



Introduction - The Partnership

The Prajapati London Foundation (PLF) is the charity arm of the Shree Prajapati Association, London. Their aim is to take on small projects which will relieve poverty and improve the lives of people throughout the world. To this effect they have kindly come forward to support the latest collaboration with Kamla Foundation.

The identified support that the PLF seeks to provide is a strong legacy whereby we stabilize the immediate chronic funding situation of the Widows Home, ensuring that the resident widows are provided with a decent comfortable environment in the twilight of their lives. They have kindly agreed to meet the core running costs for the up keep of the Home for one calendar year. This security will enable the Manager of the Home to seek long term sustainable funding options to safeguard the future of the Home.

“Changing Minds – Changing Lives” is at the root of the philosophy of Kamla Foundation and we firmly believe that helping the widows to stand independently and to provide a stimulating environment will enrich their lives within an otherwise wretched existence, enabling their voices to be heard and helping to uplift their status in society. The widows are the unacceptable face of India, a range of agencies including Central and Local Governments have failed them, Politicians with rare exceptions have ignored them and the rest of society will continue to exploit them.

India is changing no doubt, but even in today's India - the India of the silicon revolution - there are still millions of widows who are left without hope and yearn for the day when they will die.

The Context - The Dalit Community

The Dalit community are discriminated against and deprived of any social privileges in India. They are deemed to be ‘educationally backward’, socially discriminated, economically deprived, politically powerless and neglected. In the main, they don’t have any access to resource or welfare support from Government or any other agency. On December 27, 2006 Manmohan Singh became the first sitting Indian Prime Minister to openly acknowledge the parallel between the practice of “untouchability” and the crime of apartheid. Singh described “untouchability” as a “blot on humanity” adding that “even after 60 years of constitutional and legal protection and state support, there is still social discrimination against Dalits in many parts of our country.”

“Prime Minister Singh has rightly compared ‘untouchability’ to apartheid, and stressed that the Indian government can no longer deny its collusion in maintaining a system of entrenched social and economic segregation.”

Dalits endure segregation in housing, schools, and access to public services. They are denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of the Police and upper-caste community members who enjoy the state’s protection. Dalits also suffer routine violations of their right to life and security of person through state-sponsored or-sanctioned acts of violence, including

torture. All of our target beneficiaries reside in remote rural villages of Tamil Nadu. They are from the Dalit community and in the main are landless, and primarily engaged in menial work for survival.

The status of women

However, within this society, more often than not, the ultimate victim of rural poverty is the female. In most cases, the women are classed as secondary level citizens. Within these communities women are extremely vulnerable, asset less and invisible on the socio-economic front. They do not have access to any form of financial credit and are denied rights to property. They are therefore engaged in even greater menial work than their spouses and are often engaged in subsistence occupations to eke out a meager living.

Moreover, the role of women becomes crucial in these families where the male contribution to the household income is low. Some men spend almost all their income on personal consumption like liquor or tobacco. As a result, the family is heavily dependent on the earning potential of the women (and or children) for survival and a significant number of women are sole contributors to the family income.

The plight of Widows

Furthermore, within this group there is a sub set which is even further stigmatised and that is the plight of widows. It is estimated there are 40 million widows in India today - 10 percent of the country's female population. **India is the country with the largest widow population in the world - it has become home to the "husbandless"**.

For the majority of these widows life is what some have described as a "living sati", a reference to the now outlawed practice of widow burning. Only 28 per cent of the widows in India are eligible for pensions, and of that number, less than 11 per cent actually receive the payments to which they're entitled. If a woman is not financially independent, she's at the mercy of her in laws and her parents. And if they don't have the will or the resources to take care of her and her children, she's on her own.

Many widows are thrown out of family homes by their children or abandoned by their in-laws as evil women who caused the death of their husbands. Unfortunately, without a man by her side a woman has no respect in rural Indian society. **It is part of a patriarchal culture where a woman is respected only if she is a mother, daughter and wife,**

Traditionally when a man dies, his widow is expected to renounce all earthly pleasures. Widows should no longer look attractive, and are expected to wear only simple white saris for the rest of their lives. On news of their husband's death, they break their bangles and can no longer wear jewellery or use sindhoor - the red powder women wear in their parting and on their foreheads to denote their married status.

An orthodox widow may be expected to cut her hair or even shave her head. A widow from the south of the country may not even be able to wear a blouse under her sari.

The Project

ARUL MALAR OLD AGED HOME FOR WIDOWS

Tamil Nadu, India

Managed by: Development for Rural Oppressed People's Service Society - (DROPSS)

DROPSS is a Charity registered under Section 12A (a) of Income Tax Act 1961 registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act 1975 (Registration No. 80/1999).

The care home is supported by a group of passionate and committed Community Workers. It began life in 1999 and provides food and accommodation, health and related care services for widows who would otherwise be destitute. Currently the home is providing accommodation for 25 widows.



DROPSS also work with a range of Women's Groups and provide a much needed service which includes; family counselling, Prevention of Domestic Violence Workshops, Campaigning for equality for women within the mainstream of society. They work in some of the most impoverished neighbourhoods and in areas including slum dwellings in the district of Karaikudi Municipal Town and adjacent backward villages in Karaikudi Taluk



The Home is managed by an Executive Committee consisting of 11 women. Since its inception it has provided solace and inspiration for hundreds of women. The major services include; Home for Widows, Formation of Self Help Groups and Adolescent Girls Clubs, Awareness, Education, Vocational Trainings and Empowerment Education.

In February 2011, I visited the Home and saw at first hand the fantastic work of the workers who struggle to provide the support on a shoe string budget. The bulk of their time is taken up by seeking in kind donations for the up keep and general running of the Home. In response to this situation the Foundation feels compelled to raise funds for this incredible Project.



To find out more of the work of PLF please log onto: www.spalondon.org/