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PHOTO ARTS

June 2020

Sumba

an ancient community staring at a crossroads

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A Photo Album comprising of celebrated street photographer DEBRANI DAS's self portraits
Renowned macro photographer OMPRAKASH GHOSH's album depicts the beauty of the insect world



Photograph by Rahul Bera

The devastation caused by Cyclone Amphan sent shockwaves across the state of West Bengal. The damages amount in billions, something which is bound to take a severe toll on the future of the state and its people. Yet again, the Sundarbans was at the frontline, and the super cyclonic storm wreaked havoc on the mangroves, rendering millions homeless, snatching away their livelihoods and uprooting vast swathes of mangrove forests which serve as our first line of defence against such natural calamities. Things are trudging back to normalcy in our towns and cities, but the mangroves are still reeling and we cannot afford to forget that. Let the images of destruction stay with us and compel us to rebuild the Sundarbans.

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Cover page photograph by Mangalika Ghosh

Cover Story

Sumba

A COMMUNITY
AT A CROSSROADS

by Mangalika GHOSH

THE STORY OF AN ANCIENT TRIBE WHICH HAS SUCCESSFULLY HELD ON
TO THEIR TRADITIONAL ROOTS, BUT FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?

Ratengaro Village in Sumba Island is home to the ancient Sumba people who are widely known for their unique architecture, art forms and ancient lineage.



The vast swathes of golden sand along the shores of Sumba Island lead to a pristine world of lush green valleys that gently roll up into limestone hills which nestle on top of them small villages. These villages stand out by dint of the unique conical thatched roofs and are home to Sumba people.

We are living in an age of progress and advancements, in every sphere of life, much of which is being guided by science and technology which have reached dizzying heights over the past few decades and are showing no signs of slowing down. This world that we are a part of is home to the most modern technologies, the effects of which reach far and beyond our comprehension. In this age of automation, satellite communication, high speed internet, artificial intelligence it becomes almost impossible to even imagine a time when the planet was bereft of these boons of science and technology. Yet there are places on this very same planet, where the primal order still has kept the probes of science at bay. In these places life has not yet strayed far from its roots, from that humble origin, where ancient cultures and traditions still thrive in their own unique ways, where the societies are yet to be fragmented along the economic fault lines. One such place where life unfurls in such an organic and simplistic manner is the Sumba Island, a stunningly beautiful landmass tucked away in the Eastern Nusa Tenggara province in eastern Indonesia. The vast swathes of golden sand along the shores of Sumba Island lead to a pristine world of lush green valleys that gently roll up into limestone hills which nestle on top of them small villages, which stand out by dint of the unique conical thatched roofs. These villages belong to the people of Sumba tribe. The Sumba people in spite

of the influences the outside world has had over the island, still retain much of their traditional methods and way of life. There is very little information available which can conclusively determine the origin of this ethnic group and how they landed on the shores of this island. However the popular theory suggests the Sumba people are of Melanesian and Austronesian origin. Although there are multiple theories which are at loggerhead over such claims, with the information that is available to anthropologists this seems to be the most plausible explanation. It also becomes incredibly difficult to ascertain the exact time period during which the Sumba people started inhabiting the island. Based on historical findings and evidences it is believed the northern part of the island welcomed the earliest settlers on the island. As more of them arrived they gradually branched off to other parts of the island. The Sumba people pique interest by dint of their enigmatic origin and mysterious arrival on the island. While their origin, much of which has remained shrouded in mystery adds to this enigma, the unique architecture of their villages firmly rivets the attention of any outsider. A typical Sumba village stands out on top of these rugged hillocks courtesy their unique and traditional thatched houses. In ancient times the hillocks with their rugged terrain and thick thorny vegetation surrounding them provided some kind of natural fortification to the Sumba villages and

The Sumba people pique interest by dint of their enigmatic origin and mysterious arrival on the island. Their origin, much of which has remained shrouded in mystery adds to this enigma...

offered the much needed safety from enemies in the form of warring adjoining villages. This goes a long way in explaining the almost exclusive locations of Sumba villages on top of hillocks in the island. Open living quarters primarily made of bamboo are covered on top by thatched roofs which taper vertically above and give a unique conical appearance to the Sumba homes. The skulls of buffaloes and other wild animals adorn the walls of the living areas, these artefacts serve as a reminder to the warrior lineage of the Sumba people. The wooden beams which support the overall structure are meticulously carved which is typical to the houses. These carvings and other decors which adorn a traditional Sumba household speak volumes of the ancient Sumba heritage which has withstood the test of time and lives on in this remote island tucked away from the glitz and glamour of the modern world. Almost everything associated with the Sumba people is steeped in history. Their traditional ways are so ancient even history loses its way retracing this maze of time. For instance the Sumba people still follow their traditional Marapu religion. While parts of Sumba settlements in different parts of the island converted to Christianity mainly due to the repeated visits from Christian Missionaries when Sumba was

annexed by the Dutch East India Company, like countless other facets of the Sumba way of life, Marapu religion has not only managed to survive the onslaught of changes but even thrived. The Sumba people who are followers of Marapu religion are firm believers in afterlife and believe after death their souls leave their mortal bodies for an eternal life in the spirit realm. This spirit realm could be viewed upon as the idea of heaven for Sumba people. They also believe in this afterlife they will be reunited with their long deceased ancestors. In fact they believe the spirits of all living creatures inhabit this spirit realm and lead an eternal life there. Idol worship too forms an integral part of the Sumba religious practices. The idols represent various species and it is common in the Sumba society to worship these deities. Often these deities carved out of wooden blocks are placed in front of households to ward off evil spirits or bad omens. The Sumba people make sacrifices to these deities in the form of cattle, poultry or food grain although betel nut and leaves bear the symbol of any offering of the highest order and are in high demand during any religious ceremony. The battle to restrict the waves of change crashing on their shores is the toughest fight the Sumba people are faced with, particularly the old

A typical Sumba village stands out on top of these rugged hillocks of Sumba Island courtesy their unique and traditional thatched houses as can be seen here in the village of Prai Ijing.





timers. The influence of evangelical churches is on the rise in various parts of Sumba islands and huge segments of Sumba people particularly the younger generation is converting to Christianity. While traumatic for the elders the young Sumba people prefer pragmatism over sentiments. This is mainly due to the fact that Indonesia does not recognize Marapu among its five state religions. As a result of which followers of Marapu religion are often deprived of the benefits in terms of employments, social aids which followers of the state recognised religions enjoy.

burn technique and cattle rearing form the two principle occupations of the members of the Sumba community. The island is blessed with a tropical savannah climate which while facilitates cattle rearing is not ideally suited for agriculture. Along with that the rugged rocky terrain is not particularly suitable for farming either. The principal agricultural crops are rice, beans, corn among others. The rather dry savannah climate often results in prolonged periods of droughts. In fact conflicts among neighbouring villages over the scarcity of food during seasonal droughts used to be

The influence of evangelical churches is on the rise in various parts of Sumba islands and greater segments of Sumba community, particularly the younger generation is converting to Christianity.

Sumba art is as ancient and steeped in history as the community itself. Glimpses of which can be still found in the present Sumba society although much of it has taken a backseat paving the pathway for modern influences from beyond the shores of Sumba island. The colourful costumes, the gold and silver ornaments, the elaborate headgears all form an integral part of the vibrant Sumba appearance. These traditional costumes do not find too many takers in course of everyday life although during some festival or ritual the villagers dress themselves up in these colourful traditional costumes. A wide array of accessories made from various animal parts is also popular among the Sumba people.

Agriculture which follows a slash and

a common phenomenon in the ancient times. Even in the present Sumba community malnutrition particularly among young children continues to be a major problem. In addition to these the lack of technical knowledge and facilities have led to the widespread use of the slash and burn technique which has robbed the island, particularly the eastern part of it of the much needed forest cover and has rendered vast swathes of land barren and useless. Faced with such hardships it becomes imperative for the farmers to find newer and more productive ways of farming. The Government of Indonesia in association with some NGOs and other concerned agencies have conducted workshops or interactive sessions in the past where Sumba farmers participated.

Sumba art form deserves a special mention and the superlative quality is evident from this traditional musical instrument which this man has carved out of wood.



These Sumba men are engaged in rebuilding one of the houses in the village which was burnt down by a strike of lightning during one of the previous thundershowers.

