

# The Position of Widows in the Hindu Society



There are so many interpolations of our Vedic Shastras, especially from the West, about this highly sensitive topic, that now we feel obliged to comment about it and right the wrongs that has truly marred our understanding of this extremely delicate and misunderstood subject. In our shastras there is quite a lot of information on this matter but one should remember that one has to view the information with a modernistic mentality.

**DO NOTE:-** In this article we tried to cover as much on widows as possible. This article is very thought-provoking and is not intended to create further questions, rather to look at it from different perspectives.

**“Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah”**

**Dharma protects those who protect Dharma. (Manu Smrti, Ch8,v15)**

In the pravachans (discourses) I deliver, I always propagate RESPECT, and respect not only to all of God's creatures, but also every single human being - young, old, widowed or not. I have always promoted respect to women because as Hindus, Mother worship is considered the highest. I myself worship the Mother very sincerely, hence I respect every women - married or not. We awesome Hindus respect the feminine force because Devi Kali portrays the destructive energy, Devi Durga the protective, Devi Lakshmi the nourishing, and Devi Saraswati the creative. This is also why the Shakti (female) is mentioned first, and then the Shakta (male) afterward. Here it's evident that Hinduism recognizes both the masculine and feminine attributes of the Divine, and that without honouring the feminine aspects, one cannot claim to know God in His entirety. So we also have many female-male divine-duos like Rukmini-Krishna, Sita-Raam, Uma-Mahesha, and Lakshmi-Narayana, where the feminine form is always addressed first. Hence it is very sad and disturbing that in the holy land of Bharata - Bhumi (India) - widows are normally referred to as the “living dead”.

Before we continue with this pertinent topic, I must firstly add that some of our Vedic Shastras do point out widows to be inauspicious and the like. Do we criticize our shastras? Well only the foolhardy and not so well informed will do so. Most westerners who translate our Shastras interpolate the Sanskrit verses, hence all the confusion. Do note that everything happens according to deshaa-kaala-artha-tattva-jnah “according to time, place and circumstances” {Srimad Bhagavatam 10.11.22} and this is what I am trying to relay in this article. Times have changed and if one as a Hindu is not going to change for the better,

then, like the dinosaurs, we shall perish pitifully. I'm aware that many will email me quoting our shastras especially the Manu Smriti and the like and, while I'm not debating such verses and quotes, one should look forward rather than backward when tackling a touchy and controversial topic such as the one we are dealing with here. I humbly request you read this article with an open mind. Please do read the **DISCLAIMER** at the end of this article.

In India The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856, also Act XV, 1856, enacted on 25 July 1856, legalized the remarriage of Hindu widows in all jurisdictions of India under East India Company rule. In order to protect both what it considered family honour and family property, upper-caste Hindu society had long disallowed the remarriage of widows, even child and adolescent ones, all of whom were expected to live a life of austerity and abnegation. The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856, enacted in response to the campaign of Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, provided legal safeguards against loss of certain forms of inheritance for a remarrying Hindu widow, though, under the Act, the widow forsook any inheritance due her from her deceased husband. Especially targeted in the act were Hindu child widows whose husbands had died before consummation of marriage.

In ancient Vedic India, women occupied a very important position, in fact a superior position to men. It's a culture whose only words for strength and power are feminine - "Shakti" means "power and strength". In Vedic times, women and men were equal - as far as education and religion was concerned. Women participated in the public sacrifices alongside men. One text mentions a female Rishi Visvara. Some Vedic hymns are attributed to women such as Apala, the daughter of Atri, Ghosa, the daughter of Kaksivant or Indrani, the wife of Indra. Apparently, in early Vedic times, women also received the sacred thread and could study the Vedas. The Haritasmrti mentions a class of women called brahmavadinis who remained unmarried and spent their lives in study and performance of rituals. Panini's distinction between arcarya (a lady teacher) and acaryani (a teacher's wife), and upadhyaya (a woman preceptor) and upadhyayani (a preceptor's wife) indicates that women at that time could not only be students but also teachers of sacred lore. He mentions the names of several noteworthy women scholars of the past such as Kathi, Kalapi, and Bahvici. The Upanishads refer to several women philosophers, who disputed with their male colleagues such as Vacaknavi, who challenged Yajnavalkya. The Rig Veda also refers to women who engaged in warfare. One queen - Bispala is mentioned, and even as late a witness as Megasthenes (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) mentions heavily armed female guards protecting Chandragupta's palace. Recent incidents of Sati and rash of "dowry murders" have made headlines not only in India, but all around the world, and have focused attention on womens' issues in India. In the wake of the discussion, it emerged that Indian womens' problems are not only problems of Hindu women or problems caused by traditional Hinduism. Western biased media paints India as a dangerous place. But if statistics can be trusted, a study by Hindus Against the Abuse of Women presented at the Second International Conference on Bride Burning and Dowry Deaths in India puts USA in the lead of familial femicide. Despite media campaigns and shocking statistics, domestic violence continues to be one of Europe's most under-reported crimes. But those same reporters seem to have verbal diarrhoea when it comes to India and women.

