

5. STIPEND FOR WIDOWS

While they provided guidelines for taking care of orphaned children, the problem of widows, it seems, did not come to the notice of Founding Fathers, in the beginning. Financial help, and later the Widow Fund, came into being after receipt of requests for assistance – still quite early, 1895. The number of recipients was quite small. On the basis of disbursement up to 1927, it has been worked out that an *average* of ten widows were availing this facility – Rupees Two per month. It is quite understandable because the self-esteem of a *Mohyalan* will not let her accept charity, unless she is in dire need of it. After all it is not an honorific award for the elderly.

It is good that the tradition of monthly financial assistance to widows has continued since then. Two observations appear necessary. One: that the stipend of Rupees Two per month in the beginning, about Rupees Six in the 1950s and Rs. 1000- at present: the amount has never been enough to maintain a widow, *if she had no other source of income*. This aspect has been overlooked. Two: at present reportedly there are more than 450 widows receiving stipend *and the number is increasing rapidly*. This raises doubts whether we really have so many indigent or destitute widows, when our small community is now, reportedly, quite affluent? The stipend must be being sanctioned by GMS on the recommendation of Local Sabha etc. *but they have no guidelines from GMS for assessment of eligibility*. A widow is a widow and the caretaker may apply for stipend: it could meet the mobile bill of *Mataji*. The local leaders are boasting about the increasing number of stipends they have secured from GMS during their respective regimes and we have no convention of any social audit or review of functioning of our organisations, while we are impressed by the mounting bill.

We submit that the issue should be examined seriously. It is the Mohyal community that is footing the bill. The eligibility criteria should be laid down by GMS and made public. Please think of the really destitute, for whose benefit (like the orphaned children) the procedure was introduced. They must have been starving, all along, if they did not have any other resource.

Click on the arrow <- on the top left of the computer and go on reading.

