of *Sati* was continued for economic reasons as well. Talking about the incident of Roop Kanwar, the community started having an annual fair in the name of Roop Kanwar after she performed *Sati*. The proponents of *Sati* glorified that incident and celebrate it every year. These are the significant reasons why this evil practice was so prevalent in society.

## PROHIBITION OF SATI

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<sup>11</sup> Jethmalani, *Widows, Abandoned and Destitute Women*, ILHR Mar. 1991.

*Sati*, the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husband's funeral pyres, has long been a contentious issue in Indian society, steeped in tradition yet marred by controversy and condemnation. The prohibition of *Sati* stands as a significant milestone in Indian history, marking a decisive milestone towards the protection of women's rights and the rejection of archaic customs that perpetuated gender-based violence and inequality. Rooted in ancient Hindu scriptures and mythology, *Sati* was believed by some to be a noble act of self-sacrifice, symbolising a wife's unwavering devotion to her husband. However, over time, it became increasingly institutionalised and widespread, particularly amongst certain social classes and regions of India. Widows were often pressurised or coerced into committing *Sati* and denied the choice to live independent lives following their husbands' deaths. The practice of *Sati* drew widespread condemnation from various quarters, including social reformers, religious leaders, and colonial administrators. Critics argued that *Sati* was not only morally repugnant but also violated fundamental principles of human dignity and autonomy.

The *Sati* was initially criticised by an Arab traveller, Ibn Battuta, who, in his works, mentioned that *sati* was prevalent in Indian Society and was considered praiseworthy by the Hindus, and they have always made attempts to justify this practice.

*Sati* has been prevalent in society for a long time, but there is no simple explanation for its validity. There are different views on the emergence of this tradition, and very few references that too are scattered in various parts of the subcontinent. The *Sati* was also condemned in many societies and several important steps were taken in the past to prohibit the *Sati* practice.

The Delhi sultans initially did not interfere with local traditions, particularly the *Sati* practice. But later on, the state intervention to try and control the incidents of widow immolation began. Mohammed bin Tughlak was the first Muslim king to speak out against *Sati*, making it necessary to acquire a license before burning a widow. Humayun attempted to stop it permanently, but Hindus did not object. Akbar banned coercive *Sati* practice in his realm, stating that if a Hindu woman wanted to conduct *Sati*, she should be stopped, not coerced. Jahangir made abortion and *Sati* illegal, but some argue that the prohibition was only in writing and not rigorously enforced. Shah Jahan forbade women with children from practising *Sati* and permitted the schooling of widows' children. Aurangzeb outlawed *Sati* in his realm, but it was not completely eliminated. Many Muslim emperors attempted to save the widow through various methods, and many of those efforts were successful, saving numerous widows.

Moreover, British officials who governed India during the colonial era viewed *Sati* as a barbaric custom incompatible with their vision of modern civilisation. After the Mughal rulers, the Britishers made several attempts to ban *Sati*.<sup>12</sup> Britishers, along with influential Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, took various steps to prohibit *Sati* and to punish those who were found forcing the women to perform *Sati*. The movement to abolish *Sati* gained momentum in the early nineteenth century. It was fuelled by a growing chorus of voices demanding legislative action to end the practice. On 4 December 1829, Lord William Bentinck passed the *Sati Regulation Act*. The regulation was clear, concise and unequivocal in its condemnation of *Sati*, declaring it illegal and punishable by the criminal courts. The *Sati* Regulation not only criminalised the act of *Sati* but also imposed penalties on those who abetted or encouraged it, including family members, priests, zamindars, and bystanders. Additionally, the regulation empowered colonial authorities to intervene in cases where *Sati* was attempted or planned, thereby providing a legal framework for the protection of vulnerable widows.