According to some neanderthal-minded Hindu customs, being a widow is seen as a sign of sins committed in her past life. She was excluded from any major religious event; the family did not want the ill-omen brought by a widow. She had to give up wearing red coloured clothes, eating sattwic food and the respect of her family members. Many families never

said a word against this as they didn't want to "rock the boat". Keeping quiet and following the customs ensured their place in society as honourable. Can- one blame them? I personally would not. It's very easy to judge from the proverbial "high horse", unless one has personally experienced it.

The status of women in a Hindu society is said to be directly dependent on her father, husband or son. If she loses any of them or don't have any one of them, she seems to be doomed. Remaining single is viewed as a sign that something is wrong with her character so no one wants her. Widowhood in Hinduism seems to be viewed by some as the bottom of the "food chain" and get the worst kind of treatment. If one reverts to our religious texts, one will get mixed messages about the place of women in a Hindu society. Some texts say "Wherever women is respected, there the Celestials reside", then some say "Women are like Shudras, low in birth". The Hindu society which forbade women from learning the religious texts, took advantage of this confusion sufficiently painted women as non-human and began treating them as such. The custom of wife burning, bride burning, child marriage, polygamy, dowry and debarring women from education were introduced to ensure that women did not challenge the male egotistical supremacy.

In traditional families, widows were, and in some cases still are, required to wear white sarees. The presence of widows at religious rites in such families is considered inauspicious. Widows are expected to devote their lives to an austere pursuit of religion. These restrictions are traditionally strongest in the highest castes, in which the head is frequently shaved as well. The so-called "highest castes" also have severe restrictions on remarriage. Such restrictions are now strictly observed only by a small minority of widows, though some degree of ritual inauspiciousness lingers. In Narada Smṛti 12.45-48, there are three types of punarbhū, or a remarried widow: The virgin widow, the woman who abandons her husband to take up with another man and then returns to her husband, and the woman who has no brothers-in-law who can give her offspring. Although this list is not exhaustive, it makes it clear that a punarbhū is not just any widow. Indeed, she may not have been a widow at all (as in the second case). In the other two cases, she is a childless widow, which is an important distinction. Many texts do seem to frown upon the re-marriage of widows and sometimes permit it. A punarbhū is often not given the same rights as a woman who has married only once. The son of a punarbhū, a punarbhava, is often listed as one who is unfit to invite to a sacrifice, as is the husband of a remarried woman. The punarbhava also does not inherit as would a 'natural son'. Now if a non-hindu reads this he or she may have a very negative view on Hinduism.

It's not that these customs were a result of society; they are present in the religious texts as well. I would prefer not mentioning them in too much detail as they are very disturbing. The discrimination does not end here. As mentioned earlier, the treatment of widows is definitely not acceptable. There has been so much debate about the position of women in Hinduism and if anyone cared to know about the position of women in Hinduism they will find it impossible to believe that the Hindu communities, religious organizations and so-called leaders are doing almost nothing towards reform. What is even more disturbing is that instead of working towards reform many religious leaders are now busy forming factions and fighting for influence.

I pray and hope that the Hindu communities around the world will understand the need for reform before we reach the "Hindu Taliban" way. Scary thought indeed.

So how can a young widow of 20 years old, remain a single individual and disregarded for all prayers and at family functions? How unfair and unjust is this? Hinduism is a very well

evolved and respectful culture. Hinduism or rather the correct term is “Sanatan Dharma” (meaning “the way of life”), hence Sanatan Dharma is not a religion. So please, my fellow awesome Hindus, stand up and be counted - and start showing respect to every living being.

Shree Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu sings this verse from the Sri Siksastakam :

“One should chant the holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street; one should be more tolerant than a tree, devoid of all sense of false prestige and should be ready to offer all respect to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly”.

