

The Ritual of Sati and a Question of Women's Subjectivity in India and beyond: - Notion and Perspectives.

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Abstract

This article explores the practise of widow immolation- namely Sati that according to various texts, even school texts seem to be a pan-India phenomena. "In some parts of the country, widows were praised if they chose death by burning themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Women who died in this manner, whether willingly or otherwise, were called "sati", meaning virtuous women." This is an excerpt from the class 8th state sponsored NCERT textbook. But in our history textbooks, Sati has often been taken at its face-value with not much research work dedicated to understand the religiosity of Sati and what our ancient scriptures say about sati especially the Hindu Religious-legal texts like Rig Veda, Manusmriti, etc. If Sati was as supposedly an essential part of the Hindu society then was there a mention of any kind of procedures laid down in the Vedas, no mention of the mantras that are to chanted while the woman performs Sati ? This article will also explore how the practise of self-immolation of widows was part of a larger tradition in the Indo-European culture and how the practise of Self-immolation also find presence across the border in countries like Indonesia, Africa, China etc. Then we will also see the state of Sati in 2 states namely-Bengal and Rajasthan and will explore how Sati was not something which was limited to a particular gender by finding references from literary texts like Rajatragini and epigraphic evidences as well. At the same time, we will also see the state of the English society itself about how well they treated their womenfolk.

Keywords: Sati, women's subjectivity, colonial discourse, Vedic scriptures, Hinduism, self-immolation, ritual practice, gender and religion, Bharatiya tradition, widowhood, dharma, feminist critique, memorial stones, cultural memory, agency.

Introduction

An 18-year-old girl in the year 1987 committed Sati. Sati is a word derived from the Sanskrit word asti which means "she is pure". Sati was basically an old Hindu ritual wherein the wife of the deceased man committed suicide on the same funeral pyre as that of her husband.

The woman from 1987 was Roop Kanwar hers, was the last recorded case of Sati in India. Such was the magnanimity of the event that even though it occurred in a quiet and unknown hamlet of Sikar district in Rajasthan this event sent shock waves all throughout the country. It led to change in the 1829 Bentinck Regulation against Sati and eventually state level laws as well as a central government level legislation was implemented.

A case was registered against 11 people as the prosecution believed that Roop was "murdered". Even a local daily from Jaipur on 5 September ran the following headlines "Akhir Roop Kanwar Sati ho hi

gyi” which can tell us that many people believed that the act by Roop was not voluntary but rather coerced upon her and hence it culminated in murder. Eventually, all 11 accused were acquitted by a Special court in Jaipur on 31st January, 2004.

People of the Deorala village where this event happened still accord the status of a goddess. Why a woman who committed an “act of barbarity” was given the status of a goddess and her act is eternalized by constructing a temple at the very place where she committed this act.

Religious Texts

The oldest Hindu religious texts are the Rig Veda. A general consensus upon the time period of their compilation is considered to be between 1500 BCE to 1000 BCE. There seems to be no mention of any form of practise that comes even close to Sati. A Rig Vedic verse (10.18.7) which is:

इमा नारीरविधवाः सुपत्नीराञ्जनेन सर्पिषा सं विशन्तु । अनश्रवोऽनमीवाः सुरत्ना आ रोहन्तुं जनयो योनिमग्रे ॥
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“Let these women who are not widows, who have good husbands, enter (anointed) with unguent and **butter(ghee)**. Let women without tears, without sorrow, and decorated with jewels, first proceed to the house.”

Now as stated by P.V. Kane in his elaborate work, The History of Dharma shastras Kane stated that in the sixteenth century a smriti (commentaries) writer from Bengal Raghunandana mistranslated the highlighted word above from *agreh* and this word which meant “ghee/butter” was replaced by a totally different meaning word with wider repercussions which was *agne* meaning “fire” which completely altered the meaning of the verse. It is not so that Raghunandana was an amateur scholar. He is accorded with writing 28 smritis on Hindu law and even wrote a commentary on Dayabhaga.

Furthermore, another verse from the Rig Veda (10.18.8)

उदीर्ष्व नार्यभि जीवलोकं गतासुमेतमुप शेष एहि । हस्तग्राभस्य दिधिषोस्तवेदं पत्युर्जनित्वमभि सं बभूथ ॥
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“Rise, woman, (and go) to the world of living beings; come, this man near whom you sleep is lifeless; you have enjoyed this state of being the wife of your husband, the suitor who took you by the band.”

