

RURAL DISTRESS REPORT - MAHARASHTRA: WIDOWS OF FARMER SUICIDES, 2018

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. The Rural Distress Report of Vidarbha was undertaken for four years between 2014-2017, to follow and study the lives of the widows of farmer suicides. The research, published in the form of a book*, covered 18 case studies in Yavatmal and Amravati districts of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. The narratives revealed the condition of welfare, the undiminished control of patriarchy, and the invisibility that is imposed on rural women in Indian villages.



The widows inherit such invisibility because they are women. Their invisibility is executed and maintained through tradition, status, procedure, opportunity, value, and vote, all of which claim but fail to represent their interests and their rights.

* Widows of Vidarbha, Making of Shadows, Oxford University Press, 2018.

The first invisibility is brought about by tradition, which fails to represent the interests of the widow through her family and community. The inherited invisibility of tradition is a status quo that the widow prefers to keep. Such conformity was hailed as 'correct' conduct and is rewarded with security and respect, which reveals the second invisibility of the widow - status.

The state fails to assist widows to be independent of the conditional welfare of their family. This constitutes the third invisibility of the widow when the state fails to represent her rights and interests -procedure. The welfare schemes for widows, the marginalized, and other underprivileged sections of the society aim at empowerment without defining it for them. The widows are denied the chance to represent themselves, which reveals the fourth invisibility of the widows -opportunity.

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