**ON REMARRIAGE:-** In Hinduism widows can choose to re-marry or remain single. Widows who intend to stay single dedicate their life to the upbringing of their family, to live for a cause or to live in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. If a widow chooses this path she is respected as a brahmacharini (celibate women dedicated to spiritual pursuits), and is generally enjoined to live a life similar to monastics. One of the signs that they have chosen this path of life is that they wear plain white clothing (though these days many will wear either whitish saris or white saris with designed borders). Widows who choose not to re-marry may also be initiated by a swami to be a sannyasini and may wear yellow or orange saris. These widows follow the tradition of sannyasins, where they do not participate in community functions such as weddings except only to observe and give their blessings. They may however, lead prayer groups during holy festivals, give discourses if they are qualified to, and can certainly perform pujas and perform Arati on such occasions or on any occasion where there is gathering of people for spiritual purposes.

Widows who intend to re-marry will follow the customs of an unmarried girl. Her attire would be what she normally uses, though she is enjoined not to use the red sindhur on her forehead and as, with an unmarried girl, use the black dot or no dot instead. These signify that she is open to marriage proposals. These are the general guidelines for widows in the Hindu culture. Widows do have a choice on how they apply them. For instance, a widow who chooses not to re-marry may still use her usual attire and wear the red Sindhur as a remembrance of a late husband (however this is rarely practised). There is no bad karma in this and the community is enjoined to respect her wishes. There is actually no Hindu scriptural reference that regulate what a widow should wear and what she should not, or what she can or cannot do. In general Hindu society, widows are given the choice of indicating their status by what they choose to wear. By status, I don't mean whether they are a widow or not, instead it is to indicate whether they intend to re-marry or not. I must also state that these same guidelines also apply to a husband who has lost his wife. However, if you observe our community men are not enjoined by the community to observe the guidelines as much as women which I find to be of double standards.

Many of our shastras, like the Manu Smriti, states that a widow should not marry again. Yet there are other Hindu scriptures which more than imply that a widow can re-marry. The following verse is cited by Shree P. V. Kane, in his History of Dharmashastra: “Another man is ordained for women in five calamities: a) When the husband is missing and is unheard of; b) The husband dies; c) When the husband is impotent; d) When the husband has become an ascetic; e) The husband has become depraved”. Agni Purana 154.5; Parashara Smriti IV.30; and Narada Smriti V.97. Atharva Veda IX.5.27-29 includes a verse that translates as “Whatever woman, having first married one husband, marries another, she and the other new husband will not be separated if they offer a goat and five rice dishes illumined with religious fees”. Furthermore, the remarriage of widows is advocated in the Vashista Dharmasutra of the Rigveda. These issues impact the most personal and intimate

aspects of human life. Yet our Vedic scriptures seem to be totally contradictory in these areas. Is it really right that a human life is played around with in this way, all for the sake of baseless traditions? The Purva Mimamsa Sutras (written by the most respected Jaimini Rishi) rules for the interpretation of scripture clearly state that if two smritis (refers to a specific body of Vedic scripture, and is a codified component of Hindu customary law) clash, the two conflicting viewpoints indicate alternative practices, both being equally valid. Even according to this rule, widow re-marriage is offered as an alternative to the lifelong celibacy of widows in the Smritis. This acknowledgement that the Vedic Shastras can contradict each other, indicates that in Sanatan Dharma (Hinduism) there are various schools of thoughts, and should be respected as such. It all depends on the teaching of those who interpret those scriptures.

### **INTERESTING POINTS OF NOTES:-**

\* "The home has, verily, its foundation in the wife" - The Rig Veda. Now the wife could be a widow, and does this mean that she should be disrespected and ostracised as it is no fault of her own that her husband has expired.

\* Widows are given such a raw deal yet this does not seem so for a widower. So why isn't a widower treated in the same despicable manner that a widow is treated in society? Are we seeing double standards in this very-ready-to-criticize society of today?