Now it is quite clear that these two verses both of them dealing with death and women do not mention the need or an obligation upon the women to discontinue her life upon the death of her husband. It must be kept in mind that in Hindu theology the Vedas are considered as *pramāṇam*. That is in case of a conflict between smriti and a Veda the words of the Vedas prevail.

Also if Sati were to be an obligation or something which was widely spread it would have found its mention in Manusmriti which was a law book codifying Hindu laws. However, after reading laws of Manu we find that they were quite opposite. In chapter 9 of Manusmriti which is translated by G Buhler we find many references of laws talking directly or indirectly about Widows like

4. Reprehensible is the father who gives not (his daughter in marriage) at the proper time; reprehensible is the husband who approaches not (his wife in due season), and reprehensible is the son who does not protect his mother after her husband has died.

146. He who takes care of his deceased brother's estate and of his widow, shall, after raising up a son for his brother, give that property even to that (son).

175. If a woman abandoned by her husband, or a widow, of her own accord contracts a second marriage and bears (a son), he is called the son of a re-married woman (Paunarbhava).

None of these rules tells us about how the woman's life would come to an end but rather focus on how she has to lead her life further on.

It is also important to see the epics of the time termed as iti-hasa (thus it was) do we find any mention of self-immolation from either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana?

In the Mahabharata, the second wife of King Pandu, Madri chooses to kill herself in the same funeral pyre as that of her husband whereas Kunti, The first wife of King Pandu decides to stay alive and raise the Pandavas.

Also the Stree Parva of the Mahabharata mentions the after-math of the war and how the wives of the fallen Kauravas princes visit the battlefield it talks about their grief and sorrow. It talks about the ceremonies performed for the fallen Kauravas like their chariots, clothes and weapons were all placed in the fire but there seems to be no mention of any kind of a practise like Sati.

Even after the death of Krishna, some of his wives like Rukmani, Jambavati self immolated themselves on the funeral pyre after the death of Krishna whereas Satyabhama and other wives decide to stay in the woods.

In the Ramayana there is mention of a woman burning herself in the Uttara Kand in its chapter 17 which narrates the story of Ravana being smitten by the beauty of Vedavati who is the daughter of Brahmarishi Kusadhvaja, she was so alluring that the Devas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Pannagas all approached her father for her hand in marriage but all proposals were turned down by her father. These proposals were rejected as Vishnu was chosen to be her consort. Hearing this Ravana insults Vishnu in front of her and makes promiscuous advances to Vedavati. She burns herself in front of Ravana and promises to take revenge.

“Soiled by your contact, O Vile Rakshasa, I do not desire to live and shall throw myself into the fire before thine eyes. Since you have affronted me in the forest, O Wretch, I shall be reborn for your destruction.”

Another source which seems to indicate that Sati was not something that the society accepted as being “natural” comes from Maha-Nirvana Tantra which is an important text of the Tantric tradition and is a series of dialogues between Shiva and Paravati. Ch 10 of the text we find a reference condemning the practise of sati :

“O Kuleshani! a wife should not be burnt with her dead husband (79). Every woman is Thy image—Thou residest concealed in the forms of all women in this world. That woman who in her delusion ascends the funeral pyre of her lord shall go to hell (80).”

Literary Evidence

Kumarasambhava a literary masterpiece by Kalidasa describing the marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Paravati mentions a scene where Rati the wife of Kama, the god of love and desire, who was turned into ashes by Shiva after he tried to break Shiva’s meditation. Rati was so grief stricken that in Act 4 of the play she says:

34. “Besmearing my breasts with these ashes of the body of my beloved, I shall lay my body on the fire as if on a bed of young leaves.”

But she is held back by a heavenly voice from committing this act.

Harshacharita written by Banabhatta in Sanskrit talked about the life of Harsha of Thanesar and it also mentioned a period from 7th CE when Yosamati who was the wife of Prabhākaravardhana who became sati even before the death of her husband. P.V Kane writes that

“She (Yaśomatī) wanted to avidhavāmarāṇa. It means she was going to die like a suvāsinī with all her decorations, with tāmbula in her mouth and so on.”

We also find references of Harsha dissuading his mother to commit sati and also he rescues his sister Rajyasri who was the widowed queen of Maukhara family who tries to end her life by being a sati. She further went on to pursue Buddhism.