Most of these workshops are aimed at solving the problems faced by the farmers in Sumba Island and how they can maximize the minimum resources which are at their disposal. Some of the popular methods which have been adopted involve planting trees and focusing on building thriving agroforests. Agroforests apart from creating an underground reservoir for the rainwater, supply the communities with agricultural products such as cloves and other herbs. More and more farmers from the Sumba community are adopting these newer techniques which certainly

range of products such as meat, eggs and wools among others. Sumba shepherds keep a close eye on their herds of cattle and sheep from atop the signature sturdy miniature horses which are indigenous to this region. The significance of cattle in the Sumba society transcends the boundaries of earning a livelihood. Cows, buffaloes, sheep, pigs, goats are often used as sacrifices during various Marapu ceremonies. These animals often constitute much sought after dowries during wedding ceremonies. Even on the occasion which marks the construction of a new house

In keeping tune with many of the ancient traditions, even in the present Sumba society the more cattle you own, the higher your social status.

augur well for their future. While agriculture remains one of the mainstays it would be safe to say cattle rearing, traditionally has been the principal means of livelihood for Sumba people. Apart from being the pillar of livelihood, cattle on the island of Sumba signifies several social parameters. Cattle are largely considered to be the symbol of one's social status in the Sumba society. The number of cattle one owns contributes to the family's social status. In keeping tune with many of the ancient traditions, even in the present Sumba society the more cattle you own, the higher your social status. Apart from cows it is common to find sheep, pigs, chicken, and goat in an average Sumba household. They are largely dependent on these animals for a wide

these animals are often slaughtered as offerings to the spirits. In spite of these animals forming the backbone of the Sumba society in many ways, livestock farmers are often faced with huge obstacles in rearing their herds. The paucity of grazing pastures, the rocky terrain, the lack of vegetation, the dry climate all contribute and further complicate these hardships. Apart from the brief monsoon during which the grazing pastures teem with lush green grass rich in nutrients, the livestock farmers have to rely upon the vast expanses of dry brown grasslands which are considerably less in nutrient contents.

The sands of time are yet to bring about considerable changes to the Sumba society. In a time when the outside world is



An elderly Sumba lady weaves a basket out of straw in her courtyard. These handicrafts bear testimony to the rich heritage of art and culture the Sumba community is blessed with.

An elderly lady grinds beetel nuts inside her home. Beetel nuts are considered as prestigious offerings on a religious occassion or to someone of importance such as the village chief.



The Sumba people make sacrifices to deities in the form of cattle, poultry or food grain although beetel nut and leaves bear the symbol of any offering of the highest order. The head priest of Golu Village can be seen offering beetel nuts.

engaged in this madding quest to become faster by even a nanosecond, the adherence of the Sumba community to their ancestral methods and ways of life is truly remarkable. Since change is the only thing which comes with a guarantee modern ways of life are slowly but steadily making inroads into this remote society. In the middle of such a setup, surrounded by the rugged hills and the thatched houses, where time seems to have stood still, only time itself will be able to hint at towards which direction the future generations of the Sumba society will be headed. The young generation seems particularly disconnected from their ancient past and are opting for

a life which is far more mainstream, they are constantly striving for a future laden with opportunities which unfortunately their ancient society on top of the hillocks in Sumba Island doesn't provide them with. It is steadily becoming a reality among the present and younger generation of Sumba people to move away from their home turf to the bigger cities or towns in search of a life which has more to offer than the dry savannah of Sumba. This small community which has preserved their ancient ways of life for centuries now, finds itself at a crossroad now. Only time will tell us which path the Sumba community has chosen for itself.



Glimpses from the daily life in a typical Sumba community. One look at these villages and it becomes evident this is an ancient society which is steeped in rich history and tradition of its own.





Sumba art is as ancient and rich in history as the community itself. Glimpses of which can be still found in the present Sumba society although much of it has taken a backseat paving the pathway for modern influences from beyond the shores of Sumba island.

The Sumba community with its ancient roots is deeply connected to the natural world and nature leaves a profound impact upon them from a very early age. Sumba kids make the most of this close association as they enjoy a playful dip in the nearby stream.





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About the Photographer

Mangalika Ghosh is an ardent travel photographer from India and currently based in Singapore. People, culture, landscapes fascinate her most. Reading expedition stories, browsing history of a place, scribbling her own travel moments are some of her next favorite things to do. So far she has explored a lot of places in India and South East Asia. Her works have been published in various forums such as Nationalgeographic, Natgeo Traveler India, Hyderabad Art festival, FujiX magazine, Discover India magazine etc. If any of her photos appeals the viewers to protect the serenity of this wonderful planet, appreciate its people or sustain a rare art that would be her biggest achievement.

Once domesticated, these magnificent beasts now roam free, and courtesy their domestic lineage of the past they are not strictly considered as wild animals, instead are considered to be feral horses.

The Mustang Conundrum

by Steve Rymers

For decades these animals have been at the epicentre of a number of political as well as animal rights movements. Blissfully unaware of the politics and the conundrums surrounding it, the mustangs continued to thrive braving the harsh elements in the deserts of Nevada but the growing numbers pose the biggest threat to the future of these magnificent beasts.



It is largely accepted the free roaming herds along the plains of Nevada, Utah and other parts of the American West owe their origins to the Colonial Spanish horses. Over the centuries close association and breeding with other breeds of horses have resulted in a number of different breeding populations among the mustang which are genetically isolated from one another.



Once the pride possessions of Spanish explorers who set foot on the American soil in their quest to discover the new world, the mustangs which now freely roam the plains of Nevada, Utah or New Mexico have

come a long way. Once domesticated, these magnificent beasts now roam free, and courtesy their domestic lineage of the past they are not strictly considered as wild animals, instead are considered to be feral horses. During the course of the following

centuries these horses left behind by the Spanish and Iberian explorers bred with other breeds of horses and the present populations of mustangs today in the American West are results of such inter breeding among different population sets

of horses. The herds too vary in their characteristics and appearances. They sport different morphs, different phenotypes, physical attributes even unique characters, yet there is one thing which binds them together. All of these herds and these



Each individual is blessed with a unique personality. This beautiful big, bold stallion is full of it and will walk right into any other band of horses and act like he belongs there!

animals have been subjected to the harshest of tests by nature itself only to ensure the toughest have made it to this point. The extreme conditions in the American West ranging from scorching heat to freezing cold, the meagre resources all have shaped this incredibly intelligent and tough footed animal which now proudly trots the valleys and the rolling slopes of the American West.

It is largely accepted the free roaming herds along the plains of Nevada, Utah and other parts of the American West owe their origins to the Colonial Spanish horses. Over the centuries close association and breeding with other breeds of horses have resulted in a number of different breeding populations among the mustang which are genetically isolated from one another. As a result of which these separate breeding populations exhibit unique features and identifiable traits which are typical to respective herds. It is not unnatural to find genetic traits of Thoroughbreds or the American Quarter Horse in the gene pool of the present population of mustangs in the West. The mustang is a medium sized breed of horse. Mustangs on an average weigh around 300-400 kg. Akin to the diversity in their gene pool, the mustangs sport a wide range of coat colours with the most popular one being bay – a reddish brown appearance. Other coat patterns might include spots, stripes and a number of other colouration. They give birth to their foals in during the months of April – June – the relative season of plenty in the

arid dry plains of the West. The young ones make the most of this favourable time of the year as they brace themselves for the harsh winter which looms large in the horizon. The high deserts of Nevada or Utah for that matter are sparsely populated by human settlements and in the absence of any natural predator the population of mustangs have grown significantly ever since they cast their footprints on the ecosystem of the Wild West. In fact under normal circumstances it is not unnatural for the population of a particular herd to double up in size over a period of four years. While for most animals, particularly those staring at extinction, this would be music to their ears, the burgeoning numbers pose before the mustangs a problem which is complicated in nature and not devoid of the murk that can be associated with our petty politics.

For decades now these animals have been at the epicentre of a number of political as well as animal rights movements. Blissfully unaware of the politics and the conundrums surrounding it, the mustangs continued to thrive braving the harsh winters and the scorching summers in the deserts of Nevada and other parts of the American West. Such increasing numbers which would otherwise augur well for most wild species on this planet spelled the doom for the mustangs. As their populations flourished, the herds spread out to wider pastures in the American West. This inadvertently brought them in collision course with cattle herders and big oil

The mustangs sport a wide range of coat colours with the most popular one being bay – a reddish brown appearance. Other coat patterns might include spots, stripes and a number of other colouration.



companies, for both of whom these lands were of primary importance. This resulted in large scale culling of mustangs which enraged the animal activists and wildlife enthusiasts alike. In the face of such protests and public outcry the Congress in 1971 approved the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 which designated the wild mustangs and burros to be federally protected species. In light of such developments the Bureau of Land Management – an agency responsible for monitoring and looking after America’s wild horses and burros came under heavy

and are forever condemned to a life in captivity under conditions that are far from ideal. There have been further allegations which suggest the conditions of living which the captive horses are subjected to are treacherous to say the least. Without proper shade and shelter the horses suffer in the extreme weather conditions and often ail from diseases and serious ailments which nobody attends to. Also there have been allegations that a significant proportion of the captured horses are trafficked to Mexico or Canada where they are slaughtered for commercial

In the face of such protests the Congress in 1971 approved the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 which designated the wild mustangs and burros to be federally protected species.

criticism. It was alleged wide scale corruption among the BLM and the agency colluded with the big oil companies and granted them access to the grazing lands of these herds for their commercial benefits. In addition to this, the BLM has also been accused of rounding up thousands of wild mustangs in order to make room for grazing lands for the ever increasing cattle industry. The rounded up horses often are kept in wide open pen where most suffer from a number of illness and other captivity related stress disorder and eventually succumb to an untimely death. The adoption program for the rounded up wild mustangs too have blown up in the face of BLM. Most of these mustangs while in captivity find very few takers and are often deemed unsuitable for adoption

purposes. It goes without saying the BML refuses to acknowledge any of these charges and refuse to lend any credence to these allegations. However there can be no denying the commercial interests of the cattle farmers as well the oil companies have slowly gained precedence over the well-being of these animals and irrespective of which agency is at fault or what the reasons are, the animals are facing the heat and bearing the brunt of such commercial exploitations.

