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PHOTO ARTS

January 2021



Maramures

-where time
denies tickling along...

by **Lopamudra Talukdar**

THOMAS NIERLE's documentation brings to life the incredible biodiversity of the Alpine wilderness.
PAUL MEI documents the remarkable religious and cultural significance of Jordan River.



Photograph by Raj Sarkar

2020 was a year only a few or possibly none would remember with fondness. Ravaged by the now infamous pandemic, it made way for 2021, which like every other year brought with it promises for a new beginning. Only time will tell how 2021 performed on accord with those promises. Yet there is one thing which can be said with absolute certainty, something which though battered and bruised under the bludgeoning of the pandemic rose from the ashes and never stopped clawing its way with the hope of a better tomorrow, it is the indomitable human spirit. Irrespective of 2021 holds in store for us, armed with this indestructible resilience of ours we can certainly hope to weather any storm.

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Cover Page photograph by Lopamudra Talukdar



Maramures

- where time denies
tickling along

MARAMURES, AN ANONYMOUS
CORNER OF ROMANIA, OPENS UP THE
VISTAS OF A FICTIONAL REALITY.

LOPAMUDRA TALUKDAR BRINGS TO
THE FORE SLICES OF LIFE FROM THIS
ANCIENT LAND DESERTED BY TIME
ITSELF.

Cover Story

Stranded alone, as the rest of the world kept pace with changing times, change itself had shunned this remote corner of Europe. Maramures is an isolated county in Romania, a place where time lost its way and stood still.

88 years of age but young at heart, this woman reminisces her youthful days, much of which centred around her church in the quaint village of Breb in Maramures County in Romania.



How does it feel to engage in a duel with time to stem its flow? Only a fool's endeavour, one would quip, and no blame can be ascertained to such pessimism for their can be only one victor emerging out of this lopsided contest – time itself. Yet there is a place on this planet, so remote, so cast away even the meandering streams of time which stop at nothing has failed to penetrate this land. It seems when the rest of Europe was hurrying towards a modern tomorrow shedding off its mediaeval ways, in that haste it had left this ancient piece of land behind. Stranded alone, as the rest of the world kept pace with changing times, change itself had shunned this remote corner of Europe. This is the intriguing tale of Maramures, an isolated county in Romania, a place where time lost its way and stood still.

Nestled in the mountains of Northern Romania, not far from the Ukraine border, Maramures is a magical entity, a wonderland harbouring green hamlets with ethno cultural nuances. The region though sprawled across 6682 sq. miles is sparsely populated with some villages huddled sporadically in pockets. While the rest of Romania still shudders at the afterthought of the darkest regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, Maramures could somehow manage to escape his evil clutches. But following that dark age of autocracy, while the rest of the country bounced back to modernity, Maramures remained as it was before — a strangely cloistered place,

estranged and engaging at the same time with a cinematic blend of fantasy and reality.

Nicolae Ceausescu's regime ushered in a dark era for Romania which culminated in the infamous poverty of the 1980s which swept through the land. In an attempt to wipe off the accumulated debt, Ceausescu brought the country under his iron grip and rationed essential commodities such as gas, heating, food materials, reduced wages and unleashed his secret police – Securitate, who wielded an iron whip to ensure the leader's austerity drive was implemented without much hiccup.

Ceausescu in the meanwhile quite conveniently excluded himself from this austerity drive as he accumulated massive fortunes and splurged extravagantly, most notably on the construction of the rather ironically termed "People's Palace" for himself, the opulence of which remained far beyond the reaches of the people who blighted by the abysmally plunging standard of life were struggling on the streets of Romania. The oppressive regime of close to a decade culminated in a series of uprising which eventually toppled his reign in 1989. As the rest of the country clawed its way to an age of prosperity Maramures, yet again, was left stranded alone.

To an outsider Maramures opens up the vistas of a fictional reality. Here, one might find Chekhovian characters from anonymous provincial towns of Russian society come alive animatedly and

welcome visitors to their old worldview. As one travels to this forgotten land relentless intrusion of the past in the present — scenes of period films with sepia undertones, remain a permanent fixture. To the uninitiated Maramures springs straight out from fables or bedtime fairy tales. The village of Breb in Maramures County upholds the same archaic way of life commonplace in other settlements of the county. Freezing winter spreads a blanket of white and assiduously tucks every nook and corner under it. Flakes of fresh snow gently caress the cypress,

To the uninitiated Maramures springs straight out from fables or bedtime fairy tales. The village of Breb in Maramures County upholds the same archaic way of life...

poplar, spruce, and the orchards of plum, apple, and cherry cloaked in the misty white do well to uphold the sombre mood. Emerging out of the mist, trotting along the snow clad boulevard emerges a horse drawn carriage – the first sign of the region's defiance of the laws of time. Cultivating crops and grazing cattle in the plots of various shades of green, carrying timbers on the cart to hone their craftsmanship, threshing hay, burning dry leaves and stacking the harvest with old grannies keeping alive the flavour of traditional dishes make a picturesque tapestry of pastureland peopled with colourfully garbed peasants. It is a village lulled in pastoral bliss. The colossal wooden gateways at the entrance of the simple yet aesthetically decked up timber

houses are reflective of the supreme craftsmanship of the denizens. Wood carvings and wooden artefacts form the bedrock of the art and the philosophic expression of this community. The lavish wooden doorways belie the humble interiors beyond them. Usually they lead to an open expanse which houses cattle shed or pen for livestock at the other end of which an elegant wooden hut stands proud. The locals believe the elaborate doorways leading to the premises of their properties would ensure the families are protected and looked after by the Almighty,

the influence of whom is quite palpable in the community. The elegant huts do their best to conceal the tell-tale signs of poverty inside as does the splendid artistry inside. Simple kitchen utensils and ceramic dishes neatly hung adorn the walls while embroidered scarfs folded with great care are stacked upon the few modest pieces of furniture. The occupant of these cosy establishments quite often is a septuagenarian or even an octogenarian, spinning wool or engaged in some domestic chores in a lazy wound up motion well prepared to make any visitor feel at home with a disarming smile befitting of the warm cosy interiors.

Modern automobiles, courtesy the younger generation visiting home for Christmas, stand in stark contrast to the ancient horse drawn carriages of Maramures.





These youngsters are back home only for Christmas. They live elsewhere, but Christmas brings them home without fail, and jackets and jeans get tossed for age-old traditional clothing.

Maramures is deeply rooted in traditions. The festival of Christmas brings the ancient traditions of the region and its people to the fore. The younger generations, who have managed to move out of their ancestral lands in search of greener pastures elsewhere in the country or the world, are well acquainted with technology

and the modern ways of life. Many of them drive up to their ancestral lands in their flashy cars and love to showcase their penchant for designer clothes. However Christmas is the time for home coming and even these impetuous and brave-hearted young generations do not defy tradition when they come and meet the

elders of their families. So behind the traditional dresses, blue denim often peeps out but the entire household or the church gathering is uniformly landscaped with traditional attires. Men are dressed in thick felt trousers, wide belts and funnel-shaped hats while the ladies drape themselves in a traditional gathered skirt, thick woollen

blouses and head scarves. Again, the array of colours in stark contrast to the sombre misty grey backdrop of winter seems to pop out of the pages of ancient folklores. Maramures is also known for its wooden churches, which are architectural masterpieces and reflect the superlative craftsmanship of this region. The impressive wooden structures of the Churches with tall spirals tower above their surroundings and stand proud from time immemorial, a time that denies ticking along. Historical accounts of the region suggest these churches were constructed between the 17th and the 19th century. The use of gigantic logs and the intricate carvings on them remain the hallmark of these ancient structures. These Churches are integral to the identity of the people of this region and provide glimpses into the uniqueness of this region. Of the 100 odd wooden churches in Maramures, 8 were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1999. The craftsmen of Maramures who were responsible for the construction of such impressive places of worships were highly skilled artisans and through generations had inherited the expertise to construct log structures with plain and well-sealed walls. In fact these craftsmen were exclusive church carpenters who were traditionally entrusted with the responsibility of constructing such elaborate places of worships carved out of gigantic wooden logs. In the village of Breb the vast snow covered cemetery with wooden crosses jutting out at the backdrop

of the imposing Church once again serves as a reminder to that mystic, the fictional Chekhovian world.

Christmas is the time for homecoming in the village of Breb and for once, albeit briefly, the aged occupants of the elegant wooden households look forward with eager eyes for a reunion with their sons, daughters or even their grandchildren. And no reunion is complete without an assortment of home cooked delicacies.

The winter air leading up to Christmas in the village of Breb is laden with the sweet aroma of the traditional cuisine, the enchanting ways of which lure the younger generation of Berb back to their roots.

Elderly men and women, who lead a secluded, almost deserted existence eagerly, anticipate the return of their loved ones. An elaborate spread of traditional Maramures cuisine graces the neatly laid out tables in the households. The ever so delicious Sarmale, a dish made out of cabbage leaves and minced meat is almost always a certainty at every table. Sarmale is usually accompanied by Polenta – a staple food made of cornmeal and the occasion of Christmas and the soaring spirits call for generous servings of Horinka – the traditional double distilled plum brandy. Yet there will always be some households which keep waiting for their loved ones to return only in vain. An elderly woman in her 90s waits for her only son who is now in his 60s, to visit her on the occasion of Christmas. It is hard to tell for how long she has been

waiting and how long her wait will last, yet each year during the festive season she musters enough strength in her fragile and decaying body as her increasingly unsteady fingers whips up homemade cheese and cakes, following a recipe she has been following for many decades.

Maybe she still harbours the hope of seeing her son one last time, maybe she has given up all hope, it is hard to tell, yet her crave for human companionship becomes obvious as she lovingly distributes the cakes and cheese and embraces anyone visiting her with the warm and tender hug of someone desperate to fill up the emotional void. In the time locked existence of Maramures, such poignant scenes pan out in tandem with the prevalent air of festivities.

Elderly men and women, who lead a secluded, almost deserted existence eagerly anticipate the return of their loved ones. An elaborate spread of traditional Maramures cuisine graces the neatly laid out tables in the households.





Young men adorn these traditional felt coats and trousers when they visit the village of Breb for the occasion of Christmas. Behind the traditional dresses, blue denim often peeps out but the entire household or the church gathering is uniformly landscaped with traditional attires.



Viflaim is a religious theatre show played on a stage in front of the church and young men from the village sand carols, dressed in their folk attire on the occasion of Christmas.



Even the elderly residents are fiercely independent. This lady in her late 80s is adamant about doing things on her own even in the brutal winters, declining any hint of help.

Come the next Christmas, maybe some of these old timers will enter the realm of eternal rest and claim their places in the snow covered cemetery in the backyard of the iconic Church of Breb, while others will be fortunate enough to share another hearty meal with their near and dear ones. The family gatherings will witness the introduction of more and more modern gadgets and appliances courtesy the

youngsters, more courtyards will turn settings of stark contrast with the ancient animal pens and the swanky modern automobiles parked next to them, maybe the visitors will be less inclined in the upkeep of the elaborate wooden gateways or the churches in their neighbourhood ,yet it becomes amply clear it still remains a daunting task for the more modernized tech savvy outside world to triumph over

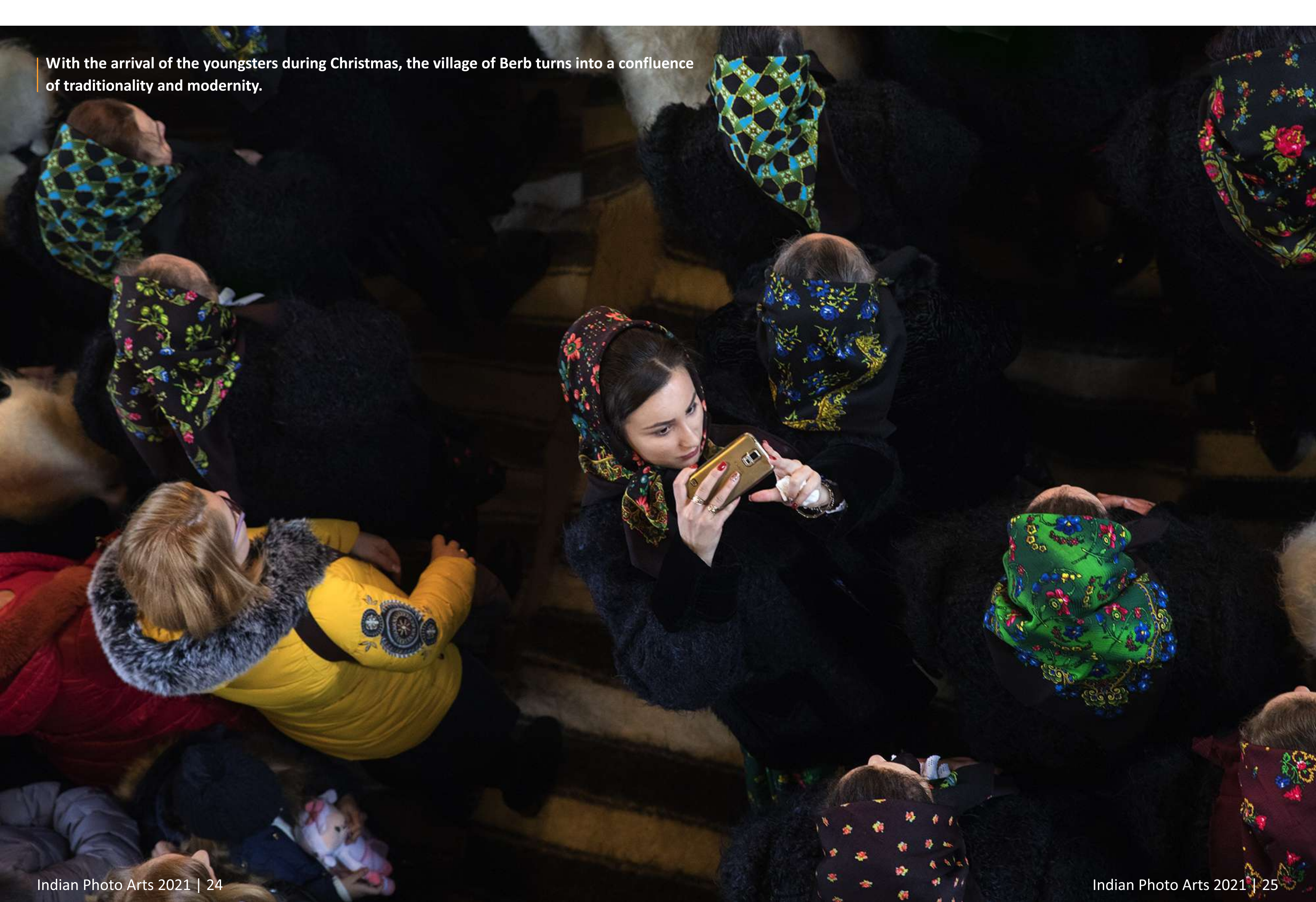
Carols are serious business at the church. This elderly man dresses up meticulously and comforts his cat before heading out to church to sing.

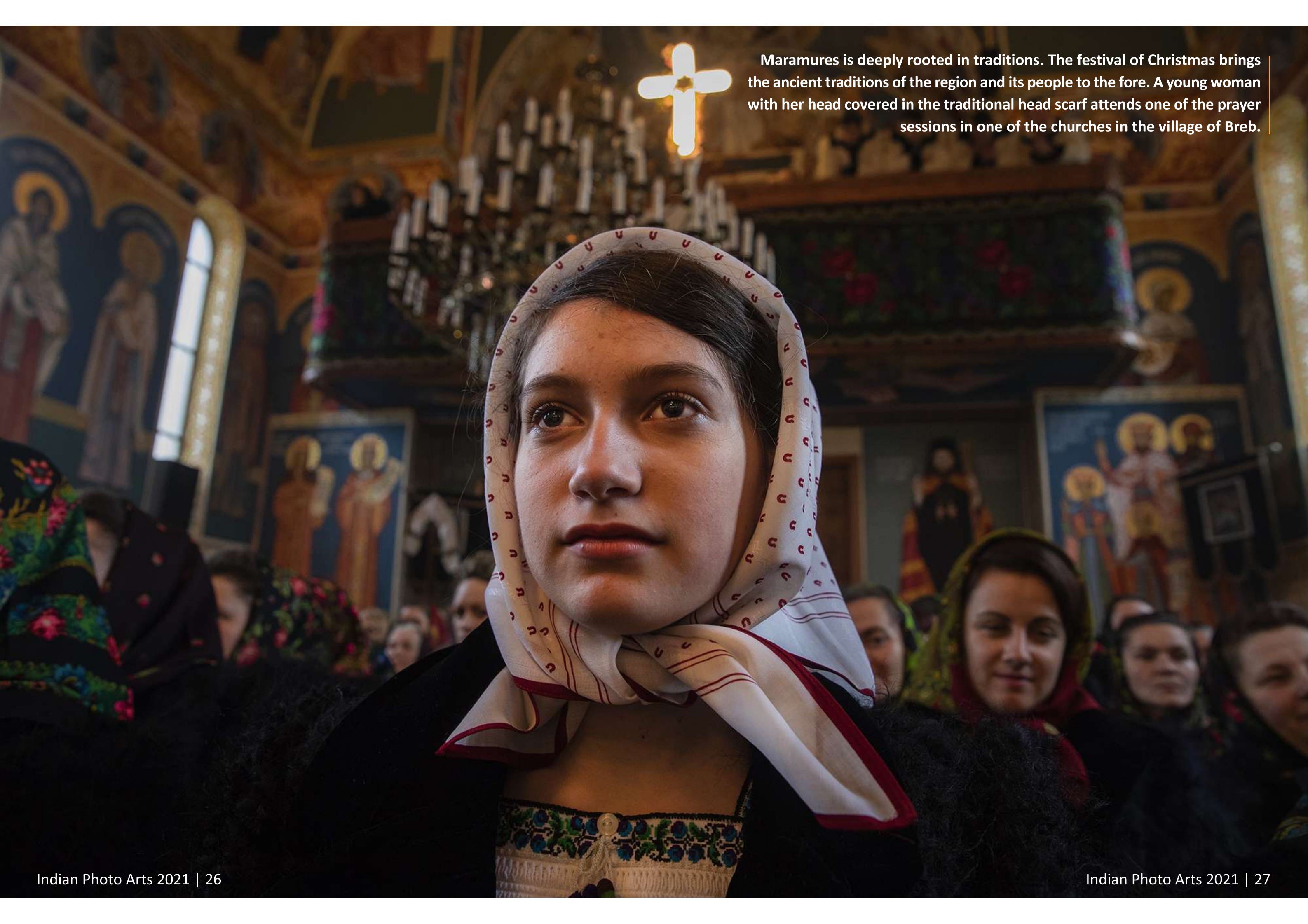


a heartfelt conversation, or a long awaited visit to a neighbour's or relative's house in the close knit Maramures society. The young generation is not averse to the idea of driving luxurious cars or flaunting their hard earned wealth, maybe in the days to

come they would demolish the ancient wooden structures in order to make way for something more suited to their urban, modern way of life, yet in the family gathering, they follow the same line that their ancestors kept following for ages.

With the arrival of the youngsters during Christmas, the village of Berb turns into a confluence of traditionality and modernity.