If we also look into Kadambari which is a romantic novel in Sanskrit which is also written by Banabhatta also condemns Anumarana which was

"This practice which is called Anumarana is utterly fruitless. This is a path followed by the illiterate this is manifestation of infatuation, this is a course of ignorance, this is an art of foolhardiness, this is shortsightedness, this is stumbling through stupidity, viz. that life is put and end to when a parent, brother, friend, of husband is dead. Life should not be ended, if it does not leave one of itself. ..."

Another source which gives reference to Sati would be Kalhan's Rajatringini which gives many instances of not only wives but also mothers, sisters, prostitutes and even slaves committing Sati. We find a reference in the text of a woman not committing sati because of the death of her husband but her committing sati on the news of her husband's imprisonment. Kalhan testifies that the wife of Damara Kosthaka entered the fire on the news of her husband's imprisonment.

Now the earliest known case of Sati that comes to us is mentioned by Strabo which talks about how the Greeks under Alexander found that Sati was practised in Cathaei in Punjab. Strabo further stated that the practise had risen out of the fear that either the wife would desert the husband or poison their husband. Then after this we don't find any other foreign writer talking about the practise of Sati until Alberuni, he talked about Sati but never seems to have witnessed any woman being Sati. He relied on the testimonies of different people.

The traveller who seems to have witnessed the actual self- immolation of a woman was the Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta who witnessed 3 women committing Sati in Madhya Pradesh. He wrote that:

“she joined her hands above her head in salutation to the fire and cast herself into it.”

He in his account of the event noted the fearless face of the women and also noted that the practise was not obligatory.

Epigraphic evidences

There are many sati pillars in India. We find the Eran which is located in the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh. This inscription belongs to the Gupta period and was discovered by A. Cunningham and edited by J.F. Fleet. It talks about a certain warrior named Goparaja under the Gupta king Bhanugupta, Goparaja lost his life in a war and his wife became sati in the funeral pyre of her husband.



(Eran Pillar Inscription)

“(There is) the glorious Bhanugupta, the bravest man on the earth, a mighty king, equal to Partha, exceedingly heroic; and, along with him, Goparaja followed ... (his) friends (and came here). (And) having fought a very famous battle, he (who was but little short of being equal to) the celestial (king Indra), (died and) went to heaven; and his devoted, attached, beloved, and beautiful wife, in close companionship, accompanied (him) onto the funeral pyre”

Another inscription that comes before us is the Belaturu inscription from the time period of Rajendra Chola. This is an interesting inscription as it talks about sati performed by a sudra woman whose husband was killed in a battle. The parents of the immolated woman strongly urged her to not commit sati. The father of the sudra woman erected a stone to honor her act.

Sati memorial stones also exist widely across India, most of these sati memorial stones have certain things in common like set of symbols like the sun and the moon, then yet another symbol which was portrayed was an open arm and hand bent at the elbow which showcased intact bangles which is a sign of being married. Most of these sati stones also had the name of the sati and the husband and the caste. Like for example the VIII Sati Pillar from Eran which belongs to the gotra ‘Khichi’ which is inscribed on the pillar and it belongs to a certain ‘Chaudhary Majoop Singh’ with the aforementioned symbols.



Another inscription comes from Kurgod found by Major Colin Mackenzie edited by J.F.Fleet. The third part of that inscription mentions a land grant made to a temple in Kurugoda and moves further to tell us that,

“ when Bechiraja was going to Kailsha in bodily form, that is, when he had died and his corpse was being cremated, his wives Bailiyakka and Malpaniyakka entered the fire”

The grant was made to the temple by Sinda Mahamandalesvara Racamalla whose general was Bechiraja. The widows before self-immolating themselves took the permission for the grant to the temple from the prince.

Sati not just for wives

Self immolation was not something which was solely practised by women. We find references of even men self-immolating themselves the motive having been either spiritual or personal. There are also archaeological evidences from south India to validate this fact. In the southern part of India we find archaeological monuments called as Virakkal and Mastikkal. The former ones were erected in the memory of a man who displayed valour or some other form of courage. Whereas the latter one was attributed to Mahasatis that is women who self immolated themselves in the funeral pyre of her husband.



(Virakkal)



(Mastikkal)

Rajatrangini also mentioned the tale of the death of several of the male servants who died after following Suryamati who was the wife of King Ananta into the funeral pyre. Sometimes even courtesans and concubines also committed sati Jayamati who was a prostitute committed sati in the funeral pyre of King Kalasa and Sahaja who was the concubine of King Utkarsa also performed sati. Kalhan mentions that during that time period Sati was performed by slaves, mothers, sisters Like Gajja cremated herself with her son Ananda, Vallabha with her brother in law and the sister of Dilhabhattaraka also committed Sati.