On the other hand the other school of thought lends a sympathetic view towards the approach of the BML instead of branding them as the villains. According to many researchers, scientists and ecologists the present population of wild horses which is approximately 80,000 is

Wild mustangs come in a wide range of coats, however the whitish coloration of coat as sported by this individual is a rarity and paints an extremely rare and beautiful picture on this desert scape.



far more than what the fragile ecosystem of the region can support. They fear such numbers have the potential to upstage the delicate balance and disrupt an ecosystem which is already burdened with several other problems. Faced with such a scenario

many argue the BML is doing the best it can at this point. At the same time many feel unless the adoption program finds takers the BML will remain burdened with the ever expanding population of rounded up wild horses in the pens and will fail to

provide them with a decent life. Most of the budget which the BML receives is spent in feeding the horses and the agency is not left with much room to address the other issues such as rounding up more horses and focus on the quality of life in

the pens. Another debate has broken out among wildlife researchers regarding the number of the horses, with one group suggesting the population of cattle exceeds the population of horses by a huge margin and the large scale breeding of cattle should



The mustangs are social animals and live in large herds, each herd has its unique traits. It is common among herd members to greet each other in this manner and further strengthen the existing bonds and even form new ones.

be checked in order to relieve some of the pressure upon the ecosystem. While the other group feels that native species such as bison, bighorn, mule deer, pronghorn and other such animals should take precedence over livestock and wild horses. One thing that clearly emerges out of these theories and counter-theories that this arid ecosystem is presently burdened with much more than it can support with no apparent solution in sight.

Such complications surrounding the fate and way of dealing with the wild horses possibly arise from the “wild” tag that has been attached to this animal. Such a coinage doesn’t sit well with everyone. It is argued labelling these horses as wild horses is essentially not a biological classification; instead it has a political connotation. For many, including some in the scientific community, wild horses are

an invasive species, which has the potential to disrupt the delicate ecological balance of the region unless their numbers are closely scrutinised and managed effectively. Velma Johnston, better known as Wild Horse Anne played a crucial role in the passing of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Appalled by the inhumane treatment meted out to the wild horses in Nevada’s Virginia Range while rounding them up or being sent to slaughter houses she embarked upon a campaign to advocate for the rights of these animals. Her persistent campaigning and activism eventually prompted the Richard Nixon led government to pass the act. Hence it can be argued this essentially was a political decision and had very little to do with an essentially biological classification. With a history that is steeped in

controversy, politics and myriad concerns the mustangs of the American West are headed for a future that looks rather ambiguous. Clearly overburdened, the ecosystem of the American West is reeling under the rampaging hooves of an ever expanding cattle population as well as herds of wild horses. There could be little or no contention surrounding the fact that the population of wild horses needs to be regulated. The BLM already reeling under severe accusations of corruption and mismanagement of resources and burdened by a number of lawsuits is contemplating a number of realistic measures which can be implemented in an attempt to regulate the population of mustangs. One of the widely used techniques involves the usage of Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) a fertility control drug with a high rate of efficiency. Pregnancy can be prevented by

administering this drug at a prescribed interval to the mares. At the moment PZP is administered to a miniscule proportion of the wild population, with a scope for expanding the reach in the future. The other approach which involves trapping and neutering mares is something which has come under heavy criticism and the BLM had to abandon any plans involving such approaches. In the wake of such a situation adoption of wild horses remains the best hope for the BLM. However in spite of spending millions of dollars on adoption procedures the BLM finds itself competing in an already saturated horse market in the United States and often the wild horses courtesy their feral way of life do not make for the ideal adoption candidates. The other approaches the BLM is banking upon at present involve expanding the foraging land for the wild

Wild stallions sparring is not a scene for the faint hearted. The high pitched squeals, the grunts, the skull crushing kicks - in other words the gloves do come off during such spars. Young stallions such as these often spend most of their time engaged in mock sparring in order to hone these skills which some day will be crucial in claiming their own herds.



horses in order to provide the already overburdened eco-system the much needed breathing space. The BML is also pursuing for higher annual budgets in order to expand their existing pens with a view to accommodate more wild horses and

providing them with a better way of life. While culling remains a standard population control measure for various species across the United States it is something which doesn't feature in the immediate blueprint of the BML.

Under such circumstances it seems the fate of the wild horses and the eco-system of the region is in the hands of nature itself. The external measures which could have been adopted by the BML or the ones which have been already adopted have

failed to yield the much needed results at the desirable scale. A number of wild herds in various parts of Nevada are already feeling the delicate balance of the eco-system shifting further away and worryingly not in their favour. The food



Newborn foals take their wobbly first steps within minutes of being born. With their mothers firmly by their sides and the safety that comes with a large herd these young ones are relatively safe during these precarious early days of their lives.

supply is running low, the new born calves are either premature or grow up to be malnourished displaying stunted growth. In the face of such developments it is imperative for the BML and other

concerned agencies to come up with a sustainable solution. However it goes without saying it is easier said than done. In the meanwhile the feral herds in the high deserts of Nevada continue to gallop

through their days unaware of the emotional and political uproar surrounding them and the resulting consequences on the ecology they are a part of. It appears their identity, which has resulted in a

number of long-standing controversies and their future both are staring at a crossroad, trying to buy time for these magnificent beasts which will eventually lead to a sustainable solution.



Steve Rymers

The females are no pushovers and are more than capable of warding off any unwanted attention. This young male finds it out the hard way upon approaching a female who was in no mood to entertain his romantic overtures.



With a history that is steeped in controversy, politics and myriad concerns the mustangs of the American West are headed for a future that looks rather ambiguous. Clearly overburdened, the ecosystem of the American West is reeling under the rampaging hooves of an ever expanding cattle population as well as herds of wild horses. The extreme conditions in the American West ranging from scorching heat to freezing cold, the meagre resources all have shaped this incredibly intelligent and tough footed animal which now proudly trots the valleys and the rolling slopes of the American West. Sadly they are faced with a fresh battle, one they will not be able to win on their own.



About the Photographer

Steve Rymers got started in the world of photography when he first started taking photos with his iPhone while on wilderness backpacking trips. He quickly became very interested in capturing images of nature's beauty, and he wanted to capture the images in the same way he sees them in n person. Steve is very dedicated to his family, and to helping others in need. He is very grateful for his many blessings!

IN SEARCH OF A WASTELAND

by Chinmoy SWARGIARY

Guwahati's has intensified the search for newer ways to effectively manage its solid waste. One can only hope it is already not too late for the environment and the fragile eco-system of Deepor Beel which have been reeling under the effects of the mounting heaps of filth at the Boragaon dumping site.

Huge heaps of waste and filth accumulate at the Boragaon dumping site in the outskirts of the city of Guwahati in Assam.

The West Boragaon dumping ground of Guwahati is located at a distance of about 15km from Guwahati City. The potent force of life finds its way even among these huge mounds of dirt and filth as these dumping grounds are home to hundreds of greater adjutant storks, kites and egrets.



