

## **Author profile, Kota Neelima**

Kota Neelima is a political author and has been a journalist for over 23 years in New Delhi. She holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and a Doctorate in political science from the University of 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 was a political editor for The Sunday Guardian newspaper and principal correspondent for The Indian Express covering politics. She writes on farmer suicides, women farmers, gender, and issues concerning the rural poor and electoral reforms.

Neelima's new book, 'Widows of Vidarbha, Making of Shadows,' (2018, Oxford University Press) presents the life of the widows left behind by farmer suicides due to agricultural distress. The book presents the story of farm widows who have been invisible to the state, the community, and even to their own families, and talks of their 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. Widows of Vidarbha was first presented in Jaipur Literature Festival 2018. ([link to the talk](#))

Based on her experience as a journalist and researcher, Neelima's earlier books fictionalised the narratives of farmers to contrast the lives of the poor in Vidarbha with the lives of the powerful in cities. Her first novel, Riverstones (First print 2007. Reprint, Penguin Random House, 2016), explored the deliberate policies of the government that neglected farm crisis and denied farmer suicides. Her second novel, Death of a Moneylender (First print 2009. Reprint 2016, Penguin Random House), revealed the hopeless poverty in villages and how it was dismissed by mainstream journalism.

Her third novel, Shoes of the Dead (2013, Rupa Publications), has been one of the popular political books in India. This work examined, on the one hand, the farm crisis in a hypothetical village and the circumstances that led a farmer to commit suicide, and, on the other, the workings of dynastic politics and the cost politicians paid to survive in Delhi's power circles. The book tells the story of two young men, one from Delhi and another from a remote village, and contrasts the inheritance of power of a political heir with the inheritance of despair of a poor farmer. The book had been on the national bestseller charts in 2013 (HT-Nielsen Bookscan) and is being made into a motion picture in two languages. Her recent book, The

Honest Season (2016, Penguin Random House), reveals the deals that take place behind the closed doors of a mythical parliament. The story is about six conversations that are secretly recorded inside the parliament premises on issues ranging from how corporate houses dictate appointment of ministers to how politicians wash off the taint of communal riots. The book has been well received by critics and readers and was among the top 5 on airport charts across India (WH Smith). She works from her studio, StudioAdda, in New Delhi.

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