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.

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.

27 May 2016

Veerappan:

Whenever we reminisce of 90’s, we think about our pleasant experiences of our childhood. But when our subconscious thinks about a name called Veerappan, there is a sense of terror and dread.

Back then even though there was no social media, the legends of Veerappan reached to the remotes of the areas and were known to everybody. His violent streaks from one forest to other. And his abductions brought shivers of fear and terror. And today when the pages of time bring us to the future we saw never coming, the ghosts of our past continue to travel with us in some one form or the other. One of the forms is cinema and one of these ghosts is Veerappan.

Ram Gopal Varma is known for lot of things, pandering audiences isn’t exactly one of them.

He is known for his unsolicited stories and Veerappan is exactly one of such stories he is bringing this Friday. Whether we’re happy with this drive down the memory lane or not, only time will tell. We are sure excited. But for now, the world has called for the story of Veerappan and that’s exactly I am bringing to you today.

Veerappan was born in a small village Gopinatham on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border. The geography of his birth played a very important role for the fate of the state and its people in further.

At an early age, He was very fond guns and killing. He was always curious and exposed to the world of poaching. His father Sevi was also a poacher at the time. Even before he was teenager, Veerappan was assisting his father by killing animals and smuggling their valuables.

At the age of 10 he had gunned down an elephant. His father was so impressed with his skills that he gave his personal gun to Veerappan, who was again just 10 at the time.

Being brought up in an oppressed world, a place for breeding ground for killers and poachers. As Veerappan continued to acquire skills of ivory smuggling and sandalwood, his rank elevated among his peers.

It wasn’t very long before Veerappan would commit his first murder, that of a forest guard, at the age of 17. He would go on to kill 14 people in his 40 years of reign.