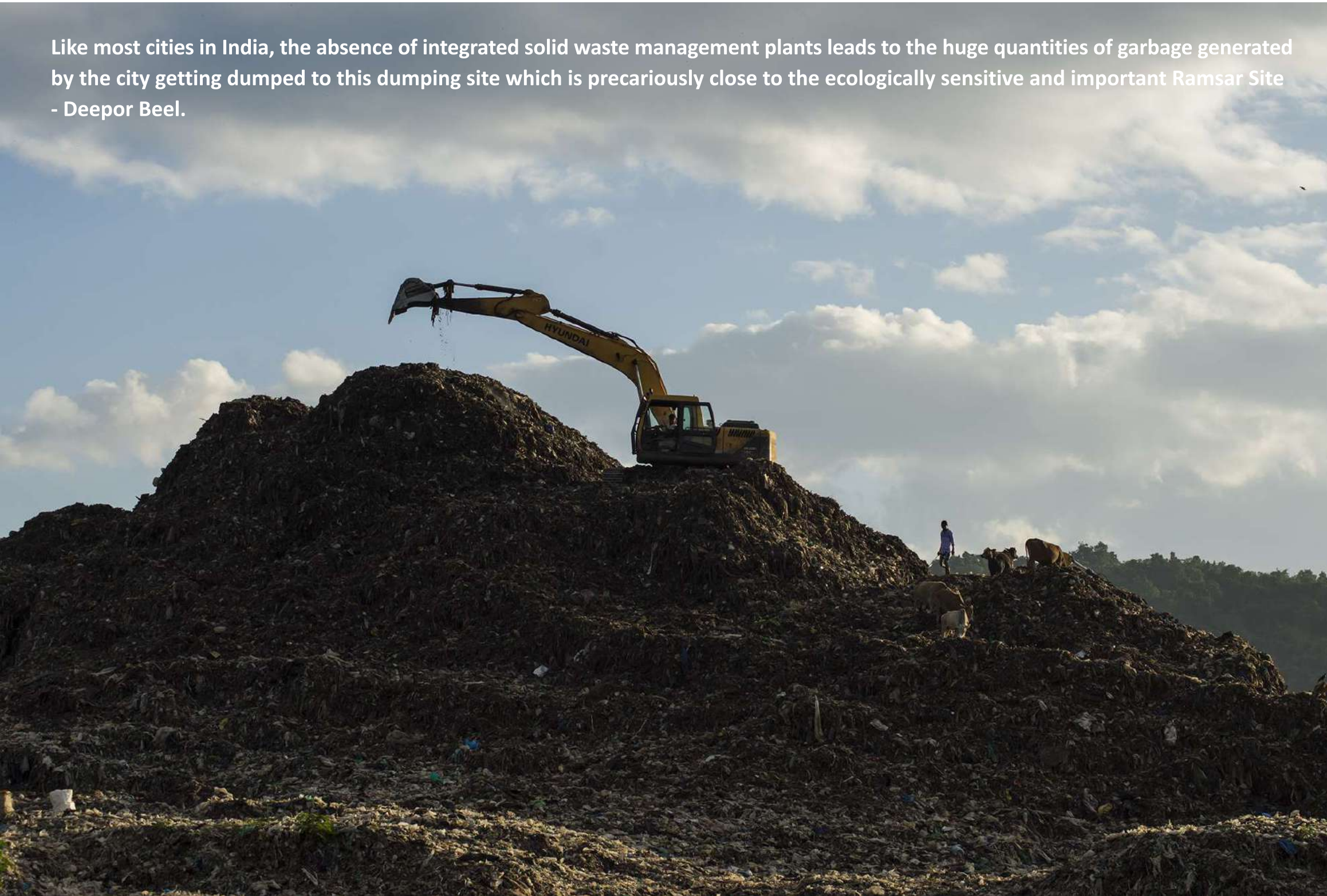
The Greater Adjutant Stork is a member of stork family. Assam holds the largest colony in terms of breeding population and these birds prefer to roost in such garbage dumps.



India's cities are reflective of the nation's growing ambitions, the aspirations of the citizens. Each year thousands come within their folds on a daily basis hoping to carve a niche for themselves. Among the major cities in India, the city of Guwahati in Assam is of prime importance to the entire north-eastern region of the country. The city of Guwahati acts as gateway to the entire north-east region of the country. For a sizeable population from a total of seven states including Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur the city of Guwahati acts as the main commercial hub. Quite understandably Guwahati becomes the preferred destination for people from all of these states looking for the opportunities which life in a big city offers. As a result of which Guwahati has grown in proportions over the decades, both in terms of population as well as stature. However with this a new aspect has come to the fore, which Guwahati, like every other major city would prefer to keep tucked away in obscurity. The increasing footfall has contributed hugely towards a massive increase in the amount of solid waste which the city produces on a daily basis. Although not as grave as that of Mumbai or Delhi's concerns, effective solid waste management is increasingly becoming a worrying concern for the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC). For decades, Boragaon has been the designated solid waste dumping ground

of the GMC. The 500 tonnes of waste which the city produces daily gets dumped at this site. The Boragaon dumping site by dint of its location has been at the epicentre of a number of protests and the GMC and the state government is feeling the heat as well. Located in the outskirts of the city, at a distance of approximately 15 km, the dumping site is perilously close to Deepor Beel – one of the largest freshwater lakes in the state and a designated Ramsar Site since 1971. For long environmentalists and concerned agencies have been complaining about how the choice of Boragaon as the designated dumping ground is spelling doom for the fragile ecology of Deepor Beel. Deepor Beel apart from being home to a wide array of flora and fauna, is key to the survival of a number of villages comprising of indigenous people. A significant chunk of the economy of this region is either directly or indirectly dependent upon the resources of Deepor Beel. Freshwater fish is the major source of protein for the villagers and also provide the one major source of income for the fishing communities. A rough estimate suggests as many as 1500 families depend upon this fragile eco-system for their lives and livelihoods. In addition to being an economically significant location, Deepor Beel occupies an incredibly sensitive spot in the wildlife map of the state. The lake is home to hundreds of species of birds and mammals. Along with the flora and a wide range of wild species, Deepor Beel

Like most cities in India, the absence of integrated solid waste management plants leads to the huge quantities of garbage generated by the city getting dumped to this dumping site which is precariously close to the ecologically sensitive and important Ramsar Site - Deepor Beel.



has carved one of the most prominent ecological hotspots in the state of Assam. The lake swarms with huge flocks of migratory birds particularly during the winter months. Some of the commonly found bird species in Deepor Beel are spot billed pelicans, lesser adjutant stork, the greater adjutant stork and migratory

species such as the Siberian crane. The presence of large mammals in the form of leopards, jungle cats, barking deer and even herds of elephants signifies the ecological importance of this Ramsar Site. However the nearby Boragaon dumping site threatens to upstage the delicate balance of this eco-system and even

desecrate it. The early signs of environmental degradation at Deepor Beel were noticed as early as in 2004. Since then environmental activists and other agencies have been vocal regarding the usage of Boragaon dumping ground for solid waste disposal by the GMC. Amid these protests and uproars the GMC has

been under tremendous pressure to come up with a new designated dumping ground for solid waste management. Although in spite of assurances by the GMC to shift the dumping grounds to Chandrapur back in 2015, in reality nothing has been actualised yet. As the Boragaon dumping site continued to wreak havoc on the ecology of Deepor Beel and the apathy displayed by the state government and the municipal body, the National Green Tribunal decided to intervene and in April 2019 ordered the GMC to shift the dumping site to the new location of Chandrapur within a period of two months. However the GMC, yet again failed to meet the deadline and until now no concrete decision has been taken by the authorities to shift the dumping grounds to the new proposed location. This is primarily due to the fact that the new location at Chandrapur is seemingly unsuitable for such large scale solid waste disposal. GMC officials in a report submitted to the state government mentioned the proposed land at Chandrapur is a low lying one without a boundary wall. In addition to this the only dirt road leading to the site is not particularly suitable for the movement of heavy commercial vehicles notably the garbage dumping trucks. In order to address these problems the government needs to come up with a three pronged approach which will involve land filling in order to raise the elevation of the low lying site, construction of a boundary wall

and the construction of a motorable road for the movement of heavy vehicles. This certainly poses a big challenge for the government exchequer and other government resources, which goes a long way in explaining why the entire process of shifting the dumping site has been put on hold for such a long period of time. In fact as per the recent developments the government has shelved the plan of relocating the dumping site from Boragaon to Chandrapur. Instead the government and the Guwahati Municipal Corporation have decided to concentrate all their efforts in developing an integrated and efficient solid waste management system for which an amount of ten crore rupees has been sanctioned. Once functional there will be no need for a dumping site, as claimed by the concerned authorities. However even for these projects the government needs to acquire land, and as of now it has identified four locations where such solid waste management plants will be set up. These locations are Chandrapur, Udalbakra, Sonapur and Bashistha. The district administration has identified four places to set up the integrated solid waste management project. According to official and government sources work at these locations will commence the moment the government secures the possession of these sites. In addition to setting up solid waste management plants the government also plans to recycle the waste and convert it into energy and manure. However such projects are still at a nascent stage and it

is going to be some time before actual groundwork commences on such projects. Waste management in Indian cities, by and large remains a poorly executed operation. Most cities across the country are suffering from the lack of efficient solid waste treatment plants and schemes. Perhaps such hurdles are soon going to become more and more common in other major cities across the country. A significantly huge proportion of the waste generated by our cities is dumped untreated. These waste products eventually find their way into our seas and ocean and pose a huge threat to the biodiversity across the planet and the well-being of millions of creatures. The predicament faced by the species in and around Deepor Beel is sadly becoming a norm in different parts of the country. In trying circumstances like these it is absolutely imperative on part of the concerned authorities to come up with an efficient solid waste management plans. It will require a great deal of planning and proper implementation but above all such initiatives will never bear any fruit unless there is intent from the civil society at large. Even a single piece of waste disposed by us in an irresponsible manner has the potential to find its way into the seas and oceans of our world and harm the eco-system. Hence the responsibility rests with all of us, not only with the concerned authorities. Other options such as converting such huge quantities of waste into sources of renewable energy or

The young boy searches the mounds of filth looking for items which can be sold at a scrap shop. Poverty exacts a heavy toll on the childhood of these young kids.