A write up was published by S Krishnasvami Aiyangar in the year 1906 in the Indian Antiquary titled " Self-Immolation which is not Sati" . He gave instances of men putting an end to their life.

He mentions two inscriptions found in Arkalgud Taluq in Hassan district which told instances of friends having thrown themselves into the fire for sorrow for their late masters. Aiyangar argues that most of these self-sacrificing acts were not committed on religious lines but rather on vows and some some committed on vows without even a personal motive behind it . He further consolidates all of these instances and make another argument which says that,

" All these instances show clearly that, when there was enough attachment to persons, or even to ideas, the people of India did not display much respect for life, but showed themselves ready to offer"

Bengal

It is very interesting to study about the sati pratha in Bengal as it became the epicenter for the protests against the practise and eventually it being banned.

Unlike North-western, Central, Deccan India from where Sati stones have been discovered no such sati stones have been discovered from Bengal. In Bengal the word Agnikhaki was used for a woman who performed sati the word meant fire eater. Now the commentary on Manusmriti written by Kulluka Bhatta in 15th CE from Bengal does not refer to Sati. However, as stated earlier too in the 17th CE commentary by Raghunandana we find reference to Sati he even praised sati and recommended it to every woman.

PV Kane stated certain reasons as to why the burning of women prevailed more in Bengal during the times preceding the abolition of the practise in 1829.

In the whole of India except for Bengal there was a system wherein the widows who were a part of joint family were only entitled to maintenance and they don't have any other right over the property of the family. However in Bengal there prevailed the Dayabhaga system which stated that on the death of the father, his sons couldn't divide the property amongst themselves without the consent of their mother. The mothers who had been widowed were entitled to not only maintenance but also were entitled to the same right over joint family property which her deceased husband enjoyed. Also to be noted is the fact that this right not only extended to the mothers but also step mothers with no male issues. This whole Dayabhaga system was made by Jimutavahana.

Now, this property system might have induced the family members to appeal to the woman to do the "right thing" and associated terms like love, sacrifice and devotion to euphemise the act. This act is corroborated by the figures presented by Thomas in his book 'Sutttee' from Bengal Presidency during 1815-1828. The lowest was 387 in 1815. Also most of the cases came from the Calcutta division, which lends support to the view that Sati was exacerbated in Bengal due to Dayabhaga

system as in Benaras where the rights of the widows were insignificant the number of sati cases which were reported were less.

Rajasthan

The earliest epigraphic evidence of sati comes from 842 CE in the Dholpur inscription which tells us about the immolation of Kanahulla, who was the wife of Candamahasena. The next is the Ghatiyala Inscription from 890 CE which commemorates Samvaladevi, who was the wife of Ranuka. Then all the epigraphic evidences stop until 1000 CE.

Eventually the custom of Sati came to be associated with the Rajput clan so much so that In rajasthan today many Rajput women believe that the true sati is a phenomena unique to their caste.

In the bard literature the act of act is mentioned as Bal Gai (to burn). Apart from the epigraphic evidence what is also famous in Rajasthan is the mention of Sati in its bardic literature preserved in the form of oral narratives. The Bhats and Charans who mostly lived in Rajasthan and Gujarat were bards and poets and they made genealogies of the kings they described how a Muslim queen of the Raja of Alwar, Sati Moosi committed sati.



(This is Moosi Maharani ki Chhatri was built y Maharaja Vinay Singh of Alwar in the memory of Sati)

Col.Tod gave a detailed account of sati custom among the Rajput he wrote that, "Having once imbibed this doctrine, its fulfillment is powerfully aided by that heroism of character inherent to the Rajpootni; though we see that the stimulant of religion requires no aid even in the timid female of Bengal, who, relaying on the promise of regeneration, lays her head on the pyre with the most philosophical composure."

Huge numbers came in from different states of Rajasthan when they talked about sati in a local lore, it was mentioned that 84 women ascended the pyre when Raja Bundh Singh of Bundi drowned. However we can again take note of Col.Tod's statement to find out that with time the practise begun to decline in these states.He writes,

"Budh Singh ... was one of the most intrepid generals of Aurangzeb; the period elapsed is about one hundred and twenty years. Mark the difference! When his descendant, my valued friend the Rao Raja Bishan Singh, died in 1821, his last commands were that none should give such a proof of their affection. He made me guardian of his infant heir. In a few days I was at Bundi, and his commands were religiously obeyed

Other practices from around the world

The practise of self-immolation is not unique to India. It can very well be found even in other parts of the world.