Maramures is deeply rooted in traditions. The festival of Christmas brings the ancient traditions of the region and its people to the fore. A young woman with her head covered in the traditional head scarf attends one of the prayer sessions in one of the churches in the village of Breb.



The cemetery at the village of Breb in Maramures is in perfect harmony with the idyllic setting where traditional ways still reign supreme and the agents of the modern world are yet to make any inroad into this ancient society.

One cannot help but feel not only the houses and the horse-drawn carts, but the people as well are from a different era. They have time for their neighbours, time to entertain their guests and they are the people with the essential yet increasingly less practiced courtesies and warmth. They still regard the essence of a physical hug over tech-savvy communications through emoticons and apps in mobile phones. The giant logs with their carvings welcoming one to the households, the iconic Churches, the snow covered vistas leave a lasting impression. A walk through

the villages of Maramures is akin to flipping through the pages of mediaeval Europe and the ethereal landscape is enchanting enough to provide a feeling of an incredibly beautiful lucid dream. Despite the plethora of uniqueness of the region and the surreal setting, it is the warm, simple, hardworking and affectionate people of Maramures who leave the biggest imprint on the lesser acquainted. The playful kids enacting a play on the streets on Christmas eve, the little ones who with their pretty bags slung across their shoulder trudges along from

door to door carrying the heavy load of their hard earned labour in the form of assortment of toffees and cookies, the disarming smile on the faces of the elderly men and women ever willing to greet any outsider in their humble homes, the hardworking villagers with their simple ways of life who never seem to run out of time to greet a stranger or strike up a conversation, moments like these are bound to enrich the treasure trove of memory of anyone visiting this ancient land. There is something magical about the Maramures, as the sun would rise

across the Carpathian range, the mornings would assure one of a blissful beginning, with the leaves rustling in the woods, with the birds chirping, the cowbells jingling and the herds lowing, keeping pleasing trails in the mind. The chiming of the church bells makes the air all the more dreamy and the divide between reality and fantasy turns blurry turning the real itself into nothing but a fantasy.



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Lopamudra Talukdar, known as "Lopa" in the close group, is a documentary and street photographer from India. She is an educator and world traveller. She likes to think of herself as a traveller and student of world culture first before a photographer. Whether it is understanding the vanishing cultures of the world, documenting nomadic tribes and their lifestyle, chronicling the ancient rituals of religion and faith, or simply capturing candid split-second moments on the streets, it is the human condition and her instinctive ability to visually tell a story that stands out as a pervasive theme. Lopa's recent projects include chasing the sub-zero winter lifestyle of the Changpa nomads of Ladakh — home to the famous pashmina wool sheep, documenting disappearing traditions and art forms of indigenous cultures in her native India and embarking on a long-term project to capture the once romanticized lifestyle of cowboys in different parts of the world, amongst others. Lopamudra has led workshops and mentored participants for Canon India and is a Fujifilm X-mentor. Her work has been widely exhibited and published all over the world.

**Lopamudra
Talukdar**

Alpine Wilderness

an ecosystem

on the precipice

Thomas Nierle documents the incredibly diverse Alpine ecosystem and raises concerns over the menaces of climate change plaguing this pristine wilderness.

In the background of this image the Moiry glacier which has lost – like most other alpine glaciers, significant parts of its ice shield due to global warming.



Male ibexes remain in loose groups throughout the year. Only at the rut in December will they join the female groups. Throughout the year the group's hierarchy is determined by "horn fights".

Tens of millions of years ago, when on a rather restless and violent planet Earth, two tectonic plates were sparring with each other, little did they know this duel of theirs was paving the path for one of the most iconic structures in the natural world a few million years down the line. The result of these two massive tectonic plates trying to assert dominance over each other pushed the ground up over a vast expanse of approximately 1200 km spanning across eight European nations thus forming the Alps – dotted with hundreds of peaks, a significant proportion of which are above 4000 meters with the highest being Mont Blanc which peaks into the clouds high above at an imposing altitude of 4809 meters along the French- Italian border. It would be a futile endeavour to try and phrase the beauty of this earthly paradise in words for hardly any adjective is capable enough of doing justice to the scenic beauty of this iconic mountain range. Placed against the brilliant azure of the sky, the snow clad peaks of the Alps slope into emerald green lakes and open up to lush meadows, painting a picture so sublime which makes its way into the core of even the most casual observer's heart.

The Alps is mostly recognized for its scenic beauty and some of the iconic mountain peaks across the continent of Europe. The snow clad peaks which pierce into the sky above and stand tall like old sentinels keeping a watchful eye over the continent

of Europe often appear stoic, steadfast in their resolve. Yet the most potent force on this planet – life itself, tamed these steep rocky slopes, the bone chilling temperature, the snow and every other harsh element of nature and exploded in myriad forms, colours, shapes and sizes in this snowy realm. The Alps, particularly the snowy realms of it, is home to a multitude of species, which have devised unique methods and adaptations to carve a niche for them in this seemingly inhospitable roof of Europe. The denizens of this world are surefooted enough to navigate the treacherous slopes, sturdy enough to withstand extreme cold and bold enough to soar high above the snow-capped peaks braving the thin air in which oxygen is in little supply. This is a place for the brave hearted, a place which tests every survival skill of its denizens every step of the way, a place where life has overcome all the obstacles and staked its claims in a supreme display of adaptations which are noticeable in every creature which calls the Alpine wilderness its home. One of the most widely recognised species in the Alps is the Alpine ibex. Once hunted to near extinction by marauding troops of emperors and subsequently by big game hunters in the 17th and 18th century these sturdy animals have staged a resounding comeback from a small population in a royal hunting reserve in Northern Italy, thanks to the number of reintroduction programs which were carried out across the Alps. There are very few creatures



The Alpine ibex was hunted to near extinction in the Alps during the 17th and 18th century. Only a small population persisted in a royal hunting reserve in Northern Italy. Reintroduction programs all over the Alps were successful and now its population is thriving again.



Roe deer are frequent in all parts of Switzerland. The alpine populations have significant difficulties to pass the winter as their anatomy is not adapted to deep snow.

on this planet which are as surefooted as the Alpine ibex. These wild goats are excellent climbers and are perfectly at home along the rocky slopes and ridges up and along the snowline. The males are equipped with large horns which surprisingly are of little to no hindrance to their climbing abilities. Crevices along these ridges and rocky slopes are the preferred real estate which these animals seek out when they are not foraging along the slopes. The barren rocky slopes are typically devoid of thick vegetation which compels the ibex to forage for long hours

Apart from the ibex, the Alps is home to a number of ungulates in the form of red deer, roe deer and chamois. The red deer was hunted to extinction in Switzerland in the 19th century. Since then, it has recolonized the Western Alps from the East and today's populations are stable and primarily located at higher altitudes. The red deer is one the largest deer species, coming next only to the imposing moose and elk and the formidable sambar. The males, like other deer species are typically equipped with elongated antlers which serve the dual purpose of attracting a

There are very few creatures on this planet which are as surefooted as the Alpine ibex. These wild goats are excellent climbers and are perfectly at home along the rocky slopes and ridges...

along these slopes in search of grass, moss, flowers, tubers which make up the significant chunk of their diet. Every episode in the lives of these animals pans out against the rocky snowy slopes of the Alps. During the breeding season which usually extends from December to January males and females engage in courtships, it is also during this time of the year tempers flare courtesy the increased level of testosterone and the males ram into each other with their horns interlocked in an effort to earn the mating rights with the female. The young ones are born after a gestation period of 5-6 months and are remarkably equipped to navigate the treacherous nooks and corners of their new home within a few hours of their birth.

female during the breeding season and keeping other prying males at bay. The males in addition to their antlers are considerably larger and heavier than the females and both the sexes sport the signature reddish brown coat. The bone chilling winters force them to climb down to lower altitudes, although these animals prefer the upper reaches of the Alps for foraging and raising their young ones. Along with the red deer the Alps is home to the much smaller species of roe deer. Roe deer are plentiful particularly across the Swiss Alps and the males are slightly larger than the females and sport short stout antlers unlike the elaborate ones which their more imposing relatives the red deer sports. Although a member of this snowy abode, these deer face

significant difficulties in braving the snow, particularly during the winter months largely due to their anatomy. As a result of which they prefer the dense coniferous slopes of the Alps or open grasslands with adequate food source just above the

treeline. Courtesy their smaller disposition, which makes them susceptible to predators lurking along the slopes, these deer prefer to remain in cover during the day in order to prevent being spotted by hungry pair of eyes and venture out in the cover of

night for foraging.

While the stocky and sturdy limbs of an ibex allow it to quite literally scale great heights in a rather defiant manner, the incredibly agile chamois does the same with the grace of an athlete. The chamois

is incredibly adapted to the alpine environment. Its anatomy and physiology allow this animal to scale 1000 meters in just 15 minutes. A rather small antelope the chamois uses its light frame to its advantage while escaping from the



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The red deer was hunted to extinction in Switzerland in the 19th century. Since then, it has recolonized the Western Alps from the East and today's populations are stable and primarily located at higher altitudes. The red deer is one of the largest deer species, coming next only to the imposing moose and elk and the formidable sambar. The males, like other deer species are typically equipped with elongated antlers which serve the dual purpose of attracting a female during the breeding season and keeping another prying male at bay. The bone chilling winters force them to climb down to lower altitudes, although these animals prefer the upper reaches of the Alps for foraging and raising their young ones.

clutches of its predators by covering great distances across rocky cliffs in single leaps or by clocking speed in excess of 50kmph across such rocky terrain.

The Alpine wilderness houses a number of Mustelids – members from the weasel family such as short tailed weasel and beech marten along with their distant cousin Alpine marmot and red squirrel which are members of the squirrel family. Short tailed weasels can be found from lowlands to an altitude of 3000 meters. In a remarkable adaptation ideally suited for this habitat these animals sport a brownish coat which turns completely white and

dense during winter months except for the tip of their tail. The white coat enables it to camouflage perfectly in the snow and conceals it from aerial threats. As is the case with members of the weasel family, both the short tailed weasel and the beech marten are territorial creatures and use a number of methods such as scent marking or defecation to mark their territories. The beech marten prefers to nest in the crevices along the ridges or slopes of the mountains while the short tailed weasel prefers refuge in the hollow trunks of fallen trees or even in the burrows or nests of other creatures. Their diet primarily consists of rodents,

insects, smaller birds and often these opportunist feeders make the most out of a leftover kill made by other larger predators. Alpine marmots are large members of the squirrel family and are plentiful along the slope of the Alps though they prefer to avoid the harsh winters by hibernating in their burrows from October to April. Alpine marmots are social creatures and each group is headed by one dominant breeding pair. The colonies of marmots are extremely protective of their turf and any intrusion from members of their same kind is met with quick and decisive moves. While foraging on grass,

herbs and an assortment of insects these animals often stand on their hind legs in order to keep a lookout on their surroundings. Alpine marmots make the most of the summer months when food is abundant in order to fatten up for the lean winter months. Red squirrels on the other hand are a fraction of their cousins – the Alpine marmot in terms of size. While red squirrels are common in the lowlands across Eurasia and are indeed reddish orange in appearance, the ones inhabiting the Alpine wilderness are darkish brown in appearance. This is presumably an adaptation to the colder climate.

While red squirrels are common in the lowlands across Eurasia and are indeed reddish orange in appearance, the ones inhabiting the Alpine wilderness are darkish brown in appearance. This is presumably an adaptation to the colder climate.





(above) Short tailed weasels can be found from lowlands to an altitude of 3000 meters. In a remarkable adaptation ideally suited for this habitat these animals sport a brownish coat which turns completely white and dense during winter months except for the tip of their tail. The white coat enables it to camouflage perfectly in the snow and conceals it from aerial threats.

(left) The strictly nocturnal beech marten has a wide range of distribution as long as there are some rocky areas around. That's how it was able to colonize towns all across Europe. The beech marten prefers to nest in the crevices along the ridges or slopes of the mountains.



Alpine marmots are large members of the squirrel family and are plentiful along the slope of the Alps and frequent the alpine meadows. They hibernate from October to April and, hence, it is unusual to see them on fresh fallen snow.

While the four legged denizens of the Alpine ecosystem hop skip and jump from crevices to trenches along these rocky slopes, the winged residents in these snowy mountains too are perfectly at home. Some soar high above courtesy their unique adaptations which enable them to take these flights at altitudes well above 5000 meters; others forage in the thick snow or rocky crevices navigating their way effortlessly through this terrain coupled with short flights. Among the avifauna of the Alps, the bearded vulture deserves a special mention. This large bird of prey is widely known for its peculiar palate, which comprises almost entirely of bone marrow. The remarkably high concentration of acid in the stomach of these birds allows them to digest bones from the carrions with considerable ease and the fat rich bone marrow provides them with the much needed energy

required to soar high above the snow-capped peaks in search of carrion. Vultures traditionally have been associated with evil or bad omen and the bearded vulture was no exception to this in 17th or 18th century Europe. Once widespread across Eurasia, the bearded vulture was hunted to extinction in Europe by the beginning of the 20th century. An ambitious and detailed reintroduction program in the late 1980s which primarily aimed at introducing captive bred chicks and hand rearing them till adulthood started bearing results. Since then over the past 30 years the bearded vulture has been staging a steady comeback and has recolonized parts of the Alpine arc and their populations are steadily increasing. Although it largely prefers feasting on the bones of carrion, the bearded vulture is known to harass a potential meal in the form of smaller ungulates or even a mid-sized ibex with the objective of startling its prey down the rocky slopes resulting in a decisive fatal blow. Another imposing presence in the sky is that of the golden eagle's. This extremely large bird of prey is a superb flier blessed with a vision which can pick up the slightest movement on the ground from miles above. It is in fact considered by many naturalists as one of the best fliers among raptors. Most ground dwellers in the Alpine habitat are not safe from the piercing gaze and razor sharp talons of this raptor. Apart from their menacing presence in the sky, the golden eagle is fiercely territorial, and duels aimed at



A huge reintroduction program has allowed the bearded vulture to recolonize parts of the alpine arc over the last thirty years. The populations in parts of Western Switzerland are gradually increasing.

asserting dominance pan out mid-air, when the warring parties lock talons and spin vociferously until the fainter hearted succumbs to the rigors of the conflict. The Eurasian pygmy owl on the other hand is the antithesis of the large birds of prey in the Alps. It is the smallest species of owl in Europe and in central Europe their populations are restricted to mountainous areas. The Alps happens to be one such stronghold for these birds.

While the bearded vulture and golden

eagle can be often seen soaring high above in circles scanning the rocky slopes and ridged underneath, the rocky crevices and nooks are home to a number of ground dwelling birds. The most elusive of them is the rock partridge – a member of the pheasant family. Wary of the multitude of dangers these birds conceal themselves in the crevices and ridges along the slopes of the mountains and it is only during the mating season when they give off their proverbial mating calls, these birds

announce their presence in this rocky abode. Rock ptarmigans like most species in this habitat are incredibly well adapted for a life up in these snowy mountains. These birds are permanent settlers in these mountains and during winters take refuge in the rocky ridges where due to wind the snow cover is relatively less. An adaptation which is notable in many species in these mountains the rock ptarmigan too does

the all-white winter coat which provides the bird with perfect camouflage in this all white setting. The black grouse is a larger relative of the rock ptarmigan and another permanent dweller in these mountains. Spring marks the congregation of the males and females of this species , a gathering termed as lek during which the males parade themselves in a rather spellbinding display of courtship.



(above) The black grouse is a larger relative of the rock ptarmigan and another permanent dweller in these mountains. Spring marks the congregation of the males and females of this species, a gathering termed as lek during which the males parade themselves in a rather spellbinding display of courtship.

(left) The most elusive of them is the rock partridge – a member of the pheasant family. Wary of the multitude of dangers these birds conceal themselves in the crevices and ridges along the slopes of the mountains and it is only during the mating season when they give off their proverbial mating calls, these birds announce their presence in this rocky abode.

Rock ptarmigans are highly adapted to living in high altitudes throughout the year. In fact, they spent winter on ridges where snow cover is low due to constant wind. An adaptation which is notable in many species in these mountains the rock ptarmigan too dons the all-white winter coat which provides the bird with the perfect camouflage in this all white setting.



The Eurasian pygmy owl is the smallest European owl and its distribution in Central Europe is restricted to mountainous areas. The Alps are a stronghold of its population.

The common brown frog is a regular sight in Switzerland. However, the observation of the “love parade” on snow is only possible in selected sites at higher altitudes.



Like every other ecosystem on this planet, the Alpine ecosystem too is reeling under the scourge of climate change. During the previous century, the average temperature of the Alps rose by a worrying 3 degree Fahrenheit and at this rate it is expected to double itself by the end of 21st century. Among the notable subjects of this high altitude ecosystem, the glaciers are the first one to exhibit tell-tale signs of climate change. The slightest of changes brought about by climate change in terms of temperature and amount of precipitation affect the nature of the glaciers in ways

of glaciers can alter the way in which water travels from the higher reaches of the mountains to the lower valleys and it goes without saying the changes brought about by climate change have been anything but slight. As a result of which erratic patterns interspersed with droughts during warm summer months, floods and landslides in winters are becoming all the more commonplace. The rising temperature on the other hand paves the ideal breeding ground for some of the pathogens from which the colder climate of the Alps had thus far shielded it.

During the previous century, the average temperature of the Alps rose by a worrying 3 degree Fahrenheit and at this rate it is expected to double itself by the end of 21st century.

the ripple effects of which can be felt across the entire ecosystem. Under the steady but harrowing effects of global warming, the alpine glaciers have steadily receded over the past century, which in turn has led to an upward mobility of the Alpine treeline. Snow and glacial ice melt during the summer months and provide this ecosystem with the much needed water sources in the form of mountainous streams and rivers. During the summer months the melting ice of glaciers provide the much needed resources to the lower reaches of the Alps. However this ancient cycle of storage and supply is under threat now as the snowline is pushed back inches by inches by the ever-present faculties of climate change. The slightest change in precipitation, snow cover and movement

This poses the threat of an invasion at a macro level resulting in deadly virus borne diseases which can easily wipe off wild population of certain species in the Alps in hordes. The disappearing snowline poses the additional threat of exposing the rocky and unstable topography of the Alps which makes treading across it almost inhospitable even for some of the most sure footed creatures on this planet. Additionally such developments lead to frequent landslides and avalanches which pan out at a scale incomprehensible to most and quite literally obliterate vast swathes of forest patches along with inflicting heavy casualties. In this closely knit ecosystem, where every cog in the wheel is largely dependent on the other for the smooth functioning of the entire set

up the slightest shift in the balance can easily upend this fragile ecosystem. The shockwaves resulting from steady and unfortunate developments courtesy climate change at above 4000 meters is felt by every organism which finds itself at home all the way down to the lush green valleys and meadows. The Alpine wilderness and this ecosystem have withstood the test of time, and braving some of the fiercest elements of nature life has carved a niche for itself in some of the most inhospitable terrains imaginable. Yet life, in its myriad forms, shapes and sizes, is presently faced with the sternest test ever in this snowy realm, and alarmingly it is faced with an enemy which is a handiwork of us – humans. Unfortunately this is one victory which the natural world is not equipped enough to procure on its own. The monster which human civilisation has created in the form of climate change has now turned rogue and now it is turning against the very planet we so dearly call home. The Alps too, is one such home to hundreds of species and thousands of creatures, and it is under threat. The numbers, data, analysis, fail to project a heartening picture of the future. Even by conservative estimates which quite graciously and optimistically factor in a reduced pollution levels in the foreseeable few decades, the temperature in the Alps is projected to rise by 5-6 degrees Fahrenheit. One look at the devastation caused by the effects of climate change till date is enough to send chills down the spine of nature enthusiasts

at the thought of how these numbers and projections augur for the Alpine wilderness. Among all the subjects of nature, mountains tend to exhibit the changes in the slowest and most gradual manner. However contrary to this notion, the Alps has been exhibiting a disconcerting trend over the past few decades. Worryingly, off late, researches, scientists and mountaineers have been reporting numerous changes in terms of topography, snow cover, vegetation, landslides and animal movements across a number of faces along the Alpine mountains. These changes are taking place at a much faster rate than previously anticipated leaving the flora and fauna with little or no time to adapt at all. This points towards one and one direction only – the imminent extinction of a number of species, not eradicated by the laws of nature but obliterated by actions in our everyday lives.