Life for many flows in its own unimitable fashion in these garbage mounds. The cows forage in these heaps of filth, the birds scavenge, the ragpickers search for scraps which can be sold while we turn a blind eye towards the dire consequences awaiting the future.



exploitation - one garbage dumping site at a time. The modern methods and techniques available at our disposal should not make that task a difficult one. However in spite of all the access to such modern technologies we are blessed with if we lack the intent, it goes without saying not much can be achieved on the ground. The dumping site at Boragaon with a healthy population of egrets, greater adjutant stork and black kites is a prime example of how life thrives in even the most inhospitable setting. In these grounds where the living conditions are far from ideal, a large number of species have made it their homes, a large number of people scurry for a living in knee deep filth, in other words life in these abhorrent set up moves on in its own unimitable fashion. This sense of indifference however doesn't suit us, and it is time for all of us to wake up from our slumber and take a stock of what we are dumping in the lap of nature and how dire the consequences can be.

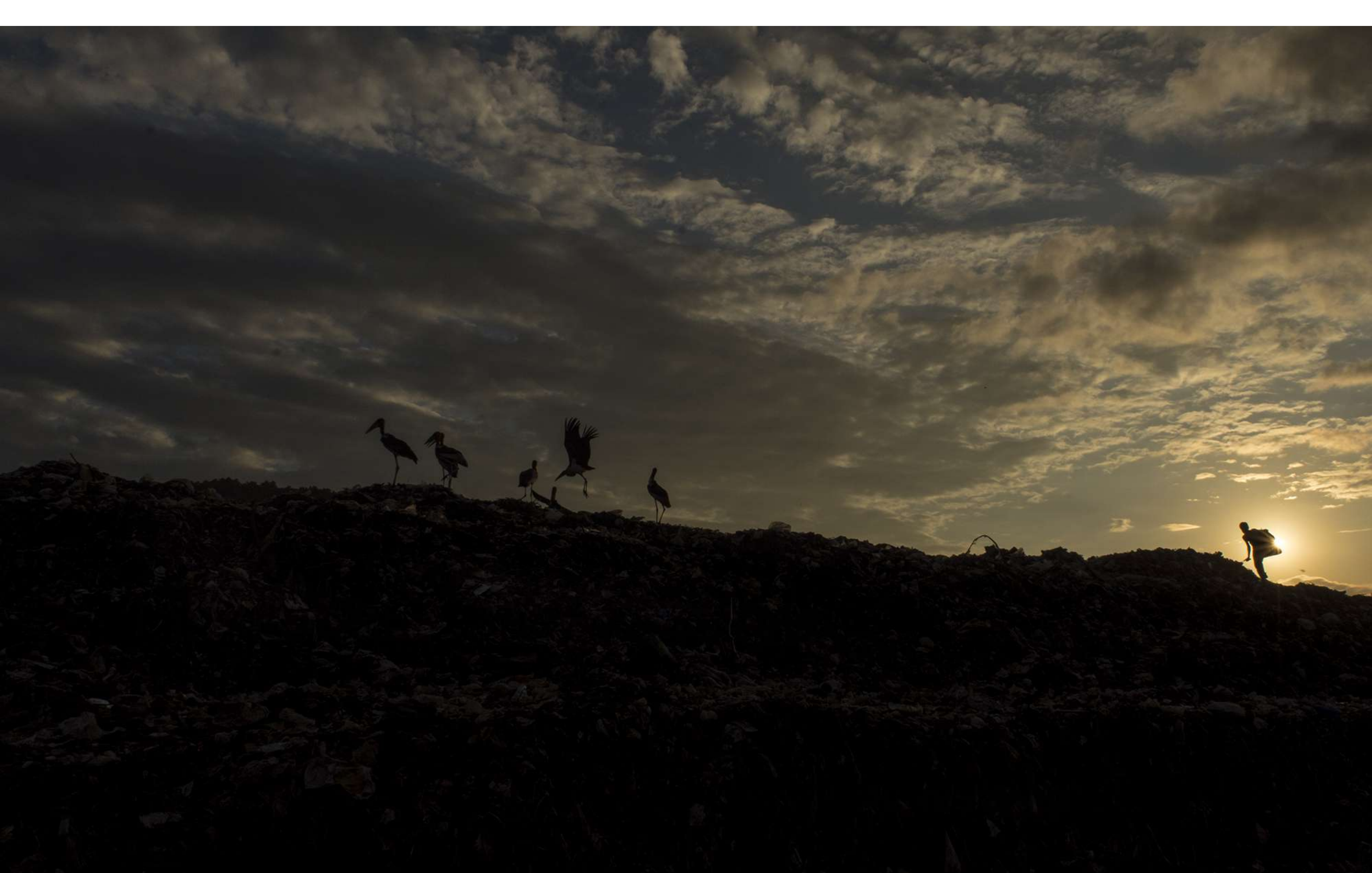
manure are viable ones and ones which can lead to a significant reduction in the annual expenses any particular municipality of state government faces. In addition to these, such renewable sources of energy contributes towards the reduction of the carbon footprint as well. In case of Guwahati and the threat that

looms large over the eco-system of Deepor Beel one can only hope the remedial measures are put into action by the concerned authorities without further delay. The delay which now has graduated into years, is not a result of the lack of infrastructure, in fact this delay can be entirely attributed to the apathetical

approach towards the well-being of the environment and the natural world. This planet is meant for the co-existence of millions of species, the natural world is a treasure trove of life, our selfish methods and ways have for long been exacting a huge toll from the natural world and its denizens, the time is ripe to end that

Local herders bring their cattle to these dumping grounds too. The cows indulge on this spread discarded by the city of Guwahati.





As the sun sets over Boaragaon dumping site it is time for everyone to retire to their homes, the storks, kites and egrets retire on these giant mounds for the night and the ragpickers trudge their heavy loads on their backs on their way home.



Waste management in Indian cities, by and large remains a poorly executed operation. Most cities across the country are suffering from the lack of efficient solid waste treatment plants and schemes. Perhaps such hurdles are soon going to become more and more common in other major cities across the country. A significantly huge proportion of the waste generated by our cities is dumped untreated. These waste products eventually find their way into our seas and ocean and pose a huge threat to the biodiversity across the planet and the well-being of millions of creatures. The predicament faced by the species in and around Deepor Beel is sadly becoming a norm in different parts of the country. In trying circumstances like these it is absolutely imperative on part of the concerned authorities to come up with efficient solid waste management plans. It will require a great deal of planning and proper implementation but above all such initiatives will never bear any fruit unless there is intent from the civil society at large.



About the Photographer

Chinmoy Swargiary is a visual story teller and is interested in documentary photography. He was introduced to the field of photography by his father with a canon point and shot shoot camera at the age of 16. In the year 2014 he took admission in a photography institute “PHOTOGRAPHIC AND VOCATION TRAINING INSTITUTE” based out of Guwahati. Later on he pursued a specialized course in editing from “VISUAL RHETORIC” from Guwahati. He also holds a diploma degree in “MASS COMMUNICATION, JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES” from COTTON UNIVERSITY. Presently he is associated with the leading wildlife NGO based in Guwahati named “AARANYAK” in the “Media Production and Communication Department”. For him photography is way of telling a story, revealing the way he sees the environment. It develops the art of observation within him. Photography provides him with a creative fulfillment.



Delhi Election democracy on trial

by Naila NASIR

THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED DELHI ELECTION AMIDST THE CAA ROW WAS A STERN TEST FOR INDIAN DEMOCRACY AND ONLY TIME WILL TELL HOW WE FARED AS THE WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY

The Delhi Election took place on the 8th of February 2020 after weeks of high pitched campaigns by the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the oppositions primarily in the form of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC).

India by dint of a population of 1.3 billion is by far the biggest democracy in the world. India with a parliamentary system of government is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic where the “President” forms the head of the state and the “Prime Minister” forms the head of the government. The country is governed as per the provisions laid out in the Constitution of India which was adopted on 26th November 1949 and formally came into force on 26th January 1950. However these mere facts and figures and dates do little to provide the true essence of Indian democracy or democracy anywhere else in the world for that matter. While periodic elections at various levels of governance, the political parties rallying against one another or trying to woo the voters, the policy makers, the heated debates at the parliaments, the twists and turns in political alliances and allegiances dominate the discourse of Indian democracy, the true essence and objective of democracy in India spread far and beyond the often narrow and power craved scope of electoral politics. In a vast and diverse country like India, where everything from food habit to religious and cultural practices differ greatly over every few hundred kilometres, Indian democracy is possibly the only common thread which keeps the wheels of this over a billion strong nation rolling in unison. The central objective of this democracy is to lend a voice to everyone, irrespective of their varied viewpoints and be heard.