Many social reformers, including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, have done considerably important work to introduce reforms in society. The abolition of *Sati* and the promotion of widow remarriage were made possible by the indefatigable efforts of such reformers. Roy has cited a few excerpts and verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* that argue against the *Sati* practice. Roy's most important and basic argument in support of the abolition of such inhumane acts was the doctrine of desired actions or *Niskama karma*, as mentioned in the *Gita*. He argued that the goal of heaven sought by an act of *sati* was an inferior end to that of salvation, to which women were fully entitled. Thus, he relied upon *Bhagavad Gita* to justify his arguments against *Sati*'s evil practice.<sup>13</sup>

The prohibition of *Sati* was met with mixed reactions in Indian society, with some communities resisting the colonial imposition of Western values and interference in traditional customs. However, the abolition of *Sati* was ultimately embraced as a progressive step towards gender equality and the promotion of women's rights. Subsequent legislative reforms and social movements further strengthened legal protection for women and challenged entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

Despite the prohibition of *Sati*, challenges remain in combating other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination in India. Deep-seated cultural norms and socioeconomic disparities

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<sup>12</sup> Antoinette Burton, Lata Mani. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1998. *The American Historical Review*, Volume 104, Issue 4, October 1999, Pages 1281–1282, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/104.4.1281>

<sup>13</sup> Sharma, Arvind, *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ. 1988



continue to marginalise women and restrict their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the legacy of *sati* persists in certain pockets of society, underscoring the ongoing struggle to eradicate harmful practices and promote gender justice.

Precisely we can say that the prohibition of *sati* represents a watershed moment in Indian history. It symbolises the triumph of human rights over entrenched traditions of oppression and subjugation. While the abolition of *Sati* was a significant achievement, it also serves as a reminder of the ongoing battle for gender equality and the need for continued efforts to address systemic injustices and empower women in all spheres of life.

### THE COMMISSION OF SATI (PREVENTION) ACT, 1987

This Act substituted all the other laws that were prevalent at that time. This, being a central legislation, was applicable throughout India. This act made *Sati* an illegal act and a criminal offence. This act not only prohibited the commission of the *Sati* but also made its glorification a criminal offence. There are provisions in the act that clearly mention that the commission of *Sati*, or its glorification in any kind for any purpose, is a criminal offence. Moreover, it will be considered equivalent to murder and abetment to murder. Anyone who is found doing such an act will be punished with death penalty or life imprisonment. The person found committing *Sati* herself will be considered as committing suicide and will be given imprisonment of one year or a fine or both. Glorification of *Sati* is also a crime, and the penalty for the same has also been mentioned in the act. Under the act, it was ordered to demolish the temples dedicated to the practice of *Sati* or the women who committed *Sati*. The penalty for glorification of *Sati* is imprisonment from 1 to 7 years, a fine of Rs. 5,000- to Rs. 30000, and the confiscation of all assets collected in the name of *Sati*.

According to this act, all the cases are to be decided without delay and these cases are expected to be referred to the special courts, equivalent to that of the Session courts. The burden of proof lies on the accused as per the act.

The enactment of the act was a significant step taken by the government, but the law was not strictly implemented. Even after twenty years of the enactment of the law for the *Sati* prevention, the government had not made any amendments in the law, and the law was not implemented properly. Thus, we see that mere enactment of law was not enough, and it required the sincere efforts of the government to implement it.

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<sup>14</sup> Sarkar Sumit, Sarkar Tunika, *Women & Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, Indiana University Press, 2008



## CURRENT SCENARIO

The nineteenth century saw the abolition of *Sati* under Colonial rule. The practice of *Sati* was outlawed in 1829 by a British official named William Bentick, and by 1862, the British had compelled the princes of India to stop practising it<sup>15</sup>. According to the present Indian penal law, *Sati* is a crime, and anyone caught performing it faces an automatic life sentence in prison. Nevertheless, the practice persisted, and each year, many instances went unreported<sup>16</sup>. *Sati* was encouraged amongst some significant Hindu castes or groups till the end of the twentieth century, even after it had been made illegal.

