26 May 2016

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.