In a democracy like that of India's there is and should always be room for dissent, for voices which may or may not align with the majoritarian views, in fact it is the responsibility of a democracy to provide a platform, a level playing field to even its most downtrodden, to the miniscule minority and ascertain equal significance to those voices, be it of a solitary individual. And democracy with all its ethos, ideologies and pluralism takes the centre stage and celebrates itself in a rather pompous manner when the nation goes to vote during our elections. Elections in Indian democracy assume a number of different forms and names although by and large there are two major types of elections which dominate the country's socio-political discourse. These two are General Elections (Lok Sabha) and State Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) Elections. During the General or Lok Sabha Elections citizens of India above the age of eighteen elect the Members of Lok Sabha (House of the People) or the lower house of India's Parliament by casting their votes in their respective constituencies for the candidate of their choice. The elected representatives are known as Members of Parliament and are expected to perform their roles for the next five years until the next General Elections unless removed from their positions by the President of India. Every General Election witnesses a total of 545 candidates being elected as Members of Parliament with the political party with the majority of representatives forming

the government. In case any single political party fails to achieve clear majority a coalition of parties forms the government. In the other major electoral process, the Vidhan Sabha or the State Assembly Election, the individual states elect the Members of State Legislative Assembly from their respective constituencies. These elections are held at an interval of five years although unlike the General Elections they are held in different years in different states. The total strength of each state assembly too varies with states unlike the fixed strength of seats for the Members

In a democracy like that of India's there is and should always be room for dissent, for voices which may or may not align with the majoritarian views.

of Parliament. However in case of State Assembly Elections the elected representatives or the Members of State Legislative Assembly (MLA) are expected to serve their roles for the next five years until the next elections unless they are removed from their positions by the Governor of the respective state. In India, the most recently concluded election was the Delhi State Assembly Election, where a total of 70 assembly seats were up for grab for the first time in 5 years. The elections took place on the 8th of February 2020 after weeks of high pitched campaigns by the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the oppositions primarily in the form of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). However in reality it was

a two pronged affair, with the AAP relying heavily on their good governance over the past five years to return to power while the BJP who is at the helm of affairs at the centre vying for Delhi by raising issues of national interest. The lead up to the elections was unfortunately dominated by political bickering of the worst kind, in which inflammatory comments with an agenda to stoke a communal divide were made far too often and frequently by the opposition leaders including their top brass which was coupled with derogatory personal remarks about prominent leaders

made by leaders across the entire political spectrum of Delhi. In the end however AAP's claims of good governance in which they take the credit for revamping the national capital's education and health system stood vindicated as they returned to power with a thumping majority. In a remarkable turn of events the AAP was able to secure a mind boggling 62 out of the 70 seats with the BJP their fiercest opponent bagging a mere 8 seats and as it was expected the Congress party failed to leave any mark on the political landscape of Delhi. Irrespective of the outcome of any election, unperturbed by the endless political analysis, the exit polls, the political narrative and chemistry and the equations of alliances, there is one entity which



The concerned authorities are engaged in verifying the identities of the voters on the polling day.

silently and tirelessly works in the background and ensures the wheels of democracy in the largest democracy of the world keep rolling. This is the Election Commission of India. The Election Commission is an autonomous body empowered by the Constitution of India and is responsible for conducting elections

at the national, state and district level across the country. It goes without saying during the recently concluded Delhi Election, it was the Election Commission which was at the helm of affairs and responsible for conducting this massive exercise in which close to 10 million people exercised their voting rights across

thousands of polling booths on a single day. However the role of the Election Commission is not restricted only to the day of polling. The organization is responsible for chalking everything out from deciding the polling dates, laying down the guidelines for the contestants in the run up to the elections, issuing and

enforcing the moral code of conduct for all the parties and their electoral candidates and taking care of a whole lot of other formalities.

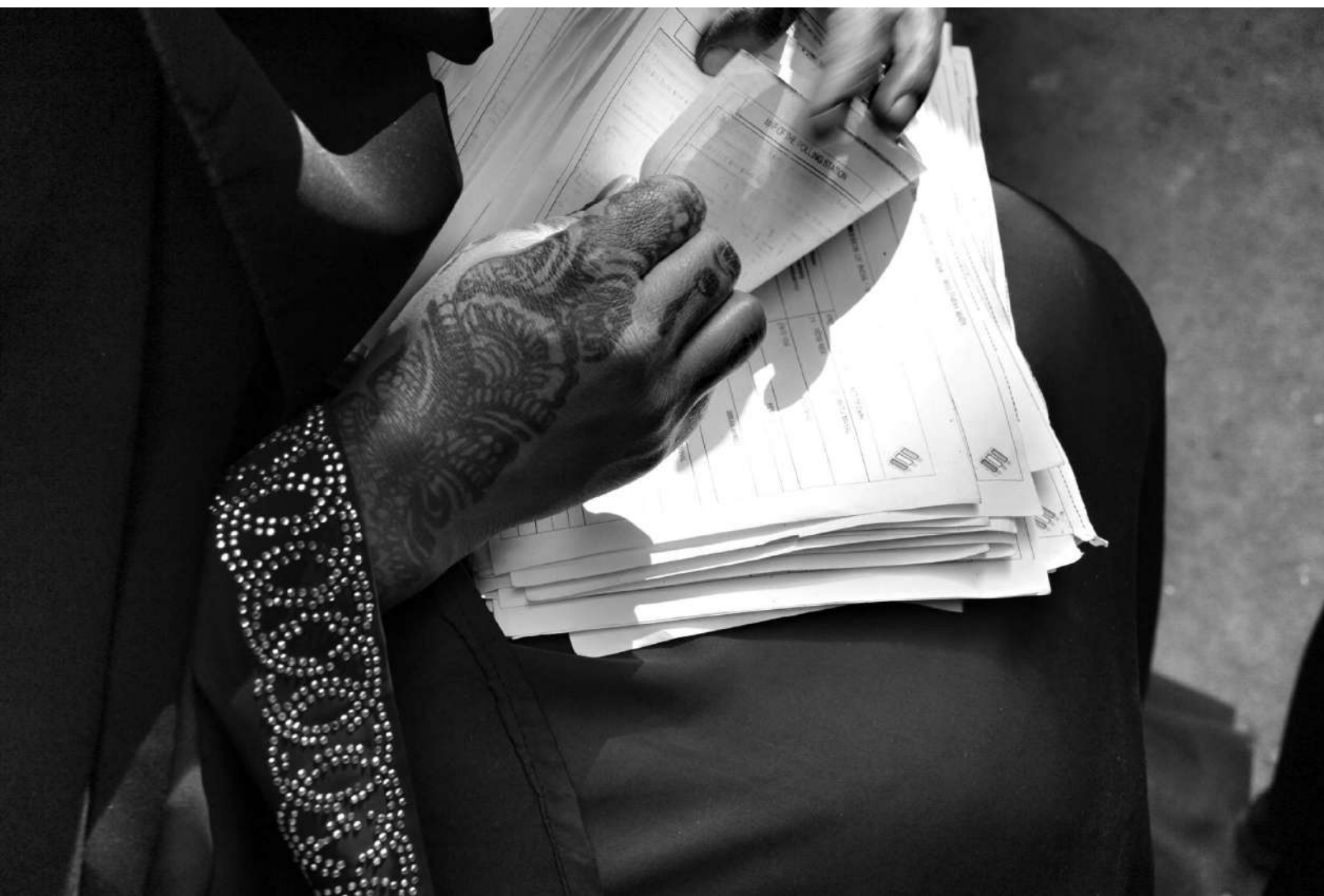
In the lead up to the Delhi Election, the Election Commission had its hands full. It would not be an exaggeration to say Delhi, at least parts of it were and one would say are on the boil. It all started out with the BJP led central government rolling out the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act on the 11th of December 2019 in the Parliament. The act aims at providing citizenship to religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who sought refuge in India before 2014 in order to escape religious persecution. The act grants citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Parsi from these three neighbouring nations although there is no mention of the Muslim community. Also there has been sufficient confusion and no clear stand by the government as to on which basis these three countries were chosen and what was the basis of excluding the other non-Islamic neighbouring countries of India. Quite understandably there was an overwhelming feeling among a large section of Indians that this act was discriminatory in nature towards Muslims. For many this was a gross violation of the secular fabric of India. Protests broke out across the country. In this context it must be said most of these protests were not politically motivated, although a large

The huge workforce which at the behest of the Election Commission worked tirelessly to ensure the citizens of Delhi could cast their votes and exercise their fundamental democratic right deserves nothing less than a huge round of applause.