\* When a Devi (Mother) prayer is performed, generally halwa puri, etc, are prepared for the Mother (like Ma Durga, Ma Kali, Ma Bandi...), and when that puja is completed, that halwa puri now is prashad, blessed food from the Mother Herself. Is one not going to offer that blessed food to a lady because she is a widow? How inappropriate and disrespectful this seems. Prashad is for all humanity to consume from a young child, to a married person to a widow or widower and prashad should even be fed to your pet animal like your dog. This has been done by great saints and gurus like Sivanada Sena of the Caitanya Lila's. A widow cannot refuse the prashad that is offered to her as that is tantamount to maha-aparadha (great sin), like what King Tungadhwa did and lost his kingdom in the Shree Satyanarayan Katha of the Skanda Purana.

\* Atithi devo bhavah (English: 'The guest is God') is a Sanskrit verse from the Taittiriya Upanishad. Atithi devo bhavah regards a procedure of the host-guest relationship. So, if a widow visits your house, would you shun her because of her status in society?. If one does that, then again it is tantamount to maha-aparadha (great sin). Why? - Since a guest regardless should be treated as if the Supreme Lord Vishnu has visited your home.

\* When a person criticizes and demeans a widow, that person is actually criticizing Parvati/Durga Devi in her widow form of Srimati Dhumavati Devi... not the best idea.

**LORD SHIVA AS A WIDOWER:-** Probably the most famous widower of all time and whom many don't know about is Lord Shiva. In the Srimad Bhagavatam 4<sup>th</sup> Canto chapter 4, this katha appears : "Sati (view the picture below) sat down in silence on the ground with her face to the North. She closed her eyes to find absorption in the process of yoga and with intelligence directed her life air upwards to the place between her eyebrows. In her desire to give it up because of her anger towards her father Daksha, thus by the exercise of her own will focused on the air and fire within her body. When she, right there within her mind, saw nothing but the nectarean lotus feet of her husband Shiva, soon the body of Sati was ablaze because of the fire that originated from her absorption." When Sati-devi gave up her body and expired, Lord Shiva became a widower. Lord Shiva waited for Sati-devi to incarnate again, and eventually she did as the daughter of Himavat (The Himalayas) Parvati Devi. That same Parvati devi expanded herself as Dhumavati Devi - the widow form of Parvati Devi. It's interesting to know that Dhumavati Devi is referred to as the



“Inauspicious One”, the name of “Shiva” means “The All Auspicious One”. Now isn't that rather ironic? It either shows many have not picked up on this fact or many have selective reading methodology.



**Srimati Sati-Devi committing “Sati” by setting Herself ablaze.**

**SHREE KRISHNA CAITANYA MAHAPRABHU AS A WIDOWER:-** In the Caitanya Caritamrita this katha appears “At the age of 14-15 Shree Krsna Caitanya Mahaprabhu was married to Lakshmi Devi, the daughter of Ballabha Acharya. During the Lord's residence in East Bengal, the Lord's wife Lakshmi Devi expired from this world due to the effects of a snakebite. Thus rendering The Supreme Lord as a widower, and it was at His mother's request that He married Vishnupriya, the daughter of Rakj pandit Sanatan Misra at the age of around 16-17 years. At 24 years of age Mahaprabhu took the Sannyasa stage of life (Renunciation).”

So some of the most famous widowers in Vedic history are, Lord Shiva (when mother Sati-devi burnt herself), Shree Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu (when Mother Lakshmi-devi was bitten by a snake), Lord Raam (when Mother Sita was swallowed by her Mother, Bhumi-devi) just to name a few. But finally, at the end of the Mahabharata War, the Pandavas travelled to the Himalayas after renouncing this world, Draupadi Devi the wife of the 5 Pandavas, first perished, thus making the 5 Pandavas widows. Although some may argue that Subhadra devi, Chitrangada and Uloopi, Arjun's other wives and Hidimbi and Valandhara, Bhima's other wives and Devika, Yudhishtira's other wife and Karenumati, Nakula's other wife and finally Vijaya, Sahadeva's other wife were maybe still living. Do note many of these wives were not human, but of a different race living in a different

dimension. In those days a Kshatriya (warrior) can accept more than one wife. This was permitted according to Dharmashastra. Well these incidents that I commented on above are just a few, but there are so many more to mention. So due to a lack of space in this article we shall leave you to ponder on the above incidents.

**So why is a widow treated differently to a widower?**

**I personally find this treatment as very unfair and unlike a true Hindu.**

Some important verses from the Manu Smriti : “Manu has clearly instructed that one should not insult others just because one’s mind is perturbed or disturbed. We should not embrace hostility or enmity and should not say anything that hurts others because by doing so only sin takes birth which always makes one anxious.” “Due to the change of times and adhering to Manu’s instructions, it is not possible in totality. It's not correct to infringe on a woman’s right and her fortune just because she has one demerit or defect.”