A diverse and intricate ecosystem, where the cycle of life and death pans out amidst some of the most picturesque settings on this planet, is standing at the precipice, with the very real threat of extinction looming large in the horizon. The number of reintroduction programs which have been successful in reversing the fortunes of a number of wild species in the Alps will be of little use against the menaces of climate change. The monster which derives its strength from the carbon footprints which we leave on this planet during the course of our daily lives has its



The red fox has adapted to many different habitats including the Alpine wilderness. A pair of pups in a den at 2250m above sea level. It is largely believed the species is Eurasian in origin and adapted to a diverse habitat.



eyes firmly set on these mountains. This time it will take a collective effort on the part of each and every one of us to reverse the impending doom that is lurking not only in the nooks and crevices of the Alps, but even in the dense canopies of our rainforests and the beautiful coral reefs of our oceans, and this is one battle we cannot afford to lose, for the stakes are too high, for there is no richer treasure than the treasure trove of the natural world.

There is a small population of the alpine ibex in the Jura Mountains. In the background the highest peak of the Alps – the Mont Blanc can be seen. This beautiful setting is one of the few last remaining treasure troves of the natural world.



Thomas Nierle

Medical doctor by training and humanitarian by conviction **Thomas Nierle**, born in 1966, spent vast parts of his career in health structures all around the globe. His childhood passion for nature and wildlife accompanied him all along. Little by little he came to the conviction that the conservation and preservation of natural life is key in ensuring human health in the long run. Autodidact, his photography aims at showing wildlife in its natural environment. The beauty of nature and its biodiversity is his constant inspiration. Since 2020 he partly works as a wildlife photographer sharing his work with environmental organizations and trying to sensitize the public to the necessity to protect and preserve wild places and endangered species. Living in the center of the Western Alps in an isolated location between alpine meadows and mountain forest, he acquired an important field knowledge of the alpine fauna with a particular focus on birds and mammals. He likes to take intimate photos of the wildlife that surrounds him. Respect for wildlife and nature are his recipe to approach and document the fragile alpine ecosystems. His work has been published in books and magazines and selected and prized in various nature photo contests. Currently, he works on the documentation of the return of the gray wolf to the Western Alps.

Instagram: [@tom_nierle_photography](#) Facebook: [Thomas Nierle](#) Website: [www.thomasnierle.ch](#)

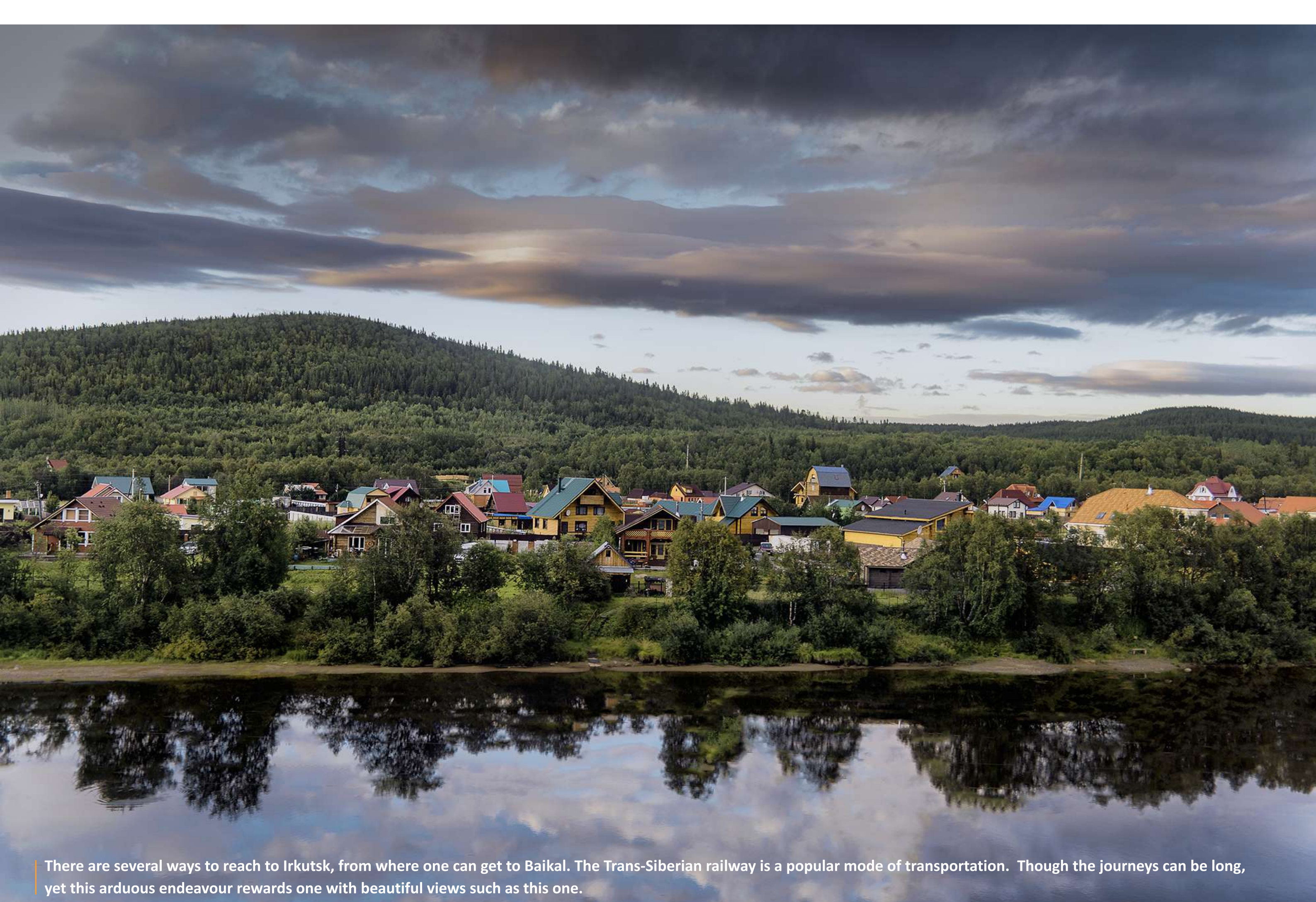


Dragon Rock on Ogoi Island has carved an iconic niche for itself courtesy its picturesque setting amidst the vast expanse of Lake Baikal.

From the depths of LAKE BAIKAL

tales from the depths of the [Sacred Sea](#) - an ancient water body that preserves the history of the natural world, a place of immense cultural significance, a place where nature flaunts its beauty unabashed - this is the story of [Lake Baikal](#) in [Siberia](#) as told by [Durlav Roy Chowdhury](#).

The history of our planet, the history of life itself often remains preserved in the uncanny of places comprehensible to the casual observer. The layers of rocks which stack up to form the gigantic mountain ranges or the layers of mud, silt accumulated on the bed of oceans, rivers and lakes are each catalogues from the ancient history of this planet. The unravelling of each layer reveals tales from billions of years ago and a little scratching and digging deep under these layers or surfaces with able help from science and technology paint a rather accurate picture of this planet at any given timeframe when everything, even life existed on this planet in much primitive forms. Billions of years ago when much of the planet was a watery realm and the planet itself showcased a rather irate personality, the tectonic plates in the deep dark realms of oceans jostled against each other. In doing so they would eventually break free of their aquatic confines and pierce into the skies above. This would continue for many millions of years and slowly but steadily the mountain ranges would creep further into the heavens above.



There are several ways to reach to Irkutsk, from where one can get to Baikal. The Trans-Siberian railway is a popular mode of transportation. Though the journeys can be long, yet this arduous endeavour rewards one with beautiful views such as this one.

Lake Baikal is unique in more ways than one. It is the deepest, oldest and largest freshwater lake on this planet. Lake Baikal in all these aspects leaves its counterparts behind by quite a significant margin.

As they emerged out of their slumber from the depths of the oceans the mountain ranges across the planet, their slopes, ridges and crevices laid bare tales from the deepest, darkest depths of their once watery wombs. These tales are anecdotes from the earliest days of this planet, some of which tell stories of a planet in which even the simplest sign of life was yet to make its first appearance. Parts of planet earth, where the tectonic plates were keener on a peaceful existence instead of sparring with each other or breaking free on their own, such ancient anecdotes still remain buried deep under water. The beds of such water bodies upon a little examination reveal how ancient they are, fossilised records imprinted on these surfaces reveal the ancient ecosystem which called these waters its home, in other words quite ironically some of the darkest places on the surface of this planet shed light on a past which had buried itself so deep in an attempt to remain undiscovered forever. Lake Baikal, located in southern Siberia, Russia hides in its depth such similar anecdotes from the planet's ancient past. Considered to be the most ancient lake on this planet, a closer examination of the bed of the lake reveals an approximate 30 million year old and counting lifespan of this water body. The mud and silt accumulated at the bottom of the lake

preserve a natural history which is a clear and meticulous commentary on the ecology of the lake since its earliest days. The most remarkable feature about Lake Baikal is how it provides glimpses into the Earth's past as well as providing a sneak peek into the future as well. The same ancient forces which resulted in the once supercontinent or Pangea fragmenting into smaller segments are still at work here and the geology of the rift valley which houses the lake will in course of time predict the nature of the planet's topography millions of years down the line. Lake Baikal apart from being a keeper of the planet's history has very much in it to turn out to be a soothsayer for the planet's future.

Lake Baikal is unique in more ways than one. It is the deepest, oldest and largest freshwater lake on this planet. Lake Baikal in all these aspects leaves its counterparts behind by quite a significant margin. Most lakes on this planet made their appearances towards the end of the last ice age and are approximately 15000-20000 year old. A handful of Earth's lakes are over a million years old, in stark contrast, Lake Baikal is the most ancient in every conceivable manner at the grand old age of 25-30 million years in addition to being the largest. Blessed with such superlatives, quite understandably Lake Baikal has been

However low the temperatures may fall, the soft rays of the gentle sun in this part of the world usher in a moment of comfort for the denizens of this icy realm.



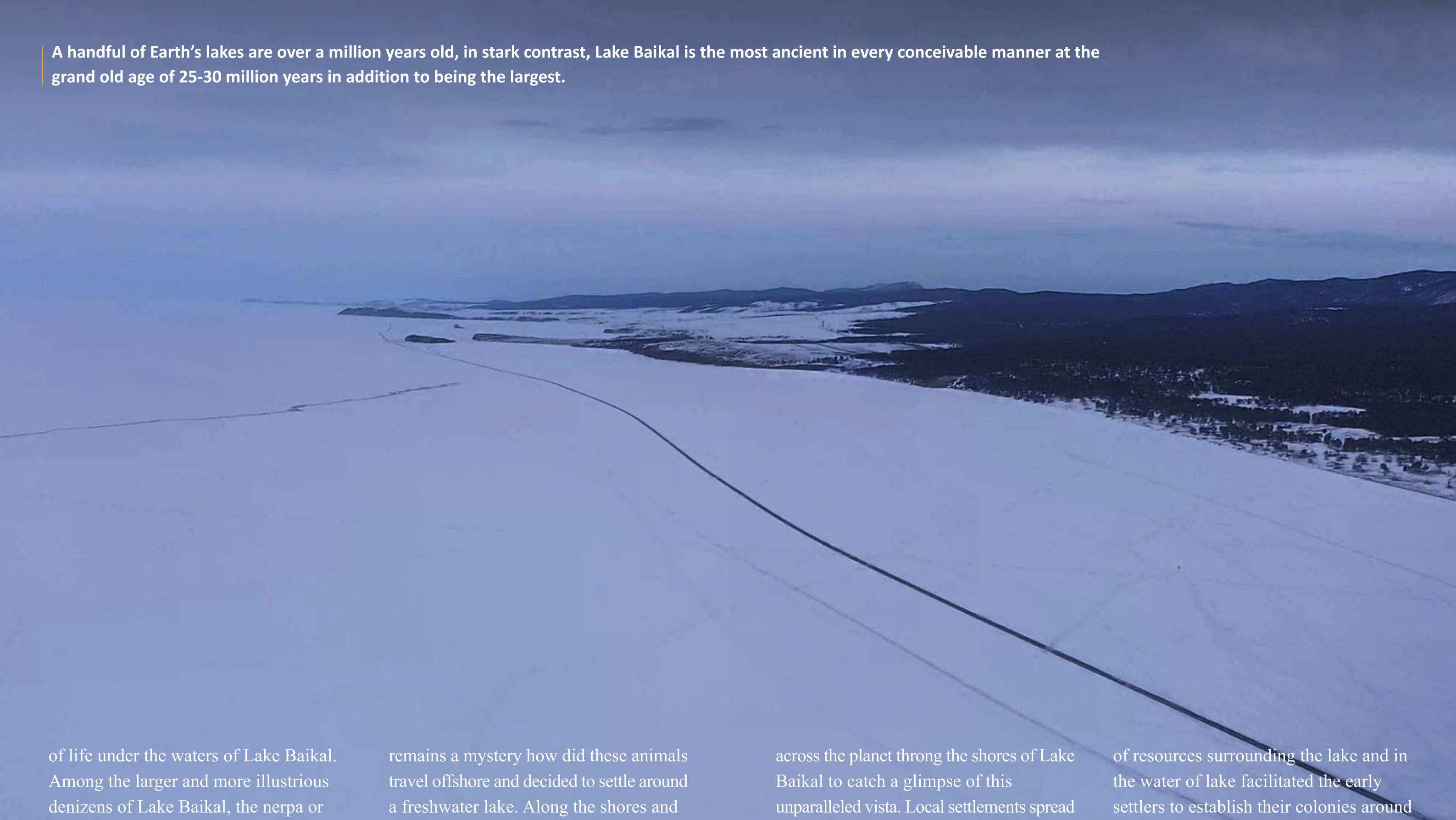
Marshrutka made its appearance in these parts during the Soviet era, this shared mode of transport akin to a taxi cab is still the most preferred mode of transport on the frozen surface of Lake Baikal during freezing winter months.



the most widely sought after by the scientific community and nature and outdoor enthusiasts alike. More than a mile deep and stretching over an expanse of 400 miles, Lake Baikal was conferred with the distinction of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. The brutal winter of Siberia, particularly from the month of January to April, transforms the lake into an icy realm. The crystal clear water and the wilderness around the lake make way for a sheet of ice which in places over the surface of the lake reaches a thickness of 1.5 meters. Even under this thick ice cover the water of Lake Baikal maintains its crystal clear nature and the millions of methane bubbles which remain trapped under the ice layer are clearly visible through the ice sheet. The deep blue ice sheet is not uniform across the surface of the lake. Surrounding the lake are giant slabs of ice which reach a height of 12 meters or more and gigantic ice crevices which run a length of 20-30 kilometres with an opening of a few meters at least along their lengths. The entire landscape surrounding this crescent shaped lake assumes an otherworldly appearance and giant crevices on to which oversized icicles cling on along with the generous ice formation on every available surface and snow piles do well to give an idea of our planet during the ice age. Such icy formations along the length and breadth of the lake are accompanied by the inimitable thunderous cracking or crashing sound of the ice. On a bitterly cold winter

night when time seems to have stood still in this otherworldly setting, these thunderous sounds serve as a reminder that the ancient forces which carved the natural world around us are still at large and one look at the gigantic crevices or the ice slabs jutting out of the flat vast expanse of ice sheet makes it abundantly clear the might of such forces is still very much beyond our comprehension. At the deepest and largest lake on this planet, nature chooses to unleash its might and the creative maverick in it at a scale befitting of this gigantic water body. What might appear a barren, desolate, icy realm at first is in fact a complex ecosystem, home to thousands of species, which in spite of the thick layer of ice thrives in the crystal clear water of Lake Baikal even during the winter months. Keeping in tune with the previous superlatives already bestowed upon this lake, it is all but natural that Lake Baikal also boasts of being the most biologically diverse lake in the world. Lake Baikal by virtue of its ancient formation and being landlocked is home to a large number of species which is endemic to the waters of this lake. The lake's microscopic life consists of a healthy and diverse population of phytoplankton and zooplankton which form the firm bedrock of this complex ecosystem. Along with these tiny organisms there are hundreds of species of small invertebrates which float in this water and each contribute in their own significant ways to web this intricate mesh

A handful of Earth's lakes are over a million years old, in stark contrast, Lake Baikal is the most ancient in every conceivable manner at the grand old age of 25-30 million years in addition to being the largest.



of life under the waters of Lake Baikal. Among the larger and more illustrious denizens of Lake Baikal, the nerpa or Baikal seal deserves special mention. Nerpa is the only freshwater seal on this planet and the shores and waters of Lake Baikal are home to a healthy population of these animals. The healthy and stable population is source of great bewilderment to scientists and researchers, since it still

remains a mystery how did these animals travel offshore and decided to settle around a freshwater lake. Along the shores and banks of the lake lurk some of the larger predators in the form of brown bears and wolves forming the top brass of the Baikal food chain. Lake Baikal of today is no stranger to human settlements and human presence. Each year a large number of tourists from

across the planet through the shores of Lake Baikal to catch a glimpse of this unparalleled vista. Local settlements spread across the expanse of the lake are largely dependent on the tourism economy and the resources of the lake for their livelihoods. The earliest traces of human settlements along the waters of Lake Baikal can be traced back to more than 30,000 years ago. The fresh water, the abundance

of resources surrounding the lake and in the water of lake facilitated the early settlers to establish their colonies around the water of Lake Baikal. In the thirteenth century people from Mongolia made their way to the western and eastern shores of Lake Baikal eventually settling down along these shores and forming the Republic of Buryatia. In fact approximately 60% of Lake Baikal's shoreline falls within the



Stranded vehicles making unexpected pit stops are a common sight. The freezing winters exact tolls from humans and machines alike. A car waits for its flattened tyres to be replaced as its flashing headlamps give off its presence in this vast all white landscape.

domain of Republic of Buryatia. Lake Baikal received the second wave of settlers in the seventeenth century, when hordes of settlers belonging to the peasant community from North Russia arrived at the shores of Lake Baikal. Soon they found the shores suitable for developing a society upon a foundation the backbone of which again was provided by the resources of Lake Baikal and its shores. These claims can be well established by the numerous

artefacts scattered across the lake which serve as anecdotes from the past. Archaeological remains, numbering in thousands belonging to ancient cultures, the likes of Mongolian, Buryat and Evenk have been uncovered in and around Lake Baikal and as an ode to the rich history and tradition of these communities some of these remains have been carefully preserved by the authorities. Cave paintings, inscriptions on rocks, ancient

monuments and ruins of ancient civilisation provide glimpses into Lake Baikal's initial trysts with human beings. The region has a rich heritage of nature revering Mongolian, Buryat and Evenk cultures. Lake Baikal finds mention in ancient Chinese and Muslim manuscripts as well, which also indicates the Huns, Turks and Uighurs all frequented the shores of Lake Baikal. The present day population around Lake Baikal is a little

above 2 million, with a hundred thousand people settled permanently in the basin of the lake. The population is largely comprised of ethnic people belonging to the Buryat and Evenk communities. People living here are primarily engaged in fishing, agriculture, hunting and during the tourism season are largely dependent on the tourism industry for their livelihoods. Even today, the hunting of Baikal seal and the use of seal products

in traditional clothing, medicines and rituals can be observed among the members of the Buryat community, a clear reference to the once hunter-gatherer past of these communities.

