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Durga is the project spanning more than 3 years of photography, and will be later compiled as a book.

A few years ago, I visited Vridavan, a holy city in the Uttar Pradesh. A chance visit to a shelter opened my eyes to the bleak world of widows in the margins of society. What I saw there deeply affected me and probably will remain with me for the rest of my life.

I saw a dark room lined up with many beds against the walls. There on the beds sat women in tattered white saris, most of them in their 70’s or older.

Who were these women? Where did they come from? Why aren’t their children or family with them? Lots of questions crowded my head. I tried talking to them about them—some of them poured their hearts out, some didn’t want to remember, some did not wish to talk about it. But that meeting sparkled in me the urge to come back to Vrindavan, again and again.

It’s been three years since then. I have lost the count of number of photos I have taken in these shelters of penury and dingy world. One day, a woman asked me sharply, “Why do you keep asking about our stories? What good is gone happen after all your photographs?

The question made think hard about what I was going to do with all the photographs and conversations. I decided to dig deeper and what came tumbling out were unbelievable facts and deeper conspiracy behind their abandonment, tracking back more than 200 years. There is a huge need of awareness on the subject, as practice of abandoning a widow is not really a thing of past. It happens even today, Hundreds of widows are forced to leave their home and end up in shelters homes or on the streets of Varanasi and Vrindavan. Denied of dignity, they lead lives of utter penury and humiliation until death decides to claim.

Why Durga?

Durga is a study of gender bias and discrimination against widows in India. It shows the bare hypocrisy of society where one is showered with adulation and the other is left crying in the dark.

Indians, the world all over worships Goddess Durga and has been celebrated as feminine power. And hypocritical society has deliberately muffled the voice of women who are fighting against inequality, whether it’s social, economic or sexual.

The idea is how Goddess Durga is in the midst of every women, whether she belongs in upper echelons of the society or the middle-class working woman, a humble village girl or even a widow, who’s so callously abandoned when her husband dies.

This series portrays how the hypocritical society is—how they idolize ma Durga and yet turning a blind eye on hundreds of millions of destitute mothers and wives, destroying them slowly.

This series has two distinct parts in the story. The initial part shows how every woman has Durga in her and second part is a visual story of the life of the widows, representing their lives in Vrindavan and Varanasi, the hardships they face and the glimpse of hope in the present situation when many NGO’s give them a helping hand.