

Abstract

Widows of Vidarbha, Making of Shadows

Book discussion by Kota Neelima

Vidarbha, the parched heartland of central India, has become the foremost site of farmer suicides in the country. These suicides are the most striking indictment of the neglect of agriculture by the state. But the story of the farmers' distress does not end with their death; it lives on in the experience of their widows who struggle to survive in the shadows.

Widows of Vidarbha tells the story of 16 such widows who have been invisible to the state, the community, and even their families, and talks of their lost dreams, their diminished worldviews, and their helpless surrender to the conveniences of patriarchy. These narratives throw light on the dark and desperate corners of their invisible world, one that reflects the state of farm widows across the country.

Title: Widows of Vidarbha, Making of Shadows

Author: Kota Neelima

Publisher: Oxford University Press

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Book links:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/widows-of-vidarbha-9780199484676?lang=3n&cc=tz>

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Author Profile

Kota Neelima is an author and researcher, who writes on farmer suicides, gender and rural poor. She has a Doctorate in Political Science from the University of Delhi and a Master's degree in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Neelima was Senior Research Fellow, South Asia Studies at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC. She has been also a journalist for over 23 years, and was Political Editor for The Sunday Guardian newspaper.

Neelima's new book, *Widows of Vidarbha, Making of Shadows*, (2018, Oxford University Press) presents the life of the widows of farmer suicides due to agricultural distress. The narratives of farm widows reveal their invisibility to the state, the community, and even to their own families, and their constant surrender to the rules of patriarchy. Between the ages of 26 and 63, the lives of these widows were followed for three years to record how they survived without hope, and what impact it had on their children. Their stories reflect the Indian reality beyond the glitter of the cities and reveal life in the dark corners of this country.

Her earlier books fictionalised the narratives of rural poor and discussed facets of the crisis in Indian villages. *Riverstones* (2007/Reprint 2016, Penguin) explored the deliberate denial of farmer suicides by the elected representatives, while *Death of Moneylender* (2009/Reprint 2016, Penguin) revealed the role moneylenders played in a farmer's life. *Shoes of the Dead* (2013, Rupa) was a chronicle of rural anger against urban India and *The Honest Season* (2016, Penguin) questioned the conduct of elected representatives within the elected Houses.

Neelima is also an artist and her works are part of collections in India and abroad, including the Museum of Sacred Art, Belgium.

More at www.kotaneelima.com