Over the years Lake Baikal has steadily carved a name for itself as a sought after tourist destination in Russia. This has significantly contributed towards sustaining the economy of the region and has greatly benefitted the local communities. While the summer months provide an unmatched scenic view of the region comprised of the crystal clear water of the lake and the lush green shores, winter veils the region in a sheet of white. Some of the popular tourist destinations around Lake Baikal include the Cape of Khoboy, the Ushkan Islands and the Zabaykalsky National Park. During the winter months skiing at designated stretches of ice or driving on the sheet of ice covering Lake Baikal provide added attraction to the adventure enthusiasts. In order to cater to such tourism activities a number of settlements have sprung up in the vicinity and steps are being implemented by the concerned authorities to promote sustainable tourism activities which will not compromise the health and the ecology of the lake. In addition to all these, tourists from all over the world are thronging the shores of the lake for a close tryst with the local culture, food and way of life while exploring these beautiful vistas.

While the increasing popularity of Lake

A drive over the frozen ice sheet of Lake Baikal reveals the true expanse of this gigantic water body, which otherwise can be hard to comprehend as the numbers, impressive as they are, fail to encapsulate the aura of this majestic subject of the natural world.



Baikal appears heartening on paper and appeals to the international community, there is a menace, of grave consequences lurking in these crystal clear water. Situated in southern Siberia, unfortunately Lake Baikal is located in one such place on this planet where the scourge of climate change can be felt the most. Southern Siberia is one of the fastest warming regions on this planet and as a direct consequence the temperature of the lake has turned warmer with every passing year. This has resulted in the thinning of ice sheet on the water of the lake in winter months as well as reduced formation of ice along the shores of the lake. Thinning ice sheets have changed the nature of the topography of the region, particularly in the winter months, rendering the once usable routes across the frozen surface of the lake unusable. This certainly acts as a hindrance for the locals when it comes to their movements. However the more worrying aspect of the effects of climate change on the waters of Lake Baikal is the implication upon this delicate ecosystem. The lake is home to thousands of endemic invertebrates and other aquatic species which are nowhere else to be found. Tiny endemic algae, phytoplankton and zooplankton which form the base of this intricate food chain, a platform upon which the more imposing creatures at the top of the chain are directly or indirectly dependent, are extremely sensitive to the slightest change in the temperature of the water. The seasonal bloom of algae and

Life flows in a sombre manner in the small settlements along the frozen Baikal scape. The population is largely comprised of ethnic people belonging to the Buryat and Evenk communities.



other microscopic aquatic vegetation provides these waters with the much needed supply of oxygen. These seasonal blooms are directly related to the duration and nature of ice cover. In the wake of climate change and changing nature of the ice cover these events are severely disrupted throwing the entire ecosystem off the balance. Even the larger animals such as the Balkan seal which is dependent on surface ice for mating and resting are being adversely affected due to the vanishing ice cover. In other words the gradual increase in temperature affects

phenomenon. These numbers may appear insignificant on paper, but for the microorganisms which form the bulwark of this fragile ecosystem are reeling under such changes. In a more worrying trend under the effects of warming climate across the Baikal the endemic organisms are losing ground to other species which are not unique to this lake. Although not widespread such developments do harness the potential to obliterate the indigenous fauna of this region. It is not only the animal species of this region which are getting adversely affected due to climate

Situated in southern Siberia, unfortunately Lake Baikal is located in one such place on this planet where the scourge of climate change can be felt the most.

each and every organism from the bottom to the top of the food chain in the waters of Lake Baikal. Evidences of unprecedented climate change are galore in the whole of Baikal region and the lake itself. Annual air temperature increased at an alarming double the rate of global average by 1.2 degree Celsius in the last century in addition to rapidly increasing temperature in the waters of Lake Baikal up to a depth of 50 meters or more over the last few decades resulting in thinning ice cover by as much as 12 centimetres. The average surface temperature of Lake Baikal has increased by a significant 1.5 degree Celsius over the last 50 years. Prolonged ice free seasons, in excess of two weeks or more in comparison to a century ago are becoming frequent

change. The human settlements along the shores and the ethnic communities who have made these shores their home for thousands of years too are reeling from the menaces of climate change. Fish is in short supply, the minute changes in the level of annual precipitation and temperature lead to lesser agricultural yields, previously unknown pathogens are gradually creeping their way up to these shores, though invisible climate change manifests itself in some of the most devastating forms.


Lake Baikal for long has been the pride of Russia and of great cultural significance to the ethnic communities, a true insignia of native Russian pride and the lake is affectionately known as “Sacred Sea”, a coinage befitting of its grandeur.



The greatest of all the gifts and treasures are always hidden in plain sight, the ever present wind reveals such alien-looking rock structure, dusting off the powdery snow, unravelling cold blue crystalized ice within, which indeed are the crown jewels of the lake.



The island of Olkhon has been the centre of Buryat Shamanism for centuries. The bitterly cold winters force the residents of this island to move to more favourable grounds deserting their homes turning the island of Olkhon into a ghost town.



Baikal reveals its magic in myriad ways. The stark contrast in the landscape dotted with lush green grass on the bank of gigantic ice sheet is one of many such surprises Lake Baikal springs up.

The future of this truly great lake lies in the hands of the proud natives who have shown exceptional affection towards the health and well-being of this lake and herein possibly lies the brightest glimmer of hope. However reversing the menacing trends of climate change on these sheets of ice will require a lot more than the earnest and heartfelt efforts of these people. The international community needs to take note of these developments and come together as one unit for the sake of the future of Sacred Sea. It will be nothing short of a cardinal sin to lose this incredible monument of natural history to the evil grasps of climate change – the monster which we gave birth to and have nurtured for all these years. In one of the heartening developments the Great Baikal

Trail project in collaboration with USAID was brought into force with a view of promoting ecotourism and raise awareness about the environment in Irkutsk and around Baikal. Additionally similar organisations such as Baikal Wave, All Russian Society for Nature Conservation with their teams of dedicated volunteers, researchers and scientists are working towards the same goals. One can sincerely hope, many more hands will join forces and their efforts will have implications on a natural world far beyond the shores of this lake, and this mighty old natural wonder will enthrall millions in all its glory as we continue to marvel at the plethora of anecdotes emerging out of its watery depths.



Lake Baikal for long has been the pride of Russia and of great cultural significance to the ethnic communities, a true insignia of native Russian pride and the lake is affectionately known as “Sacred Sea”, a coinage befitting of its grandeur and significance among the locals. The future of this truly great lake lies in the hands of the proud natives who have shown exceptional affection towards the health and well-being of this lake and herein possibly lies the brightest glimmer of hope.



Durlav Roy **CHOWDHURY**

From the peaks of Nepal to the desolate Lake Baikal and to the Arabian deserts, Durlav's journey to capture the un-documented is a testament to his passion for exploration and the love of travel. A fresh perspective and a deep love for aerial imagery and landscape, have resulted in an ever-growing portfolio of cutting-edge images.

He writes "it is really exciting for me to see a known place from the air as if the place has some hidden jewels to it when viewed from the air". He thanks everyone who has been motivating him to take the leap of faith including his mother his mentors to name a few Kounteya Sinha, Subodh Shetty and Vadim Sherbakov and his to be fiancée Ms Reem.

He quotes "she has been through the ups and downs of my drone journey" as he recalls "many times the drone would crash as I don't look to obstructions when I am getting a good shot, but she always makes me aware of the surrounding by capping my movements."

He writes, taking pictures from the aerial perspective has its own ups and downs like you must always follow with the local laws and give in to the restrictions but the results could be out of the world, but we must always respect someone's privacy too when flying from the air." Fuelled by passion and a lust for the unknown, he plans to continue his journey to the beyond and bring out stories from those places, for the world to see.

Jordan

- a hallowed river
and more...

Paul MEI documents the religious and cultural
significance of the iconic JORDAN RIVER

One of the most sacred Biblical sites Jordan River is believed to be the site where Jesus Christ was baptized, a ritual which is of prime significance to the Christian community.

Since the dawn of human civilisation, rivers have traditionally been the nerve centre around which human settlements sprung up. From the mighty Indus River which gave birth to the Indus Valley Civilisation in its lush and fertile valleys, to the Nile River shaping much of ancient Egypt and the colossal Ganges which is flanked by some of the major cities in the northern part of India, prominent rivers across the globe have traditionally been gracious and promised the early settlers along their banks a life of prosperity. It comes as little surprise, to the early settlers along the banks, the plethora of generous offerings from the rivers, soon elevated these water bodies to something more than a mere source of water and other natural resources, the dependency of humans upon these waters were attended with an almost motherly affection, which soon enough established this very humane bond between the rivers and the residents along them. In some places the rivers by dint of their generosity and motherly affection soon elevated themselves from being a natural water body to a revered entity, something which is widely noticeable in India, where millions of devotees throng the banks of major rivers like the Ganges or the Yamuna to take a dip in their holy waters in order to absolve themselves of their previous sins. The mighty Indus and the Brahmaputra too enjoy such revered status. Elsewhere in the world the Osun River in Africa flowing through Nigeria is a holy



The feeling of being at the same place where Jesus Christ was baptized can be overwhelming for millions of devout Christians visiting Qasr el Yahud as is evident from the expression of this lady's face. For many their years of faith culminate into this moment when they follow in on the footsteps of their saviour Jesus Christ.



Her companions help this devotee to take a dip in the holy water of Jordan River at Qasr el Yahud, recognised as the site of Jesus Christ's baptism. There is no bigger incentive than immersing oneself in these holy waters at the very site of Jesus Christ's baptism.

entity for the Yoruba people who are followers of Orisha, their native religion. The Cibet River in Indonesia enjoys similar status among the local population. In this context the Jordan River deserves special mention by dint of being one of

the most sacred sites for millions of devout Christians across the planet. One of the most sacred Biblical sights Jordan River is believed to be the site where Jesus Christ was baptized, a ritual which is of prime significance to the Christian community.

Jordan River stands out in terms of its topographical features as well. The river has the lowest elevation among similar water bodies and finds its source at the Syrian-Lebanese border. The river flows through the Jordan Rift Valley and pours

into the Dead Sea. The river quite literally runs into a mere trickle reaching only 20 yards across the banks with a maximum depth of only 17 feet. At its source Jordan River is met by Hasbani River of Lebanon, Baniyas River of Syria and the Dan River of Israel at the foot of Mount Hermon. From there it flows south through northern Israel into the Sea of Galilee and eventually empties into the Dead Sea. The river is considered the border between the State of Israel and the West Bank. From its origin till its mouth in Dead Sea, the river covers a distance of 360 kilometres in a long winding course. For hundreds of acres of land in this arid, dry landscape the Jordan River is the most prominent water body notable of any mention, as a result of which the river plays a vital role in shaping the overall landscape of this region. Being the only principle source of water in the region, the neighbouring countries like Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan are heavily dependent on the waters of Jordan River and the river remains at the core of the long standing Middle East conflict. A number of agreements and treaties have been signed among several countries such as Israel and Jordan regarding the usage of Jordan River which go a long way in highlighting how precious this natural resource is in a land which is largely arid. For the country of Israel the water of Jordan River is of utmost significance as most of Israel's drinking water supply and irrigation are dependent on this river. The significance of Jordan



Christians believe baptism is essential for achieving salvation from previously committed sins and purifies one's soul for a fresh beginning. Different branches of Christianity perform the ritual of baptism differently. For instance, Orthodox and Catholic Christians perform the ritual of baptism on someone who is still an infant. In some of the other branches of Christianity baptism is performed on adults in order to truly understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by Jesus Christ.

River is not only restricted to the practical purposes in Israel. The river is of great cultural and religious significance in Israel. Numerous Tanakh scriptures belonging to the Hebrew Bible have repeatedly alluded to Jordan River as the one entity responsible for being the source of fertility of Israel. The banks of the river have found repeated mentions as battlegrounds where a number of significant Biblical wars were fought.

For most Christians though, Jordan River remains the scene of baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist. In fact, to a devout Christian, Jordan River ranks only third in terms of the most sacred sites in

the world. Baptism with water is a common practice in the Christian Faith and is necessary to pave the pathway for someone adopting Christianity. Christians believe baptism is essential for achieving salvation from previously committed sins and purifies one's soul for a fresh beginning. Different branches of Christianity perform the ritual of baptism differently. For instance, Orthodox and Catholic Christians perform the ritual of baptism on someone who is still an infant. While the Catholic baptism is performed by effusion which signifies pouring the holy water over someone's head, the rituals of the Orthodox Church suggest baptism to be carried out

by completely submersing an infant in water. In some of the other branches of Christianity baptism is performed on adults in order to truly understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by Jesus Christ. Qasr el Yahud is recognised as the site of Jesus Christ's baptism and each year this place is visited by millions of Christian pilgrims. There is no bigger incentive for a devout Christian than immersing oneself in these holy waters at the very site of Jesus Christ's baptism. Qasr el Yahud is located in the Jordan River Valley in the West Bank, towards the north of the Dead Sea and east of Jericho. Jordan River finds repeated mention in the annals of Bible.

Jordan River has been historically the scene of a number of miracles performed by Christian saints and prophets. Prophet Elijah and his protégé Elisha were known for carrying out their preaching and performing miracles along the banks of the Jordan River and the river due to these acts had already gained prominence among the people of this region. It is believed both of them crossed the river without even wetting their feet. In other acts of miracles Elisha healed Naaman of his wounds by bathing him in the water of Jordan. Such acts of miracles increased the holy significance of Jordan River manifolds and firmly established the holy



Qasr el Yahud is located in the Jordan River Valley in the West Bank, towards the north of the Dead Sea and east of Jericho. Jordan River finds repeated mention in the annals of Bible. Millions of Christians visit Qasr el Yahud and the adjoining places each year to commemorate the occasion and take a dip in the holy water of Jordan River. Usually the event is held in the month of January to commemorate Jesus's baptism and the region gears up to welcome the hundreds of thousands of devotees. Special arrangements are made for the visitors, places to stay and rest are set up, volunteers and missionaries work round the clock to ensure everyone receives the assistance they are looking for.

prowess of the water of Jordan River. This legacy was carried forward by John the Baptist who in the later years urged people to absolve themselves of their sins in the holy waters of Jordan River in accordance with similar preaching from Prophet Elisha. Eventually this place became the focal point in Christian Religion when John the Baptist himself baptised Jesus Christ in the water of Jordan River at Qasr el Yahud.

To visit the baptism sight of Jesus Christ and be baptized at the very same spot is a matter of great significance for any Christian. This results in millions of Christians visiting Qasr el Yahud and the adjoining places each year to commemorate the occasion and take a dip in the holy water of Jordan River. Usually the event is held in the month of January to commemorate Jesus's baptism and the region gears up to welcome the hundreds of thousands of devotees. Special arrangements are made for the visitors, places to stay and rest are set up, volunteers and missionaries work round the clock to ensure everyone receives the assistance they are looking for. Those who travel from faraway lands wait along the steps which lead to the murky water of Jordan River patiently waiting for their turn to get baptised following in on the footsteps of Jesus Christ. A priest would perform the rituals and bless them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and a dip in the holy water will atone for their sins.



The profusion of crosses of various shapes and sizes add to the prevalent venerated atmosphere. Devotees travel from faraway lands to offer their prayers and visit this holy site of incredible religious and cultural significance.



The hymns and chants from the bible sung by the hordes of pilgrims fill up the air. A priest would perform the rituals and bless them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and a dip in the holy water will atone for their sins and earn them the distinction of being baptised at the very same spot like Jesus Christ.



Situated at the boundary of the Holy Land and the site of baptism of Jesus Christ, Jordan River is the much coveted source of the holy water used in the practices and rituals of Christianity. The footsteps left behind by Jesus Christ centuries ago are followed in diligently by millions of pilgrims including little ones from faraway lands as they congregate along the muddy water of Jordan River.

The shades of the scattered palm trees along the banks are populated by pilgrims awaiting their turn or tourists who like the pilgrims have been visiting this place in large numbers for many years now. The hymns and chants from the bible sung by the hordes of pilgrims fill up the air and the makeshift podiums sounding sermons from loudspeakers and the profusion of crosses of various shapes and sizes add to the prevalent venerated atmosphere. The young ones, less inclined towards the religious significance of the place are always on a look out for making the most of the bright sunny outdoors. A swim in the river, a game of hide and seek among

the shades of the palm trees, the aimless splashing of water do their bit to lighten the atmosphere until their histrionics are reined in by scorned parents. Situated at the boundary of the Holy Land and the site of baptism of Jesus Christ, Jordan River is the much coveted source of the holy water used in the practices and rituals of Christianity. The footsteps left behind by Jesus Christ centuries ago are followed in diligently by millions of pilgrims from all over the world as they congregate along the muddy water of Jordan River.

This iconic water body, which enjoys a revered status, ironically is faced with the very real threat of plunging into obscurity and has been reduced to nothing more than a mere trickle in many parts across its length. The tensed geo-political scenario between the neighbouring countries has been taking a toll on the health of the river for many decades now. The bickering of politics has led to numerous dams, canals, diversion channels and large scale irrigation projects being set up on the river mainly due to the failed negotiations between the surrounding countries over the share of Jordan River's water. All these constructions have stifled the river and

have reduced the flow of water to one tenth over the decades. In addition to this the quality of water has dipped significantly with large scale agricultural and industrial waste running off into the river unchecked. In stark contrast to the holy nature of the river, there is a large scale presence of armed forces on either side of the river, primarily due to the heavily militarized and disputed border which runs along a significant length of the river. Allegations and counter allegations are rife among Israel and its Arab neighbours over the harnessing of Jordan's water. In addition to the existing frosty relationships between these countries



The shades of the scattered palm trees and tents along the banks are populated by pilgrims awaiting their turn. The makeshift podiums and the loudspeakers on them announce the sermons given out by the priests accompanying the devotees.

the Syrian refugee crisis which dispersed over 2 million Syrians has strained the health of the river. A significant chunk of the displaced refugees has settled down in water impoverished Jordan. With the added burden of housing displaced Syrian

nationals, Jordan is staring at a water crisis never experienced before and the narrow trickle of Jordan River will be of little aid to them. There is a growing discontent among Jordanians over sharing the precious water resource of Jordan River

with their Syrian neighbours who now in places outnumber the local population. There is the added concern of untreated sewage waste from the several refugee camps flowing unhindered into the river and severely polluting the quality of water.