Talking about Roop Kanwar, who was only eighteen years old and was married to a man from the northern Indian village of Deorala in Rajasthan. Her husband passed away while he was being treated at a hospital. While her in-laws were preparing for the funeral, she knew that she would be burned along with her husband's dead body, thus she tried to flee. Unfortunately, her husband's family discovered her, and she was burnt to death. On that day, around 1.30 pm, she screamed and attempted to flee, but the men gathered around the funeral pyre stopped her and threw her back into the fire to burn to death.<sup>17</sup>

The perpetrators of Roop Kanwar were arrested by police for their acts. However, Roop Kanwar was elevated to a deity and a temple was constructed in her honour by the people of the locality. There is an alternative account of this tale, told by her husband's relatives and villagers. This version claims that the wife quietly prayed after learning about her husband's demise and declared her intention to offer herself as a sacrifice on her husband's funeral pyre. According to the witnesses, she was endowed with a supernatural power known as *Sati* in Hinduism, which is only granted to selected widows. Some family members calmly accepted her choice to sacrifice herself, while others tried to stop her. She was sitting on her husband's funeral pyre in her wedding gown, holding his head in her lap. According to the witnesses, she suddenly possessed the supernatural ability known as *Sat*, and when she raised her palm, the fire started itself<sup>18</sup>. When the flames gradually enveloped her body, she had a serene expression on her face<sup>19</sup>. Some observers even asserted that their illnesses had been cured simply by virtue of their proximity to the funeral and their observation of this paranormal power. The facts stay the same despite the fact that

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<sup>15</sup> Fisch, "Dying for the Dead: *Sati* in Universal Context," 294.

<sup>16</sup> Jörg Fisch, "*Sati* and the Task of the Historian," *Journal of World History* 18, No. 3 (2007): 361.

<sup>17</sup> Hardgrove, Anne. "Sati Worship and Marwari Public Identity in India." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1999, pp. 723–52. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659117>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

<sup>18</sup> The Pioneer (a national English newspaper) "Sati Killers acquitted", (dated 13-10-1996) published in the Lucknow, India, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Bushaw, "*Suicide or Sacrifice? An Examination of the Sati Ritual in India*," 1.

these two stories are about very different incidents; the only distinction is how the incidents were handled<sup>20</sup>.

In Chhattisgarh, India, a lady who was 71 years old sacrificed herself by performing *Sati* on 13 October, 2008. The witness said she went to her husband's funeral while wearing a new outfit. She jumped into her husband's funeral pyre and died along with him when the corpse was nearly burned and the villagers were prepared to depart. Many people were horrified by this act because it was carried out in the twenty-first century despite being against the law and prohibited by Indian law<sup>21</sup>. This occurrence serves as an illustration of the possibility of such tragic events in rural India. This event was only reported, and there are many more unreported *Sati* incidents throughout India that go unnoticed even in the twenty-first century. Another instance involved Kuttu Bai (65), who died in the state of Madhya Pradesh in 2002; Vidyawati (35); and Janakrani (40); who died in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 2006<sup>22</sup> and many more cases which went unreported in India every year. There are various laws in India that are made to prevent crime against women still these crimes exist in one form or the other. Although the last case of *sati* that was reported in India was that of Roop Kanwar and this practice is outlawed and illegal in contemporary India. However, it is still considered by some Hindus as the ultimate form of womanly devotion and sacrifice.

The sacrifice of women as *sati* is considered as devotional and many temples are built in the name of *Sati* Mata. The women who have performed *sati* are worshipped at many places. An estimated 400,000 pilgrims flocked to Deorala to honour the *mahasati*, Roop Kanwar, according to estimates in the newspapers.<sup>23</sup> Deorala had developed into a revered hub where the self-immolation of a wife who was utterly committed to her husband was the manifestation of heavenly reality. In the pious pilgrims' religious imagination, Roop was a goddess who realized her husband's well-being in the hereafter through her power (*Sakti*), which materialized in her magnificent deed and safeguarded him by her selfless gesture.