**THE WORSHIP OF WOMEN** from Manu Smriti (3/56) :-

Manu Deva opines that it's the duty of all the family members to worship the female child by giving her new clothes and ornaments. That clan is blessed and is showered with success where women are honoured and in which daughters and daughters-in-law are happy and satisfied.

**Meaning:-** The Celestials (Devi's and Deva's) reside there - where women are honoured and respected. Where they are ill-treated and disrespected all the deeds, (i.e. Yagya (havan and pujas) etc.) do not materialize into anything beneficial. When the husband and wife are mutually happy, the family is bound to be happy. In this way the responsibilities shall be accomplished easily and happily.

## **Srimati Dhumavati Devi**

Dhumavati Devi (literally meaning "the smoky one") is one of the Mahavidyas, a group of ten Tantric goddesses. Dhumavati Devi represents the fearsome aspect of Devi, the Hindu Divine Mother. Mata is often portrayed as an old, ugly widow, and is associated with things considered inauspicious and unattractive in Hinduism, such as the crow and the Chaturmasya (the 4 rainy {Monsoon} seasons in India - July to October) period. Devi is often depicted on a horseless chariot or riding a crow, usually in a cremation ground. Dhumavati Devi is said to manifest herself at the time of cosmic dissolution (pralaya) and is "the Void" that exists before creation and after dissolution. While Dhumavati Devi is generally associated with only inauspicious qualities, her thousand-name hymn relates her positive aspects as well as her so-called negative ones. She is often called tender-hearted and a bestower of boons. Dhumavati Devi is described as a great teacher, one who reveals ultimate knowledge of the universe, which is beyond the illusory divisions, like auspicious and inauspicious. Her portrayed, “ugly” form, teaches the devotee to look beyond the superficial, to look inwards and seek the inner truths of life.

Dhumavati Devi is described as a giver of siddhis (supernatural powers), a rescuer from all troubles, and a granter of all desires and rewards, including ultimate knowledge and moksha (salvation). Her worship is also prescribed for those who wish to defeat their foes. Dhumavati Devi's worship is considered ideal for unpaired members of society, such as bachelors, widows, and world renouncers as well as Tantrikas. In her Varanasi temple, however, she transcends her “inauspiciousness” and acquires the status of a local protective deity (Gramma Devi). There, even married couples worship her. Although she has very few dedicated temples, her worship by Tantric ritual continues in private and secluded places like cremation grounds and forests. Dhumavati Devi is often named as the seventh

Mahavidya. The Guhyatiguhya-Tantra equates Lord Krishna's ten avatars (expansions) with the ten Mahavidyas. The fish incarnation Matsya-deva is described as arising from Dhumavati.



In the katha from the Shakta Maha-Bhagavata Purana, which narrates the creation of all the Mahavidyas, Sati-devi, the daughter of Daksha and first wife of Lord Shiva, feels insulted that she and Lord Shiva are not invited to Daksha's yagna ("fire sacrifice") and insists on going there, despite Lord Shiva's protests. After futile attempts to convince Lord Shiva, the enraged Sati-devi transforms into the Mahavidyas, who surround Lord Shiva from the ten cardinal directions. Dhumavati stands in the southeast. Another similar katha replaces Sati-devi with Kali-devi (the first and chief Mahavidya) as the wife of Lord Shiva



and origin of the other Mahavidyas. The Devi Bhagavata Purana mentions the Mahavidyas as war-companions and forms of Shakambhari-devi. (to read more on Mother Shakambhari devi please click below to go to her article on Dipika.

<http://www.dipika.org.za/index.php/articles/23-shakambhari-devi-the-mother-that-provides-us-with-nourishment>

The Pranatosini-Tantra explains the widowhood of Dhumavati Devi. Sati-devi asked Lord Shiva to give her food. When Lord Shiva declines, the goddess eats him to satisfy her extreme hunger. When Lord Shiva requests her to disgorge him, she obliges. Lord Shiva then rejects her and curses her to assume the form of a widow. Another katha informs us that Dhumavati Devi was created by the warrior Devi Durga in the battle against demons Shumbha and Nishumbha. Dhumavati's literal name ("she who abides in smoke") comes from her ability to defeat demons by creating stinging smoke.