A practise similar to Sati was even found in the Indonesian archipelagos, the old Javanese literature talks about many women following their husbands in death. These references are found from the earliest Kakawin, up to 12th CE Balinese descriptions. Its possible for one to think that it was the widespread influence of Hinduism in the south east Asian region that led to this practise being exported even in this area, but scholars like J.Crawford notes that there seems to have been quite a difference between the Balinese and the Indian forms of Sati. The Balinese practices took different forms like some women chose to burn themselves some other chose to stab themselves whereas some chose to do both simultaneously, some allowing to be executed at the hands of priests and relatives.



(This drawing is of Ksiti-Sundari who throws herself onto the funeral pyre. This scene finds mention in the Indonesian version of Mahabharata. Ksiti-sundari is the 2nd wife of Abhimaniyu.)

Similar kind of practise even occurred in Japan wherein the Samurais used to commit suicide if their lords the daimyos died. Many types of ritual suicides existed in Japan which were also carried out in an obligatory fashion, these ritual suicides were like Seppuku, hara-kiri. We also that these rituals were also not obligatory or common in the Japanese society. Even in traditional China, widows were not allowed to remarry, rather they only had 2 choices in front of them either to take care of the deceased husbands parents or to commit suicide, now committing suicide again was something that was dissuaded by the family members of the widows. Also the woman who chose to commit suicide were honored by the imperial command by imperial command by them construing honorary gates in the honor of the widows. These gates were either called **p'ai fang** or **p'ai lou**.



Also in Asante in west Africa in the 19th Ce wherein a man if he didn't belong to the aristocracy and married the sister of the ruler he was obliged to accompany her to death whereas she has no such obligation.

Even we can find the evidences of Saxon wives slewing themselves when their husbands died as stated by Tacitus. Even the practise of Honorable suicide existed in Ancient Greece had its honourable suicides. The Milesian and Corinthian women, who by a voluntary death escaped from falling into the hands of the enemy, were praised in epigrams

State of English Society

The English society regarded themselves to be highly moral and just and when it colonize the other parts of the world went on to demean and degrade other civilizations culture sometimes forgetting about their odd practices.

The law was banned by the action of the act of 1829 by the then governor- general of India William Bentinck. Charles James Napier had stated earlier:

"This burning of widows is your custom; prepare the funeral pile... But my nation has also a custom. When men burn women alive we hang them."

What however is astonishing is the fact that the English society was infamous for what came to be known as "Witch-Trials". Witch trials in England took place from the 15th Century to 18th Century. These witch hunts becoming very intense during the English Civil Wars that took place between 1642 to 1651. Witchcraft had been made a Capital punishment in 1563 but even earlier it was something which was considered to be a heresy by the christian law and between 1484 till 1750 some 2,00,000 were either tortured, ostracized, hanged or burnt in Western Europe.

The victims were usually old women confessions out of whom was taken out by torture devices like 'Pillie-Winks' and iron 'caspie-claws'



Apart from these, a reference from F.J.Snell's book "Customs of Old England" refers to views from the Old England where widow-remarriage was frowned upon as they harbored the idea of duty and fidelity even in the afterlife. F.J.Snell also stated

"There is ample evidence that the indifference to the marriage of widows which marks our time did not obtain always and everywhere; on the contrary, among widely separated races such arrangements evoked deep repugnance, as subversive of the perfect union of man and wife."

Conclusion

After going through exhaustive numbers of texts it became clear to me that Sati was never a religious obligation upon the women and was voluntarily adopted by women. Now, it certainly is true that across the vast span of history there might have been certain cases where the woman entering the fire would have been not a voluntary act but something which was forced upon her by the family. However it is not possible to find or to distinguish how many women took sati by choice and how many of them became sati out of compulsion but as a whole by studying the various religious sources, epigraphic evidences it becomes evident that Sati was mostly voluntary and in most cases the family members tried to dissuade the woman from committing sati. Like Medhantithi who is one of the oldest commentator of the Manusmriti compared this practise to Syenayaga which a man performed by the way of black magic and kill his enemy.