What used to be lush farmlands or ripe orchards have gradually turned into wastelands, a clear indication that the famed Jordan River is only a shadow of its former self. The ever increasing population on either side of the border too doesn't augur well for the river's future. There has been a significant rise in the population of Israel and Palestine along with that of Jordan and it is predicted in the coming few decades the population in the region is going to spike manifolds. This compounds Israel's problem which is heavily dependent upon the water of Jordan for agriculture. The seven years of drought severely crippled Sea of Galilee, another major source of water for Israel. As a result, the country became solely reliant on the resources of Jordan. In the wake of such developments it would be safe to say, the meandering course of the river from its origin to the Dead Sea is far from being a tranquil journey. This ancient river, ripe with anecdotes from the past, a water body of tremendous cultural and religious significance and one which is the single major source of water for millions, passes through some of the most disputed and disturbed lands on the planet. The dire consequences of which get reflected in the sickening health of the river which at places can be crossed with a mere hop, belying the fables of miraculous feats of Elijah and Elisha of crossing the river.

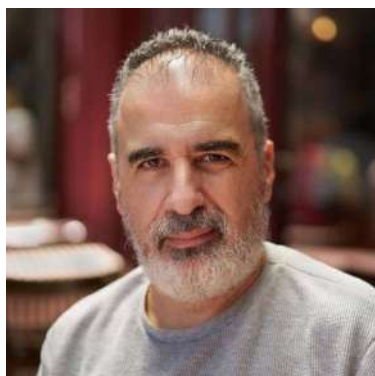
The confluence of millions at this one particular spot along the bank of the Jordan River is an event of utmost religious and cultural significance, but more importantly it is a celebration of humanity above everything else.





Young mothers with their young ones in tow visit this holy site overcoming the rigors of an arduous journey to offer their homages to the revered Jesus Christ.

The bleak circumstances have forced the authorities to take a stock of the situation. There are indeed some positive signs for the river. Israel and Jordan have realised the need for co-operation and are beginning to work together to reverse the fortunes of the river. A number of state of the art desalinization plants along the Mediterranean coast have reduced Israel's dependency on the water of Jordan and a newfound collaborative approach saw Jordan reaching out to Israel to buy a proportion of the desalinized water. To further aid such meaningful exchanges the regional NGO – Friends of the Earth Middle East or FOEME is toiling hard on the ground to help the Jordan, Palestine and Israel forego their volatile predisposition towards each other and restore the Jordan River Basin as a contiguous ecosystem overcoming the longstanding political disputes. One can only hope these are the beginning of similar measures which will be undertaken in the future and this ancient river and the basin will once again thrive as mentioned in ancient scriptures and fables.



Paul Mei

Paul Mei was born and raised in Athens, Greece. In 1989 he earned his Bachelor of Science in Applied Computer Systems from Brunel University, London, UK. He has been involved with photography since his early 20s. In 2016 this interest turned into a deep passion, when he came across the documentary on Vivian Meier's life and work. Since then he has been delving into the world of street photography, familiarizing himself with the work of international photographers. His curiosity created an urge to visit many countries like Israel, Turkey, Italy, India among many. Ever since his first trip, in Israel in January 2018, he felt an affinity that immediately bonded him with each country he visited. During every travel he has been privileged to meet many charismatic photographers with whom he has established an excellent rapport and helped him nurture his skills.

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THE BREW FROM THE HILLS

by Debmalya Das

The history of famed Darjeeling Tea
What goes on behind the scenes...
The threats posed by climate change...
Documented by Debmalya Das

Staying true to its early days, Darjeeling still remains at the forefront of growing tea in India. Darjeeling's produce, popularly known as Darjeeling Tea has grown in stature and reputation.

Mature tea plants, over an age of three years are harvested with hand. Hand plucking offers more precision, although the finesse achieved comes at the expense of increased labour cost and time. While harvesting workers pluck exclusively the top two leaves and the bud and collect them in the straw baskets on their backs.



It is the perfect means to welcome someone into your homes, bury old hatchets, break the ice, even brainstorm over issues which otherwise felt seemingly incomprehensible, there is little which cannot be achieved over a cup of steaming tea. Tea or “chai”, inarguably India’s most favoured and largely consumed beverage, established its grip upon Indian households courtesy the British colonial regime in the country which lasted for almost two centuries. However the British were not the first ones to get addicted to this drink, the Chinese have been intoxicated by this flavourful beverage for more than 2000 years now. The British were quick to discover the benefits of tea and the impact this humble drink had on the Chinese society. However soon enough they were to figure out cultivating tea in the British countryside proved to be a rather expensive affair which resulted in meagre returns. As a result of which tea remained an expensive commodity in Britain in the 17th century and the only means of importing large quantities of tea was via the trade routes with China. Subsequent geo-political developments and upheavals and the constant meddling of Dutch firms who were smuggling huge quantities of tea across Europe forced the British to conceive a more sustainable approach. Faced with such a situation and to keep the Dutch at bay, British horticulturists would spend hours to devise ways of growing tea in Britain. Previously the

consumption of tea in India was thought to have been restricted among the traders of Surat, who would make frequent trips to China and had picked up a taste of this beverage. By the turn of the 19th century, British horticulturists discovered the presence of tea saplings in Assam. This marked a watershed moment in the history of tea in India. Soon tea plantations and gardens sprung up in the valleys of Assam and within a short span of time expanded all the way to the mountains of Darjeeling in the neighbouring state of West Bengal. Discovering tea saplings would be of little or no use unless the British were in possession of the intricate knowledge and techniques of growing and processing tea since they were up against Chinese tea growers with a bolstered experience of centuries. Thus over the next few decades the British were engaged in covert missions of an entirely different nature. With this view, Robert Fortune, a Scottish horticulturist was entrusted with making multiple trips to China to study the methods and intricacies involved with growing tea. Fortune diligently performed his responsibilities and managed to smuggle huge quantities of saplings and seeds from China to India along with gathering the much needed technical expertise by visiting various establishments in China. Thus, the tea industry in India gathered steam, courtesy the tens of thousands of saplings, seeds and the technical expertise smuggled in by Robert Fortune. Once it gathered the momentum,

the tea industry in India started growing at a rapid pace, and towards the end of the 19th century India’s export of tea to the United Kingdom had exceeded that of China’s. This could be attributed to the assiduous tea planters in India and a constant propaganda by the British that projected Indian tea as a purer, more aromatic counterpart of the adulterated Chinese version which was known to be dyed with chemical dyes in order to provide the greenish tinge which at one point in time found large number of takers among the European elites. Darjeeling in West Bengal and the valleys of Assam were at the forefront of this tea revolution in India. Another momentous occasion in the history of tea in India was the formation of the Indian Tea Association in 1881. At the turn of the twentieth century India’s identity in the world as a major tea manufacturer or possibly the most prominent tea growing nation was firmly established.

Already a major exporter of tea at the beginning of the 20th century, it was only a matter of time before tea would become a permanent fixture in the domestic households. The Indian Railways, quite curiously played a major role in facilitating this. Hawkers and street vendors started selling tea at various railway stations across the country. This drink, a metamorphosed version of the one ruling the roosts in Europe was an assortment of sugar, copious amount of milk and tea liquor soon won over the palate of the domestic

population. This habit, picked up from the railway stations by Indian passengers soon spread into the streets and marketplaces across cities and towns of India. Soon, the thick, sweet drink became a regular and permanent fixture in the daily life of an average Indian. Subsequently the streets and roads across the length and breadth of the country mushroomed with makeshift shanties selling milky tea in earthen cups, which still remain permanent fixtures even against the swanky backdrop of Indian metropolitans. Quite literally to spice things up, spiced tea or “masala chai” marked its appearance at these stalls. A hint of ginger, cardamom or other spices would provide that little edge which would translate into long queues in front of such stalls. Such gatherings have a lot more to do with sipping on a cup of this hot beverage since almost every Indian kitchen is equipped to brew a fresh pot quite similar in every aspect. In the daily life of an average Indian visiting these stalls has translated into a way of life. The steaming cup of tea serves a perfect excuse to socialise, catch up on long overdue gossips, and check upon one another’s well-being or the petty or major developments in their lives.

Staying true to its early days, Darjeeling still remains at the forefront of growing tea in India. Darjeeling’s produce, popularly known as Darjeeling Tea has grown in stature and reputation, as a result of which the scale of operations in the hills of Darjeeling has increased manifolds



The female workers are primarily entrusted with the job of harvesting tea leaves. Once the leaves and buds are plucked the workers carry their harvest to the nearby processing plant located within the tea plantation or the estate.

over the past few decades. The slopes of the hills are dotted with multiple tea estates, where the well embellished bungalows from the British era still overlook the picturesque vistas and more importantly house the prominent officials entrusted with the responsibilities of ensuring

smooth operations in the tea gardens. The familiar sight of women with large straw baskets strapped against their foreheads making their ways to the tea gardens or engaged in plucking the tea leaves is bound to greet anyone visiting the hills of Darjeeling. The town of Mirik,

approximately 40 km from Darjeeling, is widely known for Mirik Lake and the number of tea estates which surround this incredibly beautiful hill town. A peak into one such tea estate in Mirik provides the elusive insights into what goes on behind the scenes which translates into a hot cup

of flavourful Darjeeling Tea, much coveted across the globe. Tea cultivation requires a cooler climate with moderate precipitation, a setting which is common to the slopes of the Himalayas in the northern reaches of West Bengal. Direct exposure to harsh sunlight does not augur well for the health of the cultivation. The slopes of the mountains along which tea is cultivated do well to shield the plants from direct sunlight. Mature tea plants, over an age of three years are harvested with hand. While machines can be used and are used in some occasions for plucking of leaves, hand plucking offers more precision, although the finesse achieved comes at the expense of increased labour cost and time. The female workers are primarily entrusted with this job. While harvesting workers pluck exclusively the top two leaves and the bud and collect them in the straw baskets on their backs. This technique is employed to ensure the new sprouting of leaves and buds from the top of the plants. Once the leaves and buds are plucked the workers carry their harvest to the nearby processing plant located within the tea plantation or the estate. Tea is a delicate produce and the exposure of the leaves and plants once they are plucked largely influences the amount of oxidation the harvest undergoes, which determines the quality of the tea. Once inside the processing plant, tea leaves and buds go through the processes of withering, rolling, fermentation, drying and grading. Withering is the first step

A worker unloads her day's harvest inside the processing plant. These signature wicker baskets are a common fixture with workers employed for harvesting of tea leaves.





Once inside the processing plant the entire day's collection is carefully weighed and noted down. It is crucial to keep a daily record of the yield as the cumulative data makes up for the average annual yield over a period of 12 months. Tea is a delicate produce and the exposure of the leaves and plants once they are plucked largely influences the amount of oxidation the harvest undergoes, which determines the quality of the tea. Hence it is imperative to wrap such activities up quickly before the processing begins.

which involves reducing the moisture content of the leaves by spreading them in troughs and channelling a stream of air through them usually through the use of a large fan. Once removed of excess moisture content the leaves attain a flaccid state. The process of withering might take up to 18 hours depending upon the nature of the leaves and the relative humidity in the atmosphere.

Withering is followed by rolling during which through the use of a machine the leaves are rolled and flattened. This ensures the chemical compounds in the leaves are

broken down and the necessary enzymes are released to interact with the atmospheric oxygen. The resulting oxidation produces the chemical compounds which are responsible for the colour of the tea.

Once rolled the flattened tea leaves are sent for fermentation. During fermentation the leaves are spread out on the floor or are left on aluminium trays. A number of environmental factors including humidity, temperature among others determine the nature of fermentation which in turn determines the taste, colour, aroma and

the strength of the tea. Since so many environmental factors are involved the entire process of fermentation might take from anything between one to several hours. Fermentation is followed by drying, when once again the excess moisture is removed by passing the fermented leaves through a drier where a constant inlet and outlet temperature is maintained. This usually takes about 30 – 40 minutes.

In the last step the dried leaves are filtered by removing unwanted stalks. This process is of utmost importance since the presence of these stalks even in the finest form

eventually affects the quality of the tea. Meshes of different dimensions are used to filter the leaves from the unwanted elements and the filtered leaves are graded as per the specifications of the mesh used. Once through all these processes, tea leaves are packaged and embark upon their journey to different corners of India and the world.



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In spite of all the accolades and the much sought after reputation this produce from the hills of Darjeeling enjoys, all is not well with the tea industry. Among other things which include poor management,

labour unrest, the one big issue which is threatening to upstage this industry is the now familiar menace of climate change. The effects of climate change are being felt like never before in the Himalayas.

Darjeeling is feeling the pinch too. A gradual increase in temperature and decrease in the amount of precipitation over the last few decades brought about by the changing climate have significantly

reduced the annual yield of Darjeeling tea by a whopping 40% within the short span of past two decades. The changing and erratic climatic patterns are posing genuine concerns for tea growers in Darjeeling. The progressively warming climate and the increased frequency of torrential downpour are severely detrimental for tea cultivation. In addition to this, torrential downpour which has become increasingly common leads to massive landslides which wash off vast swathes of cultivable land, something which is in short supply along the slope of the Himalayas. In the last two decades the average annual temperature of Darjeeling has risen by 0.51 degree Celsius and average annual rainfall has reduced by 60 inches. The slightest of delay in rainfall leads to massive losses for the tea growers. Growers complain the warming weather and the changes in the moisture content in the air affect the quality of tea as well. Darjeeling Tea, which as a brand prides itself for its quality, a dip in the quality of its taste is certainly



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something the growers can ill afford. The warming climate also facilitates the birth of a number of insects which can be qualified as pests for the tea industry. The cool climate of Darjeeling previously

served as a deterrent for continued life cycles of these insects. In order to combat the scourge of climate change, scientists at Darjeeling Tea Research and Development Centre are

focussing on developing vegetative clones, which essentially are offspring of a parent tea plant developed through asexual reproduction. Scientists are of the opinion such clones might be able to combat the

threats of climate change and fair better than their parents in the face of the changing environment. Additionally scientists feel the growers can expect greater yields from these clones without the quality getting compromised. In addition to addressing the issues of climate change there are other aspects which need to be looked into, factors which are adversely affecting tea cultivation. A number of tea estates incurred significant losses due to worker unrests resulting out of a prevailing situation of disharmony among the management and the workforce. These grievances should be of topmost concern for the respective authorities and if needed there has to be intervention from the administrative level.

Millions of households swear by Darjeeling Tea, a freshly brewed cup of this hot beverage serves as a connecting dot between the flat plains of coastal Bengal and the misty, pine dotted slopes of the hills in Darjeeling. If the kitchen cabinet runs out of this produce from the hills, there is something amiss about that particular day. The rising concerns over the health and future of Darjeeling Tea threatens of a future where the tea loving Bengali community and tea aficionados elsewhere will have to make do with other varieties, something which most Darjeeling Tea loyalists will shudder at the thought of. Under such circumstances one can only hope our favourite beverage will find a way to beat the evils and keep entralling us with its signature aroma.



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Debmalya Das is a Panchayat Audit Officer with the West Bengal Government by profession and a passionate documentary photographer. He frequently travels in search of stories to the farthest corners of the country. He has featured in Vogue Italia on several occasions and has been awarded by National Geographic Travellers India on multiple occasions besides being featured and honoured by World Photographic Forum. He has been featured by many print and digital publishing houses. He is presently part of an ongoing assignment called – Project Bismillah.

Debmalya Das

Photo Essay

The Frozen Realms of **LADAKH**

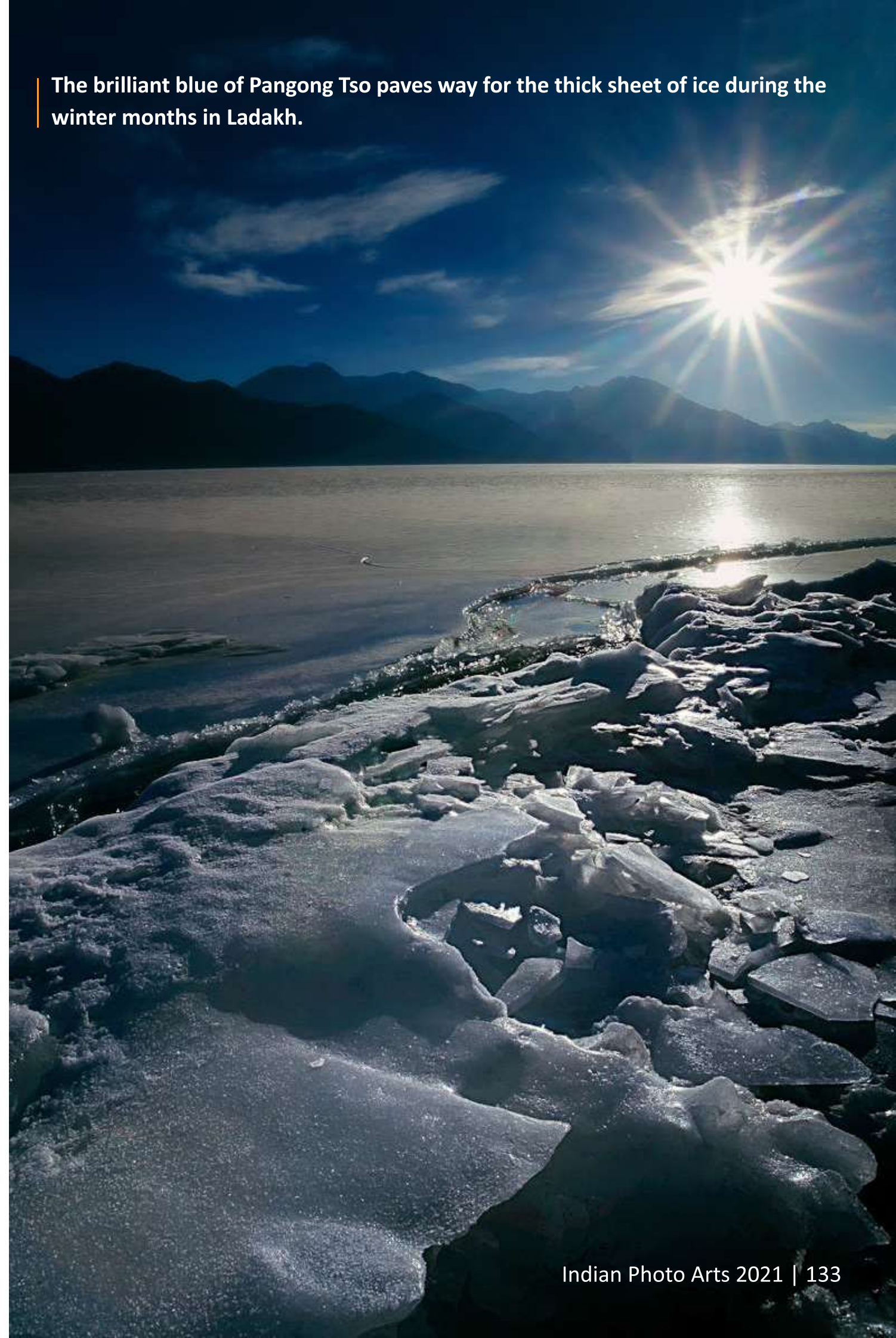
A photo essay by **Nilakkhya Dutta** depicting the winter wonderland Ladakh metamorphoses into.