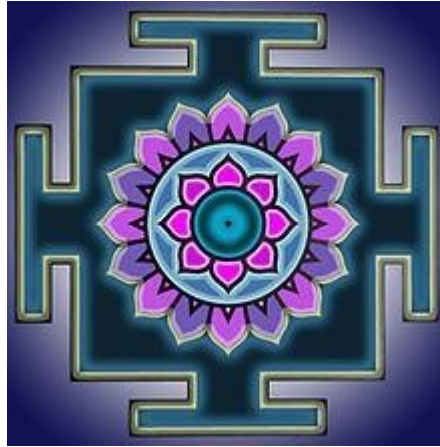
The Pranatosini-Tantra version stresses Dhumavati Devi's destructive aspect and hunger, which is satisfied only when she consumes Lord Shiva, who himself contains or creates the universe. It brings out her status as a widow and her self-assertion on her husband. The Dhumavati Tantra describes her as an old and ugly widow. She is thin, tall, unhealthy, and has a pale complexion. She is described as restless and wicked. Unadorned with jewellery, she wears old, dirty clothes and has dishevelled hair. Her eyes are fearsome, her nose long and crooked, and some of her long fang-like teeth have fallen out, leaving her smile with gaps. Her ears are ugly and rough; her breasts hang down. In one of her trembling hands, she holds a winnowing basket, while the other makes a boon-conferring gesture (varadamudra) or knowledge-giving gesture (cinmudra). She rides in a horseless chariot bearing an emblem of a crow and a banner. She is astute and crafty, though. She is always hungry and thirsty.

Dhumavati Devi is always considered a widow, and thus, is the only Mahavidya without a consort. Though associated with Lord Shiva, having eaten him, he has since left her. Having destroyed the male element (Purusha) in the universe, she is left with nothing, but she is still Shakti, the female element with latent energy. Dhumavati Devi's insatiable hunger and thirst is highlighted in many texts, and has been interpreted as the manifestation of her unsatisfied desires. She likes smoke from incense, offerings, and cremation pyres, as these symbolize destruction. Dhumavati Devi also exists in the form of smoke and roams everywhere at her will.

While Dhumavati Devi generally is associated with only inauspicious qualities, her thousand-name hymn speak of her positive aspects, too. She is often called the bestower of boons and tender-hearted. Her hymn says that she lives in the midst of women and is worshipped by them. Her hymn sings of her as the giver of children. As an ancestor or grandmother spirit, she embodies a great teacher and guide, granting knowledge of the ultimate truth of life and death. Her smoke hides that which is obvious, revealing hidden secrets and truths of "the unknown and the unmanifest". Her outer appearance as poverty is deceptive and a mere illusion that hides the inner reality. She is "the good fortune that comes to us in the form of misfortune". Dhumavati Devi embodies the "power of suffering". Through the negative aspects that Dhumavati Devi represents, rise the virtues of patience, persistence, forgiveness, and detachment. Without the revealing of this negativity of life, it cannot be transcended and the secret truths would remain hidden under the smoky veil of illusion. Dhumavati Devi's outer inauspicious, fearful form reveals the dangers of considering sensory pleasures as fulfilment-giving. The winnowing basket, used to separate the husk from the grain, symbolizes the need to separate the outer illusory form from the inner reality. Her ugly form teaches the devotee to go beyond the outer deceptive appearances and seek the inner truths of life.

Dhumavati Devi is sometimes regarded as an older form of Kali-Devi, in which she represents timelessness and unmanifest life-force. She is considered a terrible aspect of the Goddess and included among the Kalikula ("family of Kali") goddesses. Dhumavati Devi's nama stotras (hymn with names of the deities) identify her with Parvati, Sati, and glorify her as a slayer of demons.

### --- Dhumavati Yantra Worship ---



The yantra of Dhumavati, used in her worship.

Though Dhumavati may seem to be a goddess to be avoided due to her inauspiciousness, she is described as tender-hearted and one who gives her devotees whatever they want. In several places, Dhumavati is described as a giver of siddhis (supernatural powers), a rescuer from all troubles and granter of all desires and rewards, including ultimate knowledge and moksha (salvation). Dhumavati Devi's worship is prescribed to ward off all the negativity that she stands for and to transcend the smoke screen to acquire true knowledge. By worshipping and confronting her, the embodiment of the impure, the inauspicious and outside the fringes of society, one can look beyond the arbitrary dichotomies of society and acquire ultimate knowledge to become spiritually enlightened.