Currently, there is no consensus on the legality of *sati* (widow burning; formerly called "*suttee*") worship and praise in India. Following the murder of a young Rajput woman named Roop

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmad, "Sati Tradition - Widow Burning in India: A Socio-Legal Examination," 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra* note 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Supra* note 20.

<sup>23</sup> Hawley, John S. *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Internet resource.

Kanwar in 1987, the practice of worshipping *sati* was outlawed after several years of dispute.<sup>24</sup> At that point, the colonial rule outlawing widow immolation was amended by the Indian government to include *sati* glorification. As a result, events, processions, and ceremonies honouring any past perpetrator of *sati* were prohibited. In addition, the law forbade the establishment of trusts or fundraising initiatives intended to honour these individuals.<sup>25</sup>

We must understand that the tradition of *sati* in India is indeed complex. With the enactment of the central legislation, the incidents of *sati* in India have almost ceased, except for one or two stray incidents. It has been observed that such incidents occur because of certain primordial conditions that will survive in some parts of the country where the light of literacy and education has not penetrated deeply enough in society. Moreover, superstition and primitive social pressure still exist in certain pockets of the country. This problem can be handled by taking the assistance of electronic and print media to create consciousness amongst people. It would not only restore women's dignity but would also provide impetus to the empowerment of women. It is the need of the hour to awaken the people from deep slumber. Undoubtedly, literacy amongst women is an important step in ensuring equality among women and putting an end to social evils against women.

## CONCLUSION

The *Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987*, was revised by the government with the goal of tightening its requirements in a recent incident of May 2023 where a 28-year-old computer engineer committed suicide after the continuous pressure from the in-laws' family to become *Sati*. They have harassed her as, according to them, "she would have become *Sati* if she was a woman of good character".<sup>26</sup> We should be cautioned by this most recent incident because *Sati's* attraction is often accompanied by a strong religious sentiment and the conservative elements in the society try to prove it in their favour.

Such events would keep happening as long as these religious sentiments and primal urges still present. However, at the same time it is quite comforting to note that the human rights activists and women's movement, which is promoting the empowerment of women, is contributing to strengthen the position of women in society. We sincerely hope that with their efforts we are successful in raising awareness and fostering a consciousness against this heinous practice.

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<sup>24</sup> Bosch Van Den, Lourens P. "A Burning Question: Sati and Sati Temples as the Focus of Political Interest." *Numen*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1990, pp. 174–94. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3269862>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Jacobson D., 'The Chaste Wife', *American Studies in the Anthropology of India*, Delhi, S. Vatuk (ed.), 1978

<sup>26</sup> TNN. "Engineer, 28, Kills Self Over Pressure to Become a Sati." *The Times of India*, 19 May 2023, [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/engineer-28-kills-self-over-pressure-to-become-a-sati/articleshow/100367315.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/engineer-28-kills-self-over-pressure-to-become-a-sati/articleshow/100367315.cms).

However, the abolition of *sati* did not eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence against women in Indian society. Deep-seated patriarchal attitudes and customs persisted, perpetuating inequalities in areas such as education, property rights, and access to healthcare. Moreover, the legacy of *sati* continues to resonate in contemporary debates over women's rights and autonomy.

In recent decades, India has made significant strides in advancing women's rights through legislative measures, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013), which strengthened legal protections against gender-based violence. Additionally, initiatives promoting girls' education, economic empowerment, and political participation have contributed to greater gender equality and social inclusion.

Nevertheless, challenges remain in addressing entrenched gender norms, combating violence against women, and ensuring equal opportunities and representation in all spheres of society. The struggle for women's rights in India is an ongoing journey, shaped by the complexities of history, culture, and politics, but one that holds the promise of a more just and equitable future for all.