The confluence of Zaskar and Indus River in Ladakh conceives such surreal setting. Winter reveals some of the lesser explored beautiful vistas of Ladakh, such as this one.

Signature golden yellow mountains, clear blue skies dotted with white fluffy clouds in myriad shapes, majestic lakes the lush green banks of which stand in perfect contrast to the barren slopes of the mountains, traditional households were the affable smiles of the local people greet anyone crossing their path – Ladakh is all of these and much more. There is something disarming about this ancient kingdom, which easily qualifies as one of the most picturesque travel destinations in India. One of the most identifiable tourist destinations, each year Ladakh is visited by thousands of domestic and foreign tourists. In fact the tourism industry forms the backbone of the economy in the region. The summer months when the snow makes a hasty retreat to the highest of passes and mountain peaks, are the most favoured among travel enthusiasts and adventurers. Summer paves the pathway through some of the most treacherous mountainous roads on this planet and the predictable weather makes bike trips across these routes or arduous treks across mighty valleys a little saner affair. Winters in Ladakh, however paint a remarkably different picture. The city of Leh, the nerve centre of Ladakh and a bustling hub of activities during the warmer months, turns into a ghost town with a handful of places braving the bitterly cold winter to stay operational. The typical golden hue of the mountains against the backdrop of the brilliant blue of the sky gets shrouded in the sombre mist of grey

and white of the snow. Frequent and heavy snowfalls render the handful of routes non pliable and the constant stream of vehicles during the summer months reduces to a narrow trickle. Amid such ghostly setting, Ladakh unfurls the other and much lesser explored aspect of its beauty. Winters in Ladakh unravel settings of unfathomable beauty to the ones who are willing to brave some of the harshest elements of nature. The iconic lakes and numerous mountain streams freeze in the sub-zero ambient temperature, there is snow everywhere and the soft gleaming rays of the rising sun refracts through the numerous icicles which cling on to any surface they can find. This photo series brings to life some such surreally beautiful moments from a winter in Ladakh where even an average day is bound to render any outsider speechless by dint of its sheer majesty. This ancient land has been explored and visited on numerous occasions, yet this is one such place which springs up a fresh surprise around every bend, this is a place where nature and its elements still exist in the most pristine form, for Ladakh is a parable from these golden mountains. The beautiful mountains of Ladakh will wake up again from their frosty slumber, the lush green grass will take over these icy cold grounds and Ladakh will once again bear a more familiar look, till then the forzen realms of Ladakh will do its best to highlight this lesser known beauty of this ancient landscape.

The brilliant blue of Pangong Tso paves way for the thick sheet of ice during the winter months in Ladakh.

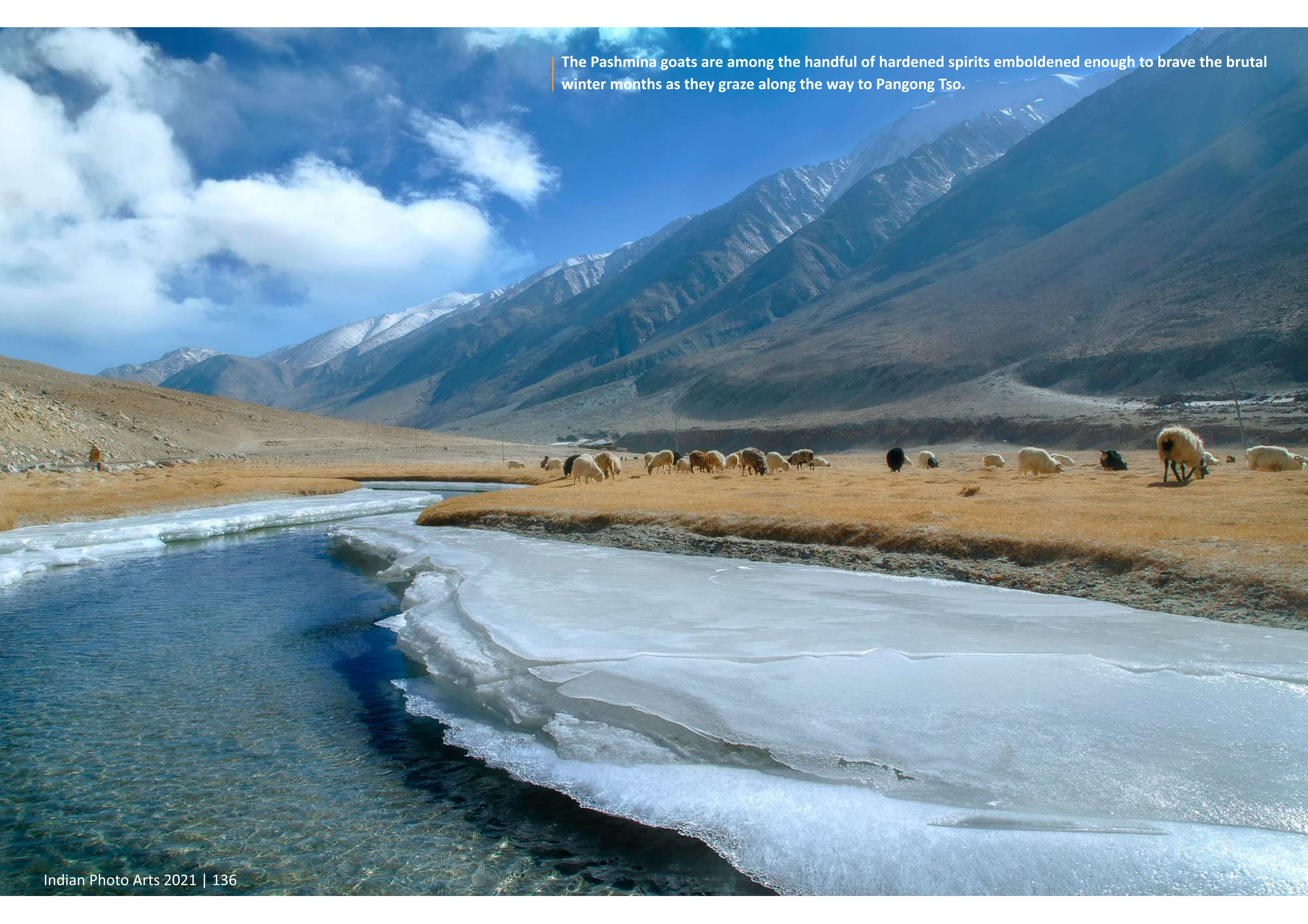




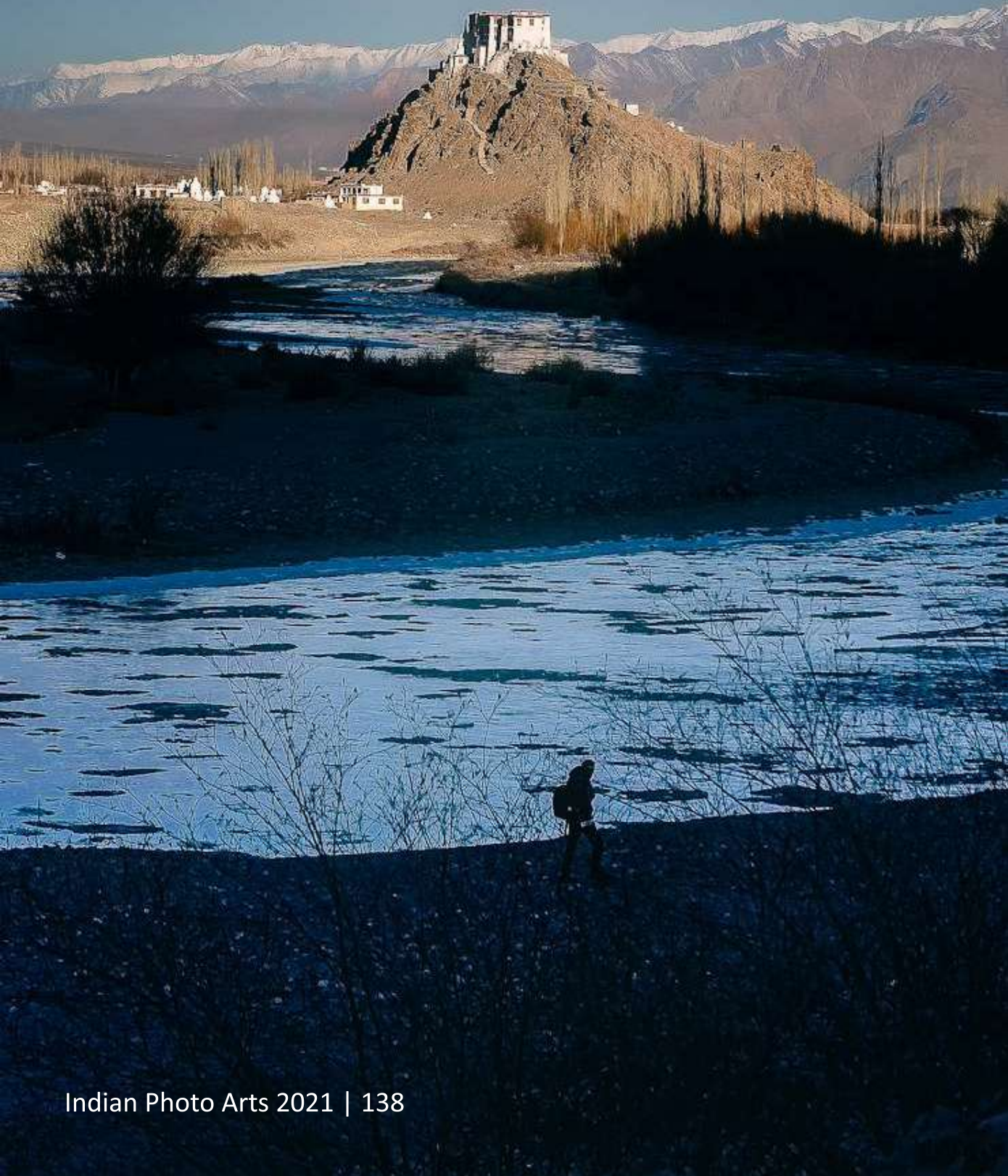
(above) Tso Moriri is one of the largest high altitude lakes in India and an incredibly popular tourist attraction in Ladakh. Tso Moriri is known for its clear blue water and the lush green banks. However winters in Ladakh transforms this iconic landscape into an icy realm devoid of all the colours. The abundance of snow on the road leading up to Tso Moriri gives a clear indication of what lies ahead along the shore of the lake.

(left) The typical golden hue of the mountains against the backdrop of the brilliant blue of the sky gets shrouded in the sombre mist of grey and white. Amid such ghostly setting, Ladakh unfurls the other and much lesser explored aspect of its beauty. Winters in Ladakh unravels settings of unfathomable beauty to the ones who are willing to brave some of the harshest elements of nature.

The Pashmina goats are among the handful of hardened spirits emboldened enough to brave the brutal winter months as they graze along the way to Pangong Tso.



Stakna Monastery is in the outskirts of Leh and the name translates into “tiger’s nose”, a reference to the hilltop upon which the monastery is situated.



An otherwise free flowing Zaskar River assumes this otherworldly form during the winter months in Ladakh.



Formation of ice and icicles on the waters of Pangong Tso and Tso Moriri in myriad shapes and forms is a common occurrence during winter.

The clear waters and the lush green banks along Tso Moriri seem like a distant memory in this frozen realm of winter.



The mighty Indus River, frozen in parts along the banks still continues to flow along the Batalik region. During the dry winter months the Indus is a precious source of much needed water.





Nilakkhya DUTTA

Nilakkhya Dutta began his journey with his camera in tow around 8 years back when he left his corporate job to pursue his long cherished passion for photography and turn it into a full-fledged career. In the due of course of time he launched his brand of wedding photography and film making by the name Nilakkhya Weddings. At the same time, it was his love for the Himalayas which made him undertake frequent

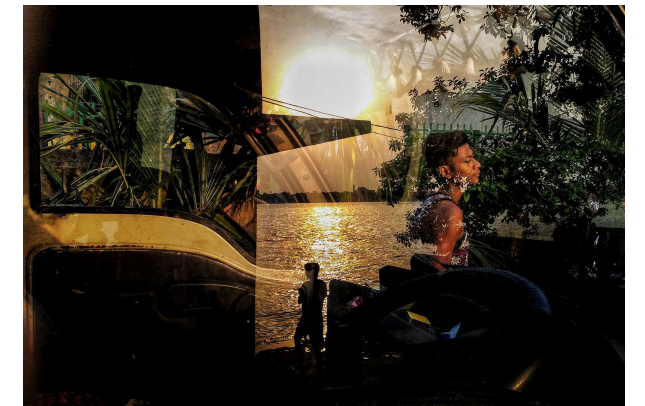
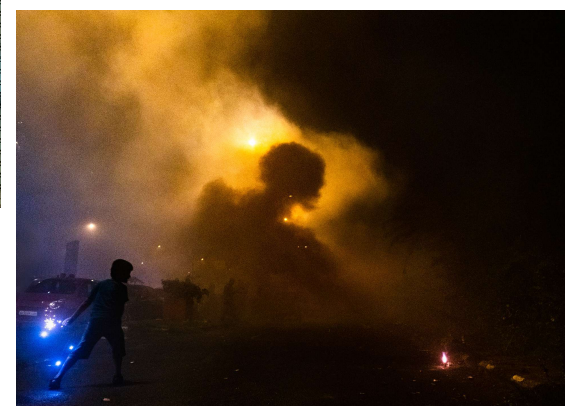
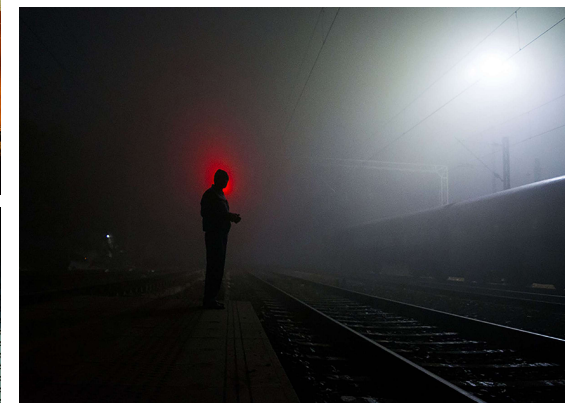
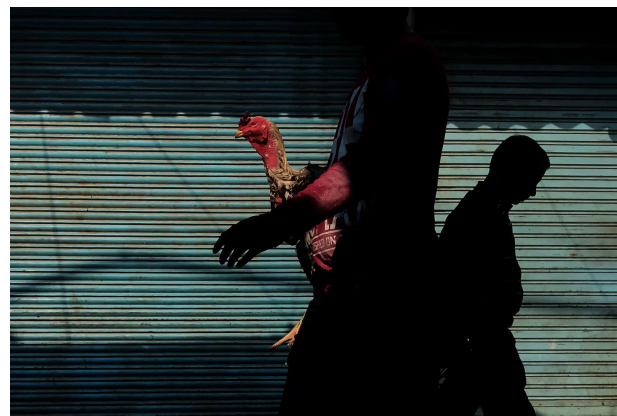
journeys to this iconic mountain range and during the course of these travels he was slowly drawn into the genre of landscape photography. Each year, he would end up visiting these mountains twice or thrice and the stack of images with which he would return and spend hours scrolling through them gave him a kind of satisfaction hitherto unknown. With time, he developed this sense of promoting landscape photography while capturing these pristine lands and showcasing it to the outside world. Over this period, he has travelled extensively across the Indian Himalayas and has tried to capture the beauty and vividness it sheds through my camera. He wishes to continue this journey lifelong till my health and support system permits.

An aerial view of Ladakh during winter. This ancient land has been explored and visited on numerous occasions, yet this is one such place which springs up a fresh surprise around every bend, this is a place where nature and its elements still exist in the most pristine form, for Ladakh is a parable from these golden mountains.

Contest

StreetEye Collective Monthly Theme Based Contest

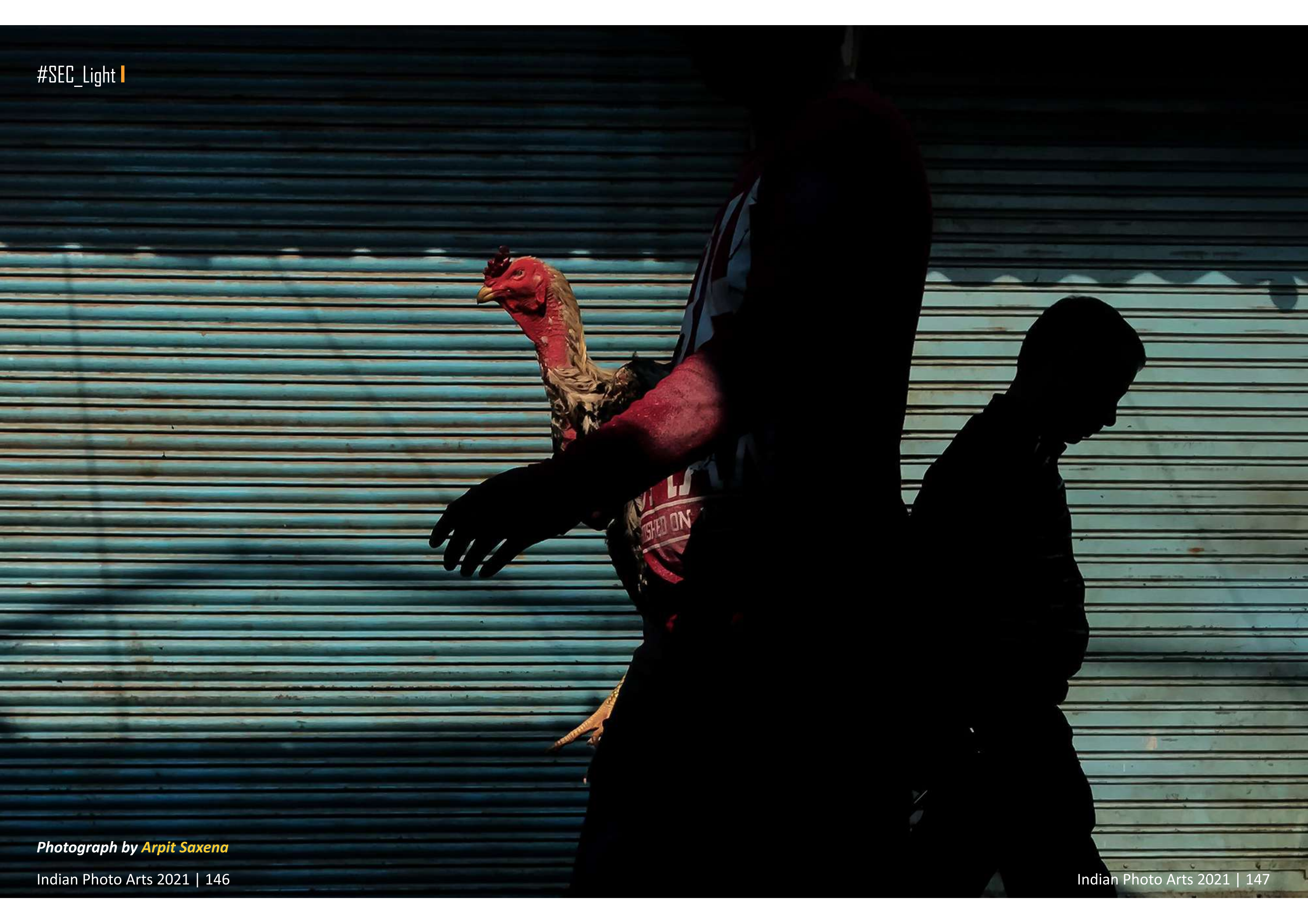
November Theme: **Light**



StreetEye Collective (<https://www.instagram.com/streeteyecollective/>) was brought into existence to create a platform to promote street photography by sharing knowledge and engaging photographers from all level.