Married people, however, are generally advised not to worship Dhumavati Devi. It's said that her worship creates a feeling of wanting solitude and distaste of worldly things, which is considered as highest characteristics of a spiritual quest. Thus, Dhumavati Devi's worship is appropriate for world renouncers who roam as lone wanderers and widows who parallel the life of world renouncers. Dhumavati Devi is also described a being partial to single persons and especially partial to widows. Widows are considered the only beings who can withstand her power. The mantra of Dhumavati is "Dhum Dhum Dhumavati Swaahaa", containing a repetition of her seed syllable Dhum (Dhoom). This mantra used in the worship of Dhumavati Devi, and with her yantra worship, as the mantra creates a protective smoke shielding the devotee from negativity and death. Her worship involves clearing one's mind of all thoughts and leaving back the known, meditating on the unknown silence beyond, and the Void that Dhumavati Devi represents.

Dhumavati Devi's worship is performed in the night in a cremation ground, bare-bodied with the exception of a loincloth. The fourth lunar day of the dark fortnight (Krishna Paksha) is considered the special day to perform her puja (worship). The worshipper should observe a fast and remain silent for a whole day and night. They should also perform a homa ("fire sacrifice"), wearing wet clothes and a turban, repeating Devi's mantra in a cremation ground, forest, or any lonely place.

Dhumavati Devi temples are extremely rare. At a temple in Varanasi, Dhumavati Devi is the main deity. Though traditional devotees of Dhumavati Devi (world renouncers and Tantrikas) worship her at the Varanasi temple, here the goddess transcends her traditional role as "the inauspicious, dangerous goddess who can be approached only by heroic tantric adepts". Dhumavati Devi acquires the role of a local guardian deity, or village deity, who protects the locals and even married couples worship her.

So let me ask you this question - "If that widow was Mother Dhumavati, would you refuse the Divine Widow Mother, Halwa Puri or refuse her from offering havan samaghree or applying hurdi, etc?" I think not... remember when Halwa Puri and the like are offered to Mother Durga actually it's also offering to the widow form of Mother Durga as well, as Dhumavati Devi.

So basically from the above given answers we can thus deduce that widows are certainly given the proverbial "short end of the stick" in the Hindu society. Widows should do as a married woman does. As Hindus we should not remain thinking in a match box, we must, as awesome Hindus, see and live the broader way of life, otherwise one shall find a Hindu only in a museum in the near future. Scary thought, isn't it? Please, my fellow Hindus let us rise from this Neanderthal mindset and be forward-thinking, uber awesome Hindus.

**Kindly note:-** Some the information above may portray the Celestials (like Lord Shiva and Mother Dhumavati) as adharmic, but you should know much information that one reads in our Shastras is totally inconceivable to us mere mortals. To truly understand our Vedic Scriptures can be quite an effort indeed, hence it requires a Guru to explain the intricacies and the secrets it has in it. Every event conveys some noble secrets in some direct or indirect way. You have to understand it with one's inner self and not like a novel. The personalities in our Vedic Scriptures are of course not worthy of comparison to the characters we come across in a novel. In each personality in our Vedic scriptures, there are message(s) to convey to us. But let me state here categorically, when the Supreme Personality of Godhead Shree Krishna and His devotees like Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, Mother Durga, Lord Indra, the 9 planets, and so forth performs an act, it should **NEVER** be questioned. Yes, this will not go down well with many so called "new-aged", "I want the truth" people out there, but honestly, what right does one have to question the Lord and His elevated servants? God can do what ever He pleases and He is not accountable to no being... BUT His servants are. The Lord has a reason for everything He does, and who gives one the right to question our Dear Lord? His Lila (pastime) is beyond human comprehension but we humbly tried to explain a little (with my minuscule intelligence) above, as to why the Lord or His devotee acted in this regard.

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Thank you so much for taking the time to read this article. We pray that this article will assist you in some way and we also pray that it helps you to appreciate the beauty and remarkable foresight of our ancient Hindu culture. We wish to educate all readers and demystify the path of Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma). Please feel free to share these articles with friends and family who do not have direct access to our website or articles. If you use the articles in any form including blogs and/or as part of other articles kindly credit our website as a source. We hope that the articles serve as a reference to you and your family

when you need clarification of certain topics. Jai Hind... Jai Shree Radha Krsna.

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