Conducting a massive exercise involving where 10 million people at the backdrop of simmering tensions in pockets of Delhi was never going to be an easy task by any means.



number of regional political parties opposed this act and took the firm stand of not implementing this act in their respective states where they are in power. The civil society involving students, professionals from all fields of work, social activists, elderly people, people of different faiths, everyone took part in these demonstrations. While most of these agitations were peaceful in nature, incidents of sporadic violence were reported and in extremely unfortunate turn of events and it must be said the high handedness of the security personnel in

political leaders to stoke communal tension with a view of polarising the masses. The police crackdowns were becoming more frequent and brutal and a sense of fear and mistrust was palpable around every corner of the capital. Under such circumstances the Election Commission was faced with this herculean task of carrying out the Delhi Election. Elections in India involving violence, bloodshed, rigging, unlawful activities are commonplace. Over the years the Election Commission has successfully curbed many such malpractices and has gone a long way in

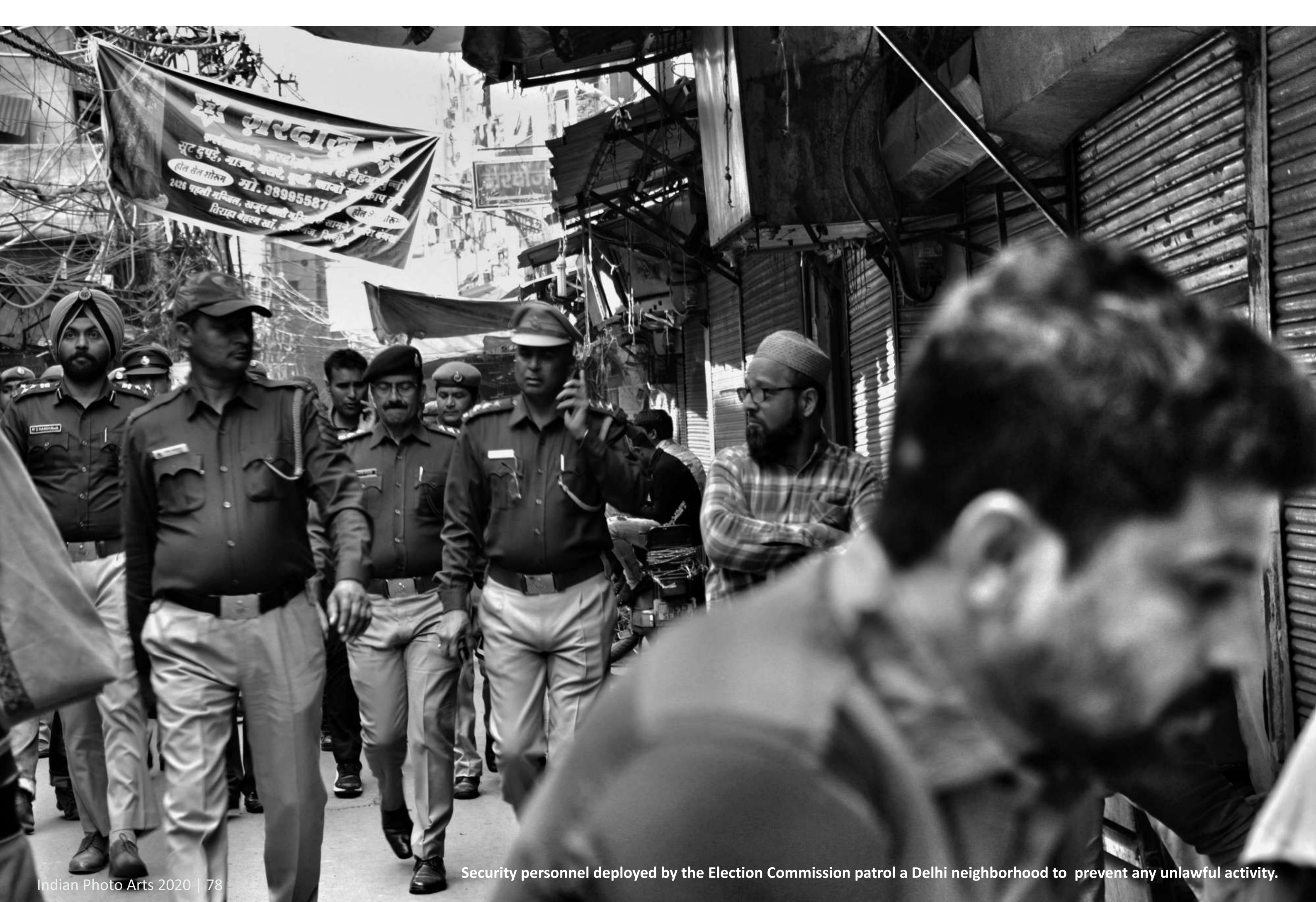
In spite of their commendable achievements it must be said the Delhi Election of 2020 were one of the trickiest and most sensitive affairs which the Election Commission was faced with in the recent past.

Uttar Pradesh claimed the lives of over 20 people and 8 more in Assam. Delhi albeit a little later, turned into the epicentre of these agitations. The police crackdown, in a rather brutal manner, on the protesting students of the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aligarh Muslim University and the grit and resolve of the Muslim women ranging from young students, homemakers to the elderly, who braving one of the harshest winters were seen camping out in the open in the neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh over a couple of months at a stretch, will forever remain the highlights of these protests. Quite understandably the CAA and the protests surrounding it dominated a large part of the Delhi Election narrative. There were attempts made by some of the

ensuring the elections are conducted in a free and fair manner. The organization has conducted elections in some of the most remote places in India where insurgency groups fundamentally oppose the concept of democracy in India and prevent the locals from voting and the polling officials from performing their duties. In a vast country like India, the Election Commission has successfully made the polling apparatus available to some of the most inaccessible corners of the country. However in spite of their commendable achievements it must be said the Delhi Election of 2020 was one of the trickiest and most sensitive affairs which the Election Commission was faced with in the recent past, more so given the ongoing unrests and agitations over the CAA.

These long, slowly trudging queues on the polling day are reflective of the beating heart of India's democracy and the humble polling booths serve as the platform upon which the country dares to dream of a vibrant tomorrow.





Security personnel deployed by the Election Commission patrol a Delhi neighborhood to prevent any unlawful activity.



Over the years the Election Commission through successive reforms has successfully curbed a number of malpractices and has gone a long way in ensuring the elections are conducted in a free and fair manner.

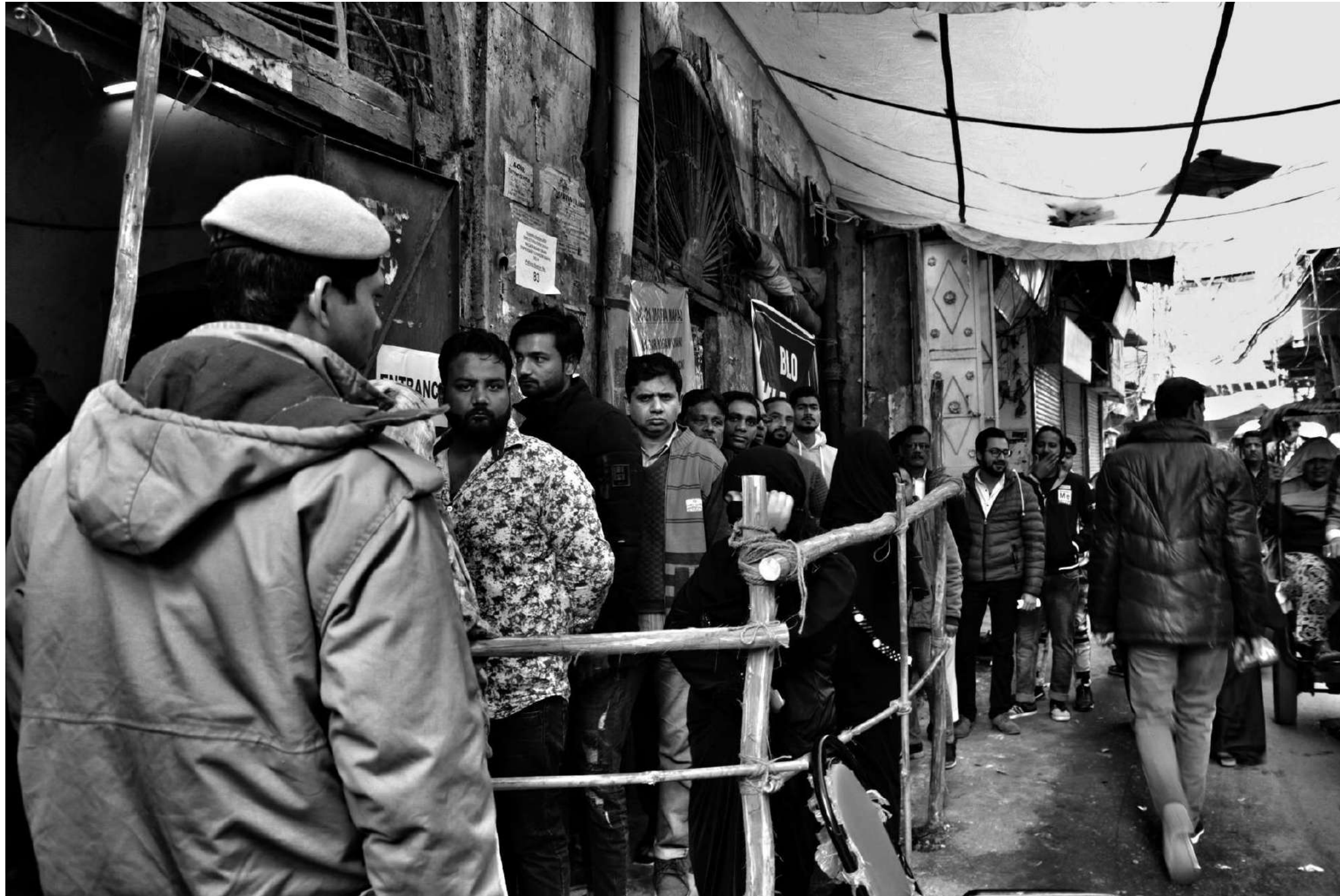
Conducting a massive exercise where more than 10 million people are expected to take part at the backdrop of simmering tensions in pockets of Delhi and ongoing unrests and agitations was never going to be an easy task by any means. Yet to the credit of the Election Commission, the Delhi Election got over without hitting any major bump along the way. In a restless and unsettling political situation like this, where everyone is eagerly waiting for the results while remaining glued to the television screens flashing the results of the exit polls, it is easy to overlook the efforts of those hardworking individuals who scripted yet another chapter in the