Even when the practise was outlawed by the Britishers it was never widespread the source of which is the law itself

Section 1 of the Regulation XVII of 1829 itself stated that :

The practice of Suttee or of burning or burying alive the widows of Hindoos is revolting to the feelings of human nature ; it is nowhere enjoined by the religion of the Hindoos as an imperative duty n the contrary a life of purity and retirement on the part of the widow is more especially and preferably inculcated and by a vast majority of that people throughout India the practice is not kept up or observed ; in some extensive districts it does not exist ; in those in which it has been most frequent, it ia notorious that, in many instances, acts of atrocity have been perpetrated, which have been shocking to the Hindoos themselves, and in their eyes unlawful and wicked”

Even a lot of Hindu sects themselves were supporting the outlawing of the practise of Sati one of which was the Srivaishnavas of South India.

Sita Agarwal in “The Genocide of the Hindu Woman” notoriously says that Sati was sanctioned by the Vedas by quoting the same rig Vedic verse already mentioned above and taking the translations by Raghunandana . However even if we ignore that there was a translation error on the part of Raghunandana. There seems to have been no mantras that were to be chanted when a widow was sacrificing herself , nor does any of the grahasutra mention any of the procedure to be followed while the woman is self-immolating herself.

P.V.Kane states that, “Whether it(sati) was indigenous or was copied from some non-Aryan or non Indian tribes cannot be demonstrated.” As mentioned earlier also the widow burning with the corpse of the husband is stated to have been an ancient indo-germanic practise, based upon the belief of after-life.Also as mentioned earlier even honorable suicides were common amongst the Greeks. There is also literary evidence which comes from Europe and the Far East.

Procopius of Caesarea who was a historian in the late Greek antiquity tells us,

“the Heruli retained many striking primitive customs, among which was the suicide of widows on their husbands’ pyres.”

Grimm states in Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer that burning of the widows was conman amongst the Scandinavians whereas speaking about the Slavs W.R.S Ralston says,

““The fact that in Slavonic lands, a thousand years ago, widows used to destroy themselves in order to accompany their dead husbands to the world of spirits, seems to rest on incontestable evidence.”

Also this practise was also conman amongst the Egyptians evident from the fact that in the tomb of Amen-hetep 2 at Thebes, wherein its proven that the wives of the king were either poisoned or allowed to commit suicide to accompany their husband in the after-life. So now its an established fact that widow burning was not something which arose in isolation just in the Indian subcontinent but was even famous amongst the Germanic and Celtic branches of Indo-European.

Koenraad Elst says, “As a general rule, it was more frequent in societies where women had honour to uphold, whereas societies where women were treated as household commodities (like the Greek) did not know the practice at all.”

The epigraphic evidence and literary evidence all suggest that the practise of sati became common during the 5th century which might have been because of the invasions by various tribes and nomads from central Asia Also the earliest epigraphic source of Sati comes from the 510 AD Eran stone pillar but after that we find very limited epigraphic evidences until 1000 AD what might have exploded the whole practise of Sati in the later periods finding mention in the works of travelers could have been the more various sets of brutal invasions that India witnessed in the later periods.

Then why is it that we find extensive literature criticizing the Hindu society and such sources which clarify that the practise was not uncommon even amongst other societies is not known. The reason might have been the Atrocity literature produced by the Britishers on Indian Civilization and culture. Even until recent times India has been notoriously called the country of snake chambers and even during the earlier times a lot of literature that was published on India remained shrouded in fantasy. In 1494, a pamphlet could "exhibit an extraordinary conception of India: there are one-eyed, dog-headed and headless men, pygmies, men and women with large feet used as parasol, a winged snake, a flying panther and other strange beasts, birds and insects." The texts on Sati was also due to this fact the Britishers wanted to portray India as a widow-burning society. The fuel was further added by the evangelical activities which became rampant in India for the spread of Christianity.

Of-course one can not justify the acts of these women who chose to self-immolate themselves but what is also true is the fact that while understanding and studying the culture and the history of the past it is essential to not always judge the past actions from a modern point of view. The women who chose Sati voluntarily stood firmly for what they believed and even choosing death to uphold their ideas for which they need to be admired. Sati was one of those practised which should always be studied in a context and one must also learn to express admiration for the courage and unfrightened nature of those Indian women who chose this step.

One can never ignore the tragedies of the colonization that was inflicted upon the civilizations which were colonized whether it were the atrocities of Leopold II in the Congo Basin or the the engineered famines by the Britishers that took place in India killing millions of people, or the notorious slavery system none of the successors of these civilizations feel shame in their civilization so as

P. V. Kane puts it , " there is no reason why poor Indians cannot express admiration for the sacrifices which their women made in the past, though they may condemn the institution itself which demanded such terrible sacrifice and suffering."

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