

REPORT FROM FIELD**Land of Widow: A Occupation Curse**

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Introduction

This interview has taken thru author Ph.D. field work, during May to September 2014 in Karauli District of Rajasthan. The area is mainly famous for pink colored construction stone used for carving and other decorative materials. Livelihood of the rural population of this district is mainly agriculture, animal husbandry, and mining (1). During field work I observe, many widows in the area. Major reasons of death among men are Silicosis. Silicosis is very much prevalent in Karauli (1), caused by inhaling silica dust (2,3). Indira Devi, is one of widow whom I met during my PhD field work.

Indira Devi (30), a widow of sandstone miner surviving with three daughters and two sons. Elder one is 13-year-old daughter and youngest is 1-year-old son. She is a resident of Sorya village 8 KM from Karauli Town. Sorya is a small village located in Karauli Tehsil of Karauli district, Rajasthan with total 238 families residing. Village has a population of 1374 of which 736 are males while 638 are females most of them belong to scheduled caste as per Census 2011. Distance of mine is only 1km from the village and major economic activities are mining.

(Amar Lal, Husband) First time he got blood at mine during work. He took Rs 1000 from mine agent and rush to district hospital. Then doctor doesn't tell anything about disease. He only had given medicine for six months. After that he was well. After few months, again blood came then admitted in TB ward. Then doctor told me about TB. When he took medicine, he was well. But the cough is always with him.

Eight years ago first time he was gravely ill then I admitted him in Kota for seven days. There, we know he had silicosis. After treatment, he was then stabilized. Two years back again he was ill, since then continuously sick. In between he admitted in Jaipur for 2-3 days and spent Rs 25000 on treatment. Since, he regularly admitted to the district hospital in Karauli. From the last six month, he was on the bed. He sat whole night because of chest pain and cough. Unable to speak and sat silent. I too awake with him the whole night. He felt hot in winter season and told me for wave fan and swab wet cloth on the body. He hadn't single chapatti in the last one month and three days before he had nothing. One day before death in evening, I admitted to the district hospital and morning he died. He was so light that I easily lifted him and get into the vehicle. Two hours before suddenly he started talking and asked for the son. Told me to stay safe and take care of the child. He died on 24th Nov 2013.

Since my husband illness, I worked on agriculture land on a daily basis. When my last son born, after discharge from hospital when I came home we don't have anything to eat. I slept empty stomach. I carried 12 days son to work as no one at home to take care. My husband was ill too. I knotted cloth on the tree from two ends and kept my son on that. I accompanied my daughter too when I had any offer of work (Her eye was tearful in between of response).

Currently, she is earning average 1500 per month from that 500 is coming from widow pension. She has bought three goats from money she received for husband disease (1 lakh). She paid off debt of 50,000

from it and 25,000 on treatment in Jaipur and rest in medicine and food. Currently don't have money to buy soap to wash cloth and fodder. My brother has left 50 kg wheat for us. From that we had some help.

Discussion

Like Indira Devi, many widows are in Karauli District. It is a curse on the women of the entire area; men work in sandstone mines for existing and die early due to silicosis (7). In a follow-up study of silicosis among sandstone miners in Jodhpur shows that 15% miners discontinued their job due to illness and after ten years about 11% workers died. Average age of death was 52 ± 13 years (9). The mine worker started work at very young age because fathers early death, who have the same occupation and died due to silicosis when son was young. So son has to start early to support family. When child become a father, the similar situation is continuing (6). This area has the largest number of young widows mostly under age 40 (5) and heads of most of the families are women (4). Arampura Jatav Basti is often referred to as "village of widows"(7). But there are other 44 villages in the same region that share a similar story (4). Unofficial estimates suggest there could be around 25,000 women in Karauli district alone who have been widowed as a result of silicosis. ARAVALI – Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement – a Rajasthan government initiated NGO along with its partner groups, which is creating a database of women widowed because of silicosis, have already registered 3,200 in just two blocks of Karauli (5). Due to various campaigns by NGO dang vikas sansthan(DVS)(7), the Rajasthan Environment and Health Administration Board has decided exgratia payment of Rs. 1.00 lakh for silicosis affected person and Rs.3.00 lakhs for family of the person died of silicosis to be paid from Rajasthan Environment and

Health Administrative Board (REHAB) that collects a mining cess (10).

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Figures

FIGURE 1