Breaking the barriers of geographical limitations they came together for this wonderful photography journey. Each member has a distinct way of seeing and presenting street photography and that makes them unique in their approach. This collective is focusing on street photography projects for its members and also trying to encourage young talents through theme based challenges, assignments and workshops. They have been conducting theme based challenge every month on Facebook which run for two weeks. November theme was **#SEC_Light** and having received brilliant images from all over the world from which these chosen 10 best submissions are a pleasure to the eyes of the beholder.

#SEC_Light |



Photograph by *Arpit Saxena*

Indian Photo Arts 2021 | 146

Indian Photo Arts 2021 | 147

#SEC_Light |



Photograph by *Sreejith Kaviyil*

#SEC_Light |



Photograph by Soma Dutta



#SEC_Light |

Photograph by *Goutam Maiti*

#SEC_Light |



Photograph by Emir Sevim

#SEC_Light |



Photograph by *Sayan Acharya*



#SEC_Light |

Photograph by *Subrata Dey*

#SEC_Light |

Photograph by *Saurav Biswas*



#SEC_Light |



Photograph by *Sachin Chauhan*



Photograph by *Dhruv Makwana*

THE HONOURS BOARD



Arpit Saxena is a Delhi based street photographer and a graduate from the prestigious College of Arts, New Delhi. He has been practicing street photography for the past 4 years. He was one of the finalists in the Miami Street Photography Festival 2019 (MSPF) and his work has also been exhibited on multiple national platforms. For him street photography relies on raw emotions and interactions with people on the street and most importantly, size of the camera doesn't matter.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/arpitnarainsaxena/>

Sreejith Kaviyil, originally from Calicut, Kerala is a teacher and a self-taught photography enthusiast who loves to wander around the streets and click candid human elements on the street. As the street scenario is always non static, busy and complex, the challenges and uncertainties it offers are immense as well as exciting and for him it is most fun to be out there in search of a moment of harmony.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/eksreejith/>



Soma Dutta residing at the heart of Kolkata, India, is a commerce graduate with a passion for photography. She began her carrier in 2006 as a banker and pursued a carrier in banking and finance till 2015, when she realized her true calling was photography. She started out by exploring the streets in different parts of India which led to a fast developing interest in travel and street photography. She has been and awarded on multiple forums and her photographs have featured in multiple.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/soma.duttasarkar>

Goutam Maiti is a Kolkata based documentary and street photographer. His work includes street life and people from various socio-economic backgrounds. Photography has given him an opportunity to express how he perceives of the world, helps him rejuvenate and find himself among the people on the streets and tell their stories. Along with exhibited, his works have been published in National geographic Daily Dozens, Chiiz Magazine, Street Core Photography group, Progressive Street, Street Photo Collective etc.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/gmaiti/>



Emir Sevim is a Turkish street photographer from Istanbul and a graduate from the Cinema-TV department. Using his 10 years of experience he makes good use of light and shadow and loves to capture the spirit, rhythm, energy and strangeness on the street. He closely follows the works of master photographers like Henri Cartier Bresson, Alex Webb, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand as examples. Each day he strives to improve by taking more photographs, reading and watching related contents.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/emirssevim/>

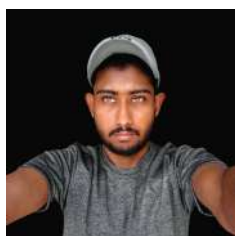
Sayan Acharya was born in Guwahati, Assam but brought up in Kolkata (India) and graduated in commerce from Calcutta University. For him freezing moments through the lenses of a camera and painting them on a canvas from the memories has got some similarities aesthetically. As a painter he used to replicate moments observed on the streets which proved helpful while taking photos. He also likes to capture portraits, various rituals, festivals and celebrations of Bengal.

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/sayan_acharya_photography



Subrata Dey, hails from Chandannagar, in the suburbs of Hooghly. He frequently visits the streets of Kolkata in search of interesting stories. He feels we get to see only a fraction of the bigger picture through the viewfinder. There is a distilled, abstracted reality, a story in the moment one captures. He always strives to strike a balance between the abstract and the real. He doesn't believe in posing his subjects instead relies on the search for the moment and the ability he possesses to exploit it.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/subrata27/>



Saurav Biswas is a botany student and a Botany Student, besides that a self-taught Kolkata based Street & Documentary Photographer. His journey with the camera in tow started almost 2 years back. For him, photography is just a reflection of, what he thinks and feels and how he observes his surroundings.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sauravision/>

Sachin Chauhan is an internationally recognized India based street photographer and holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication. A former intern photojournalist at The Times of India newspaper, the core essence of his work is candid moments on the street. This Year, Sachin was nominated for the prestigious "LEICA OSKAR BARNACK AWARD". Presently he is working part time as a photography teacher at a university. He is a member of India based Unstaged Collective – a street photography collective.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sachinphotography9/>



"A keen observer and a fast learner", **Dhruv Makwana** is usually tagged with this statement. He enjoys street photography for the entire experience associated with this genre and for what he can give in return to the world in the form of art.

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/dhruv_makwana/

MEMBERS OF THE COLLECTIVE

Arek Rataj

Navin Vatsa

Debrani Das

Rana Pandey

DK Pattnayak

Mohammad Moustafa

Sashi B Das

<https://www.instagram.com/navinvasta/>

<https://www.instagram.com/debranidas/>

<https://www.instagram.com/pandeyrana/>

<https://www.instagram.com/dkpattnayak/>

https://www.instagram.com/moustapha_photos/

https://www.instagram.com/sashi_b_das/



The Rhythm of Addis Mercato

Jean-Luc Gérardy explores the ancient traditions, slices of local culture and cuisine juxtaposed against the lofty ambitions of Addis Ababa in the largest open air market of Africa – [Addis Mercato](#) of Ethiopia.

At a casual first glance from a distance, chaos, disorder and lawlessness reign supreme, however a closer inspection reveals the order amidst the chaos. The sight of this apparent chaos which so successfully conceals the underlying order to an outsider is Addis Mercato, the largest open air market in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Pickup trucks, reeling under the rigors of hauling extensive loads of supplies to the market each morning are a common sight on the chaotic streets of Addis Mercato.

At a casual first glance from a distance, chaos, disorder and lawlessness reign supreme, however a closer inspection reveals the order amidst the chaos. The sight of this apparent chaos which so successfully conceals the underlying order to an outsider is Addis Mercato, the largest open air market in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Sprawling across several square miles, the open air market is the address for over 7,000 small to medium scale business entities involving a workforce in excess of 15,000. The 7,000 odd businesses cater to almost any demand which can be made under the sun, which possibly explains why the marketplace is such a bustling hub of activities. It is easy to lose one's way in the meandering alleys dotted with hundreds of shops which are makeshift shanties with respective inventories laid out lavishly at the front to attract potential buyers. However the locals seem to navigate with splendid ease as they hop from one shop to the next and find their ways through the stream of buyers, sellers, shopkeepers, workers, automobiles even herds of livestock.

Addis Ababa is one of the most prominent cities in the continent of Africa. Apart from being the capital and the largest city in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa is also home to the African Union. The city is a far cry from the dusty roads where the hooves of a million livestock kicked up dust storm in a bygone era. Addis Ababa is a modern city with an urban landscape where swanky

buildings pierce into the sky and dominate the city's skyline. The real estate boom, largely aided by the generous funding from the Chinese government is obvious at every corner culminating into the ultra-modern, massive new campus of the African Union. The city with its modern façade does well to conceal the still very much developing; some would go to the extent of labelling it as a reeling economy. The parameters applied to measure the growth and affluence of a country does little to refute this claim. Ethiopia, in spite of boasting of a sprawling Addis Ababa town centre, still remains one of the poorest regions in the continent. It is here, at Addis Mercato, the largest open air market in the continent, the reality of Ethiopia's fledgling economy stands in stark contrast to the city's bustling skyline. In this vast expanse of makeshift shops, shanties and crowd of buyers and sellers, the rest of the country and swanky Addis Ababa reach a middle ground. The thousands of shops which can at best be described as shanties, common across the slums in most developing nations are a far cry from the sprawling commercial complexes of Addis Ababa. The crowded streets, the unruly traffic, the ensuing chaos from a deal gone wrong, the familiar faces of beggars are all part of an average day at this open air market. However the market keeps functioning in its own rhythm and is central to the livelihoods of thousands of people. From scrap iron to succulent pork ribs, the market has everything to offer. Fresh



In this vast expanse of Addis Mercato's makeshift shops, shanties and crowd of buyers and sellers, the rest of the country and swanky Addis Ababa reach a middle ground.



Addis Mercato in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia is the largest open air market in the continent of Africa. Sprawling across several square miles, the open air market is the address for over 7,000 small to medium scale business entities involving a workforce in excess of 15,000. The 7,000 odd businesses cater to almost any demand which can be made under the sun, which possibly explains why the marketplace is such a bustling hub of activities.

produces are brought from the countryside in overburdened pick-up trucks, ragpickers scour through every pile of waste constantly scanning for any scrap that can be recycled for these fetch them good prices at recycling facilities, the market has a place for both the old and new, the fresh and the stale, it seems some value can be ascertained to everything available here. Colourful clothes, ornaments adorn the humble facades of these shops, discarded junk somehow find its way back in some brand new avatar to this marketplace, handicraft items which are locally crafted are stacked up in front of the respective shops, this open air market in a nut shell provides a glimpse into the Ethiopian way of life and culture in the midst of a cosmopolitan set up of Addis Ababa. Steadily this open air market has made a name for itself as a major tourist attraction in the whole of Africa. This is primarily due to its location in the heart of Addis Ababa, from where the tourists can experience or catch a glimpse of the Ethiopian culture while still enjoying the luxury and comfort which Ethiopia has to offer.



A shopkeeper in Addis Mercato tends to his inventory of iron and metal rods mainly used for construction work.



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Addis Mercato was set up by the Italian regime during their occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s. After an initial failed attempt during the 1890s, Italy led by Benito Mussolini established a firm grip on Ethiopia and thus on Addis Ababa after the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935. The ill trained and ill equipped Ethiopian army mostly comprised of local militia were no match against the might of a highly trained and sophisticated Italian army. Many historians view this event as one of the precursors to the Second World War. The

then League of Nations condemned this aggression by Mussolini although the condemnation was a rather symbolic one. It is only Great Britain who shared similar commercial interests in East Africa and a view of establishing control over the horn of Africa took serious note of such invasion. The nation's leader, Emperor Haile Selassie, went into exile. In Rome, Mussolini proclaimed Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III emperor of Ethiopia and appointed Badoglio to rule as viceroy. The atrocities committed by the Italian forces

reduced the country to rubble and the worst affected was the capital Addis Ababa. The Italian armed forces defied the Geneva Convention and resorted to the use of poisonous mustard gas which resulted in the deaths of millions of Ethiopians. Addis Ababa being the commercial hub of the country the Italians decided to make the optimum use of established reputation of the city. This also facilitated the Italians to establish some kind of trade monopoly in the region stretching all the way to southern Europe.

This boosted Ethiopia's, to be precise Addis Ababa's commercial presence in the region. Ethiopia remained under the clutches of Italy till 1941 when British forces accompanied by South African forces liberated Ethiopia during the Second World War. After their occupation of Addis Ababa, the Italian regime set about establishing a new market place at the heart of the city which they named – Mercato indigeno. Thus the foundation stones for today's Addis Mercato were laid.



Ragpickers scour through every pile of waste constantly scanning for any scrap that can be recycled for these fetch them good prices at the recycling facilities.



Among other notable sights in this wide open market place are the frequent piles of discarded plastic, which heap up in colourful stacks of vivid yellow, blue or red. This is largely due to the numerous awareness programs that are being conducted across the country addressing the need to recycle plastic products. A significant proportion of the market's workforce is engaged in collecting the plastic junk, sorting them out and separating the ones and carrying them to facilities where they can be recycled into a number of brand new items.

Addis Mercato of today, although nestled in the heart of Addis Ababa has a distinct character of its own. Being a vital cog in the economy of Ethiopia, the market sells one of Ethiopia's economy's mainstays – the famed Ethiopian coffee. Coffee makes up for Ethiopia's largest export amounting to more than a billion dollar each year. Addis Mercato is home to a large number of stalls selling a wide variety of coffee beans. In addition to coffee beans, the other produce which throngs the market place and is bound to draw attention is "khat". Khat is a flowering plant indigenous to Ethiopia. Chewing of khat leaves has an intoxicating effect on a person, leading to loss of appetite even a feeling of euphoria. The large scale dependency on khat in Ethiopia is a prevalent one and Addis Mercato quite diligently caters to this demand. An entire stretch in the market is lined with stalls which sell khat leaves. Although considered to be a psychotropic substance and as per the World Health Organisation chewing of khat leaves amounts to drug abuse, khat comprises of one of Ethiopia's major exports. The benefits which such an export presents to the Ethiopian economy have prompted the Ethiopian authorities to look the other way and decree the use and sell of khat legal. Along with coffee beans and khat leaves, spices, yet another item for which Ethiopia is famous for, form an integral part of this market. Ethiopian spices are integral to Ethiopian cuisine and the locals are extremely



Scrap metal dealers crowd the open air market. The booming real estate sector in Addis Ababa means such house building and construction materials are in huge demand and the dealers make the most of this demand operating out of their humble establishments.

particular when it comes to the assortment of spices in their kitchen. The customers in general are fine judges of the quality of these spices which they gauge primarily through touch and more importantly through smell. Spice trade in Addis Mercato comprises of one of the major activities in this bustling commercial hub. Among other notable sights in this wide open market place are the frequent piles of discarded plastic, which heap up in colourful stacks of vivid yellow, blue or red. This is largely due to the numerous awareness programs that are being conducted across the country addressing

the need to recycle plastic products. A significant proportion of the market's workforce is engaged in collecting the plastic junk, sorting them out and separating the ones reusable and carrying them to facilities where they can be recycled into a number of brand new items. While hordes of people throng the market place, there is a visitor, of a different kind which populates the market place in great numbers. Ethiopia is home to in excess of 8 million donkeys, a result of the nation's strong livestock culture. Even against the swanky backdrop of Addis Ababa's skyline, the donkeys remain the favoured

mode of transportation of cargo in Ethiopia. The shopkeepers often load the backs of these animals with supplies to and from their shops each day and these animals during their leisure waiting for the activities at Addis Mercato to come to halt, loiter in the lanes and alleys of the market place. As the sun sets beyond the skyscrapers dotting the Addis Ababa skyline the activities at Addis Mercato slowly draw to a close. The throngs of people lining up to the myriad stalls begin to wear thin, the shopkeepers in their seasoned manner engage in wrapping up the proceedings as

they neatly pack up their inventories and carefully seal their shops with a view of preventing any form of trespassing. The cramped pick-up trucks and hordes of donkeys kick up a dust storm along the dusty streets as they set about on their journeys to the comfort of their respective homes, only to return the next morning, to set the wheels of this 15,000 plus workforce in motion, adding yet another day's worth to the Ethiopian economy. Ancient traditions, slices of local culture and cuisine juxtaposed against the lofty ambitions of Addis Ababa give this market place a unique character. In more ways



than one the crowded and dusty lanes and alleys of Addis Ababa represent the crossroads at which the whole of Ethiopia finds itself in, hopefully from here on it will be journey towards a prosperous future which the country aspires for while keeping its roots alive in vibrant settings such as that of Addis Merkato.

Addis Mercato of today, although nestled in the heart of Addis Ababa has a distinct character of its own. Addis Mercato was set up by the Italian regime during their occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s. After their occupation of Addis Ababa, the Italian regime set about establishing a new market place at the heart of the city which they named – Mercato indigeno. Thus the foundation stones for today's Addis Mercato were laid.



A shop selling fresh pork in Addis Mercato. Ethiopia boasts of a rich heritage of animal husbandry and these shops bear testimony to that. Addis Mercato in spite of the giant steps the nation's capital is taking towards becoming a major cosmopolitan hub in Africa remains one of the major cogs in the economy of the country. Ancient traditions, slices of local culture, cuisine juxtaposed against the lofty ambitions of Addis Ababa give this market place a unique character and encompass the crossroads at which the whole nation finds itself at.

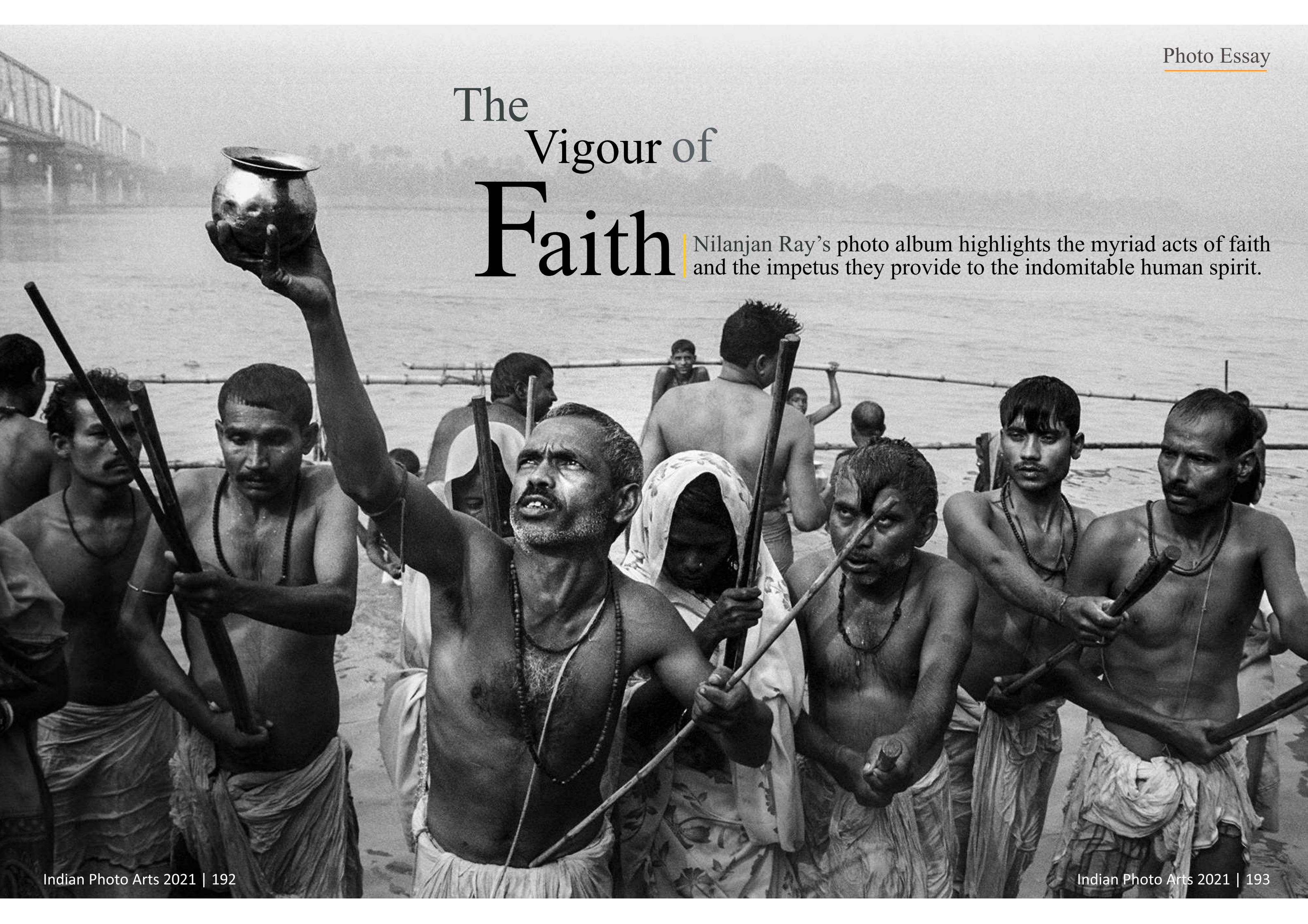


Jean-Luc Gérardy was born in Belgium. He studied computer science engineering at the University of Liège (Belgium). He practices photography as an amateur since he was a child. Being mainly an autodidact, he improves his photography by attending workshops with the master photographers Frédéric Pauwels, Craig Semetko and Fulvio Bugani. He also participated to portfolio reviews with Magnum photographers. Gérardy likes documenting instants of life capturing people in their day to day environment. More of his work is available on his website - jlgerardy.photography

Jean-Luc Gérardy

The Vigour of Faith

Nilanjan Ray's photo album highlights the myriad acts of faith and the impetus they provide to the indomitable human spirit.



The legendary Formula One driver Ayrton Sena from Brazil once said – “And suddenly I realized that I was in a different dimension.” A deeply religious man, Ayrton Sena, to many the greatest ever to have graced the motorsport arena, in spite of all his expertise and supreme mastery behind the wheels of racing car, placed his faith in the hands of the almighty which he felt elevated him to a higher dimension by virtue of which he was able to outwit his rivals. Similar sentiments surrounding faith and religion resonate with billions of people across the globe. Individuals staring down the barrel or ones at the top of their game find one thing in common – their unwavering faith. The notion of faith, which often extrapolates to religious beliefs may fail to appeal to the scientific minded or the rational thinker, yet in parts of the world where logic and convention suggest there is nothing left to look forward to, quite often it is the unwavering faith of individuals that keeps the indomitable human spirit alive and provides the impetus to the relentless quest for a better tomorrow. Human beings undertake arduous feats, observe astounding practices of austerity and unflinchingly embrace demanding sacrifices all in the name of faith. From a rational standpoint there can be little explanation for such practices and endeavours and often the credibility of such feats is shrouded in scepticism, yet there can be no denying it is faith and faith alone which provides human beings with



such otherworldly capabilities to pull off such stunts. Ancient sages and saints were known to perform acts or bear excruciating pain which were unforgiving enough to demolish the spirit of any individual. History is rife with anecdotes of individuals successfully overcoming enormous odds stacked against them courtesy their

credence. The contrast between scepticism and faith is so stark it often brings the pledged allegiances at a loggerhead. Yet, a staunch sceptic and the most rational mind must concede there is something admirable about the way faith elevates people to perform miraculous feats which otherwise would have been beyond the

realms of human capabilities. This photo series explores the myriad acts of faith performed by people following their respective religious beliefs and highlights how individual faith for billions across the globe nurtures the human spirit and keeps it alive in the face of hostile adversities.

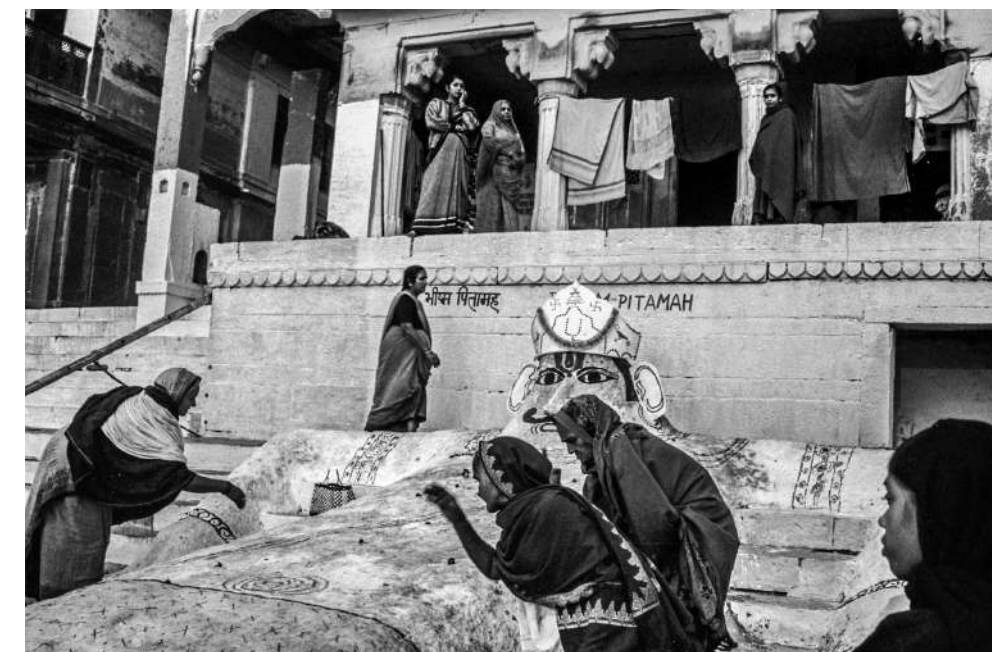












Nilanjan RAY

A Candid and Documentary Photographer with his own style, Nilanjan Ray was born in Kolkata, India in 1959. Nilanjan has a handful of exposed stock on "HUMAN INTEREST" and keeps stock of other people's money in a Bank since it is his profession. Although he did attend some workshop and classes at the different Institute, Nilanjan is to be considered substantially a self-taught photographer. He is a life member of an oldest Photographic club in Kolkata, Photographic Association of Bengal, Kolkata.

Right from childhood, he has always been fascinated by the life on the streets and the complicated and fascinating motion it involves, and this was the spark that inspired his first long-term personal projects, photographing in Varanasi- An Eternal City and then Faith – A quaint Emotions.

Over the years he has produced long and detailed photographic projects in various subjects in West Bengal as well as India.



PHOTOGRAFEED

Photo Association of Barrackpore - Annual Exhibition

Featuring the 30 winning photographs belonging to 10 different categories handpicked by the judges from Photografeed Photo Association of Barrackpore's 2020 annual exhibition cum photography contest.

Hearliest congratulations to all the winners and a big round of applause for each and everyone who took time out of their busy schedules to take part in this contest and became a part of the annual exhibition organised by Photografeed Photo Association of Barrackpore. The "Judge's Choice" features a wide array of impressive photographs belonging to as many as 10 different genres and a collection of 30 photographs which secured the first, second and the third position in their respective genres. An endeavour like this and a platform such as the one provided by this exhibition is surely going to encourage the budding photographers and enrich the field of photography with more stellar works and ideas.



Photograph by Bablu Khan

1st |

Photograph by Manas Das

Photograph by Ranjan Kumar



2nd |



3rd |



3rd |



1st |

2nd |



1st |

Photograph by *Achintya Chakraborty*



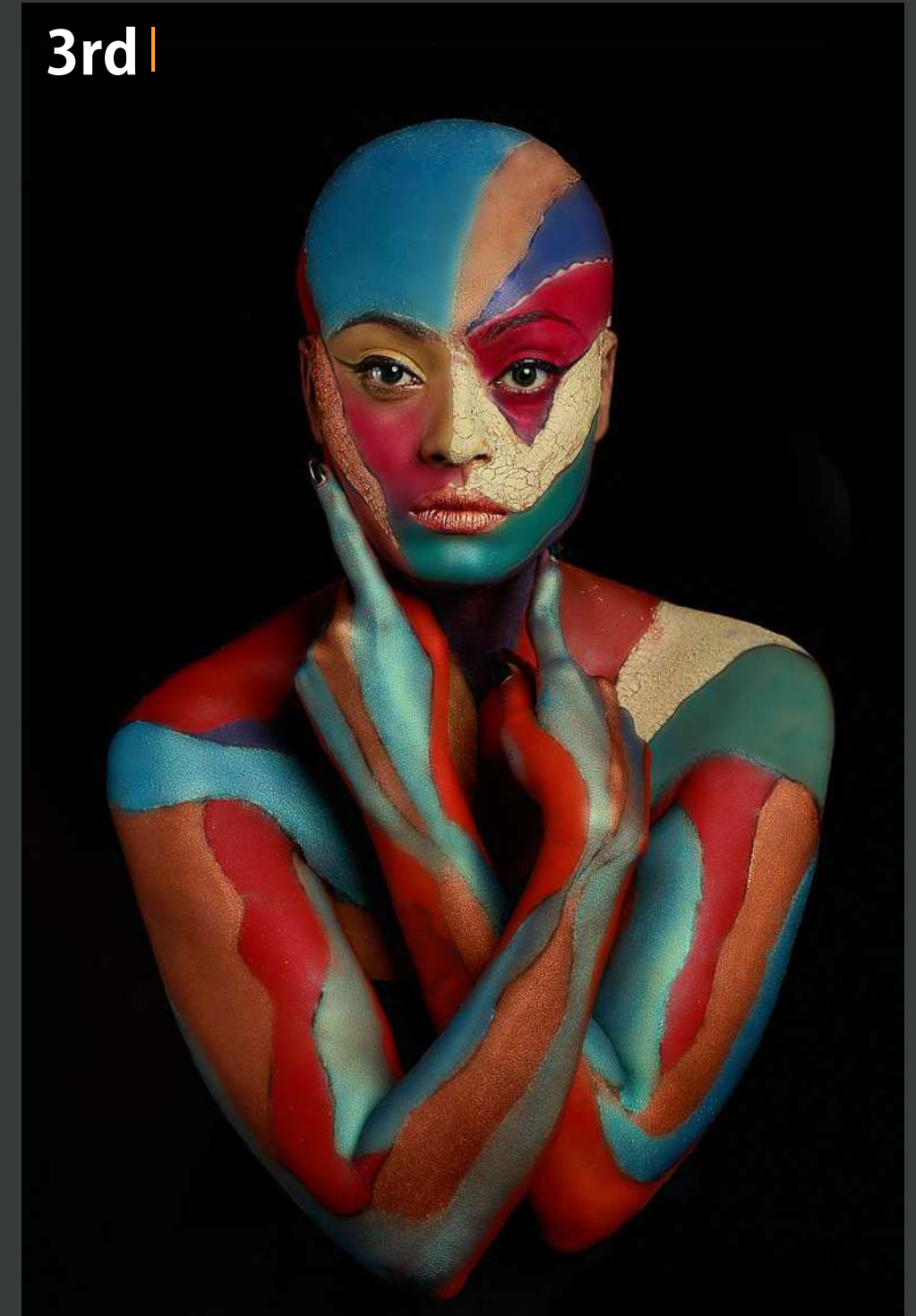
2nd |

Photograph by *Achintya Chakraborty*



Photograph by *Partha Bhattacharya*

3rd |



1st |



Photograph by *Pintu Biswas*



2nd |

Photograph by *Somor Mukhopadhyay*

Photograph by *Souptiki Dey*

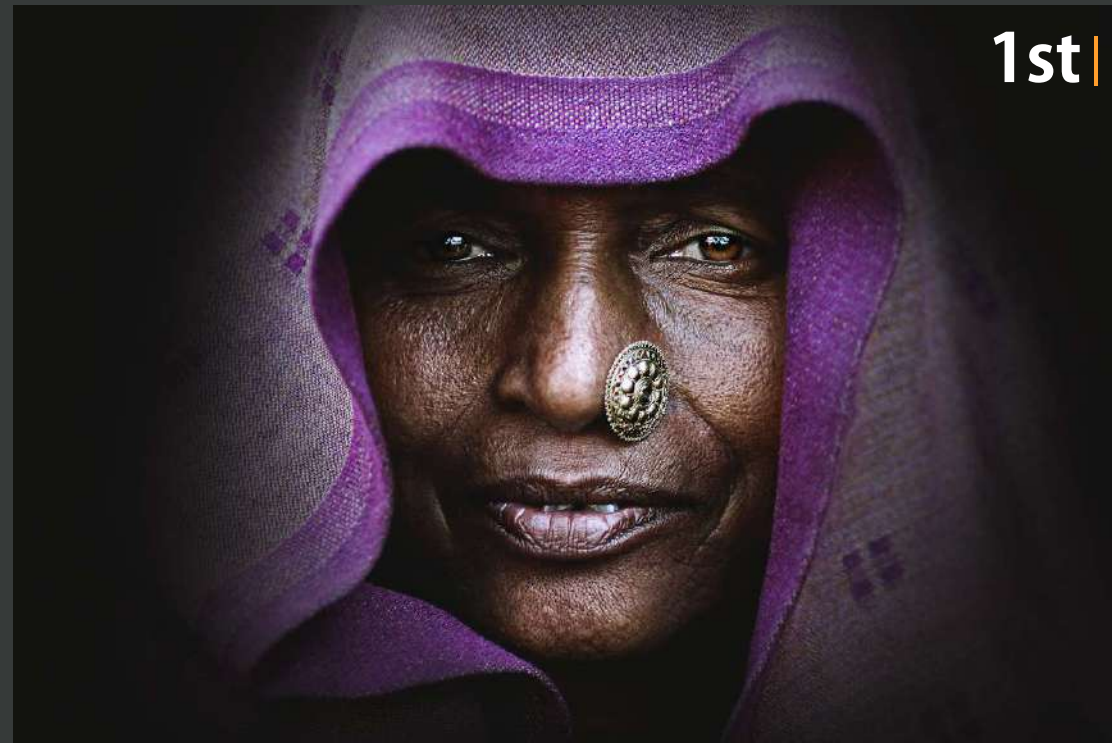


3rd |



2nd |

Photograph by **Abhijit Banike**



1st |

Photograph by **Anindya Banerjee**



3rd |

Photograph by **Debotra Sen**

Photograph by *Rahul Das*

1st |



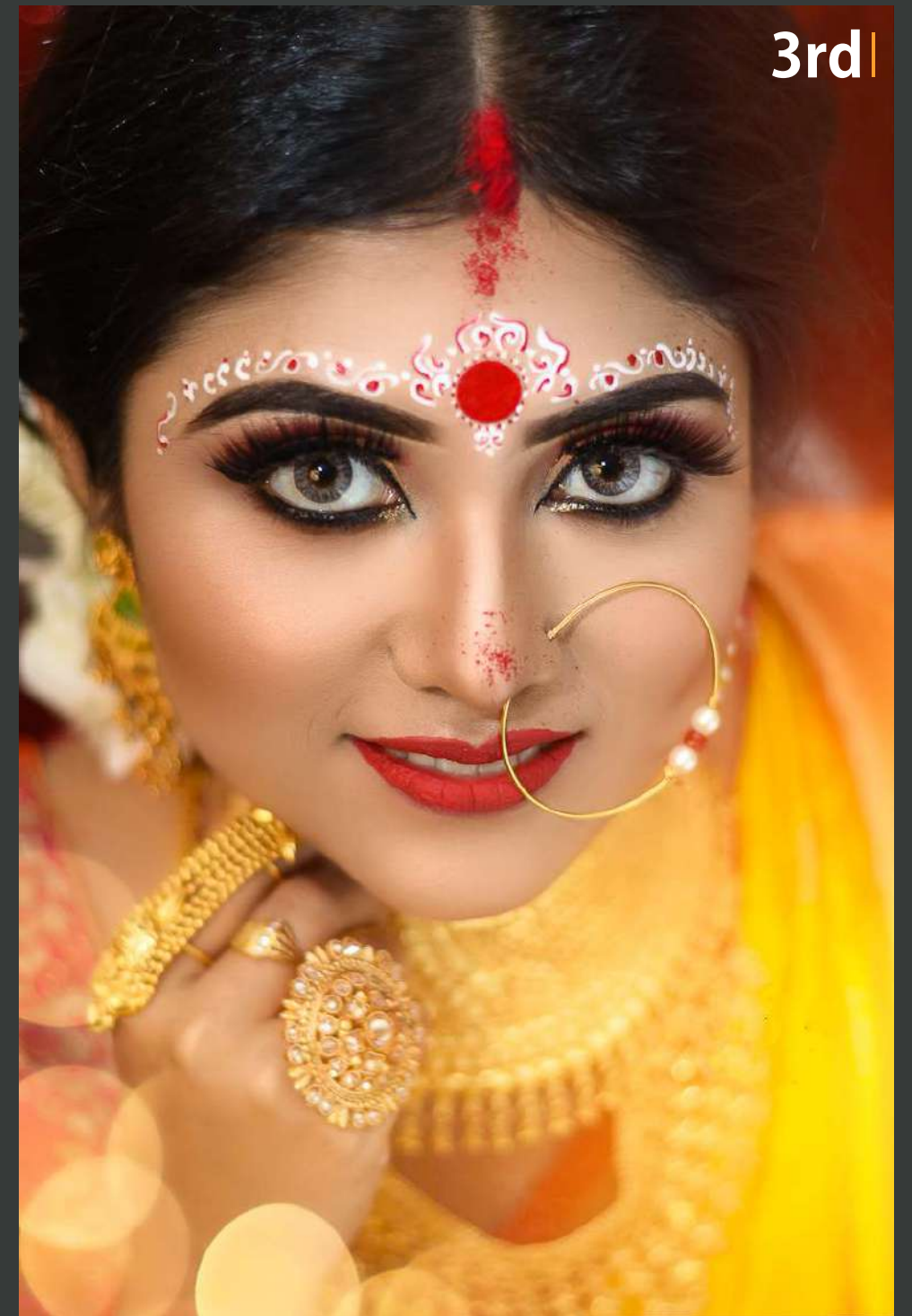
2nd |

Photograph by *Subhajit Majumder*

3rd |



Photograph by *Subhadeep Dam*





Photograph by *Debanjan Das*



Photograph by *Hirak Bhattacharjee*



Photograph by *Hirak Bhattacharjee*

1st |



Photograph by **Rohit Das**



2nd |

Photograph by **Arijit Saha**

3rd |



Photograph by **Koustav Bondyopadhyay**

1st |

Photograph by *Debmalya Chowdhury*



2nd |

Photograph by *Sagnik Bagchi*



3rd |

Photograph by *Amit Ruhela*



Photograph by Aviraj Saha

1st |



Photograph by Arindam Bhuiya

3rd |