history of the celebration of our democracy amidst the political cacophony. The huge workforce which at the behest of the Election Commission worked tirelessly to ensure the citizens of Delhi could cast their votes and exercise their fundamental democratic right deserves nothing less than a huge round of applause. However it must be said, in spite of all its tremendous achievements including the successful conclusion of the Delhi Elections, the Election Commission of India must embrace its fair share of criticism and ponder upon them. In the past the opposition parties repeatedly accused the commission of going soft on the ruling



party and in cases of hate speeches or other attempts at stoking communal disharmony the commission was late in reacting and intervened only after being pulled up by the Supreme Court of India. In case of the Delhi Election too one might argue some of the sanctions handed out by the Election Commission to a few representatives who tried to flare up the already sensitive situation on the ground while addressing the crowd, were too lenient. Such instances have severely affected the credibility of the commission and there is a feeling among the opposition parties that the commission tows the ruling party's lines. Although exaggerated, it

must be said such claims are not entirely devoid of merit. In addition to these many are sceptical about the Election Commission's ability to monitor the expenditures by the political parties leading up to any election and how to prevent any abuse of money power. It goes without saying this is easier said than done, something which the commission itself admitted. Despite being an autonomous body, the Election Commission of India came of age and stood firm for the first time during the tenure of T.N Seshan a former IAS officer who was appointed the 10th Chief Election Commissioner and was at the helm of affairs for the next six



In a populous country like India, the Election Commission is burdened with a Herculean task every time an election is round the corner.

years. He is credited for introducing the electoral reforms, Voter IDs to eligible voters and a mechanism to monitor the financial irregularities of the candidates. Such bold steps were unprecedented and had serious consequences. He was responsible for cancelling the candidature of as many as 1488 candidates who failed

to submit their expenditure account in the lead up to the 1999 general Elections. He adopted a strict and no nonsense approach towards curbing several polling malpractices such as bribing or intimidating voters, stoking up communal hatred or appealing to religious sentiments of the voters through rabble-rousing among

others. In other words he provided the Election Commission with the much needed tooth and nail which it was lacking and helped the commission step out of the shadows of the political parties and take the reins in its own hands.

The democracy that India is blessed with, the democracy which caters to all

culminates or rather it should into its finest hour during the elections in India. However elections in India are often marred by political slugfest, hate speeches, abuse of finances, violent clashes on the day of polling all of which pose serious challenges to the Election Commission while conducting any election. It wouldn't be unfair to say, for many Indians, the elections which should have been occasions to celebrate our democracy, have turned into a rather sordid affair. As a result of which many chose to not turn up to cast their votes while many do so in a disenfranchised manner, none of which augurs well for a democracy. In a democracy like that of India's we have the much coveted right to choose our representatives, people who will make our voices heard, fight on our behalf for our needs, our necessities and we can exercise that power by casting our votes. Hence it becomes our responsibility to cast our votes and do so in an informed and educated manner. While it is true that the Election Commission is supposed to rein in those fanning hatred or seeking votes in the name of religion, it should be our responsible as well to not fall for such theatrics which only aim at drawing the attention away from real issues. For instance caste based politics still rules the roost across vast swathes of India. We can blame the political parties for feeding off of such a set up and getting away by playing the caste card without addressing the real issues on ground.



This little one is too young to grasp the seriousness of the occasion and tugs at her mother impatiently, yet one day she will be standing in the a similar queue to cast her vote and carry the legacy of the world's largest democracy forward.



The Delhi Election got over a long time ago, the people's mandate is out in the open, the elected representatives have taken to their offices, in the midst of all this the baton has silently passed to the next generation of voters.

Although the truth remains the political parties merely adopt a strategy which they feel will earn them leverage, in this case favour with the voters. In such situations, we need not look far and beyond or wait for the Election Commission to intervene, the Indian democracy has already equipped us with the necessary tools to reject this vitriolic brand of politics once and for all.

The recently concluded Delhi Elections could serve as a glimmer of hope in the murk of Indian politics where in the future elections will be contested and won on the basis of good governance and good governance alone and the citizens of India will reject any such brand of politics which aims at polarising people or divide them along the lines of caste or religion. Maybe

Delhi has paved the way for the rest of the country to follow, maybe this is the beginning of a new era in Indian politics, one can only wait and hope for it, for there is no telling in politics which way the tide is going to turn.



About the Photographer

Naila Nasir is currently pursuing a master's degree in mass communication from A.J.K. Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. A journalism graduate from Christ University, Bangalore her mission as a photographer is to bring out stories of social, cultural and political importance. She relentlessly attempts to direct her modes of visual storytelling onto human interest stories reflecting facets of emotion. She has been largely influenced by her father's unwavering passion for photography. In addition to photography, she dabbles with the moving image which enables her with an arena to structure stories, experiment with lighting, frames, sound and editing. In the future, she wishes to dive into the realm of documentary films to produce stories that wouldn't be exposed to audiences otherwise. The power of both still and moving images as mediums of visual storytelling continue to fascinate her as she keeps charting her course in this journey.



A WORKING CLASS APART

Ujjal Dey's photographs bring to light the perils, hardships, dedication and supreme artistry of hardworking people engaged in some rarely known professions.

The tuk tuk has become synonymous with Bangkok. In fact this colourful vehicle assigns a distinct identity to the city courtesy their vibrant exteriors and popularity among foreign tourists. However it would be wrong to assume the local people are averse to the idea of boarding a tuk tuk. This convenient and cheap mode of transport adds that extra dash of colour to the daily life of Bangkok.

The standard definition of a workplace does not apply to these professions. The safety parameters, scores of labour laws, rules and regulations are unheard of. They are a huge workforce which is often overlooked. They almost never get hold of even the basic necessities of life as the rest of the society continue to reap the benefits almost on a daily basis of the hard labour they put in. More often than not, they don't receive their dues; their craftsmanship doesn't bear any name on it and artisans remain in oblivion, the final product almost never reveals the horror stories deeply entrenched in the backdrop, possibly because we never care to look beyond the immediate obscene urge to satisfy our demands. Such has been the story of working class people for centuries now. People belonging to this section of the society mostly perform blue collar jobs and largely depend on wage labour usually on a day to day basis to earn their livelihoods. They toil hard under the most extreme conditions, in dangerous places, often putting their lives at risk and the insanely long work hours leave them with a pittance which is barely enough to meet the very basic demands of life. In addition to this, the volatile nature of their professions, the occupational hazards, combine to make it even more difficult for millions of people to carve a livelihood. Some of these professions are ancient ones and are rapidly fading away in the face of modern technological advancements. The art of cormorant fishing in Li river is one



Yandabo is a tiny hamlet along the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar. The village is famous for the community of potters who excel at producing a large number of ceramic pots.

such dying craft. Once hugely popular in Korea, Japan and China it is now performed by a handful of old guards in the Li river basin. On the other hand the sulfur miners in the heart of Kawah Ijen volcano in East Java, Indonesia are constantly engaged in a game of cat and mouse with death. The lack of protective gears, the constant exposure to sulfur and other toxic gases emanating from the depths of the volcano, the hundreds of feet of steep climb up and down threaten their lives every step of the way. Eventually luck runs out for some and the tragic fatalities serve as a grim reminder to the others how fickle and how dispensable their lives are. The brick kiln workers in

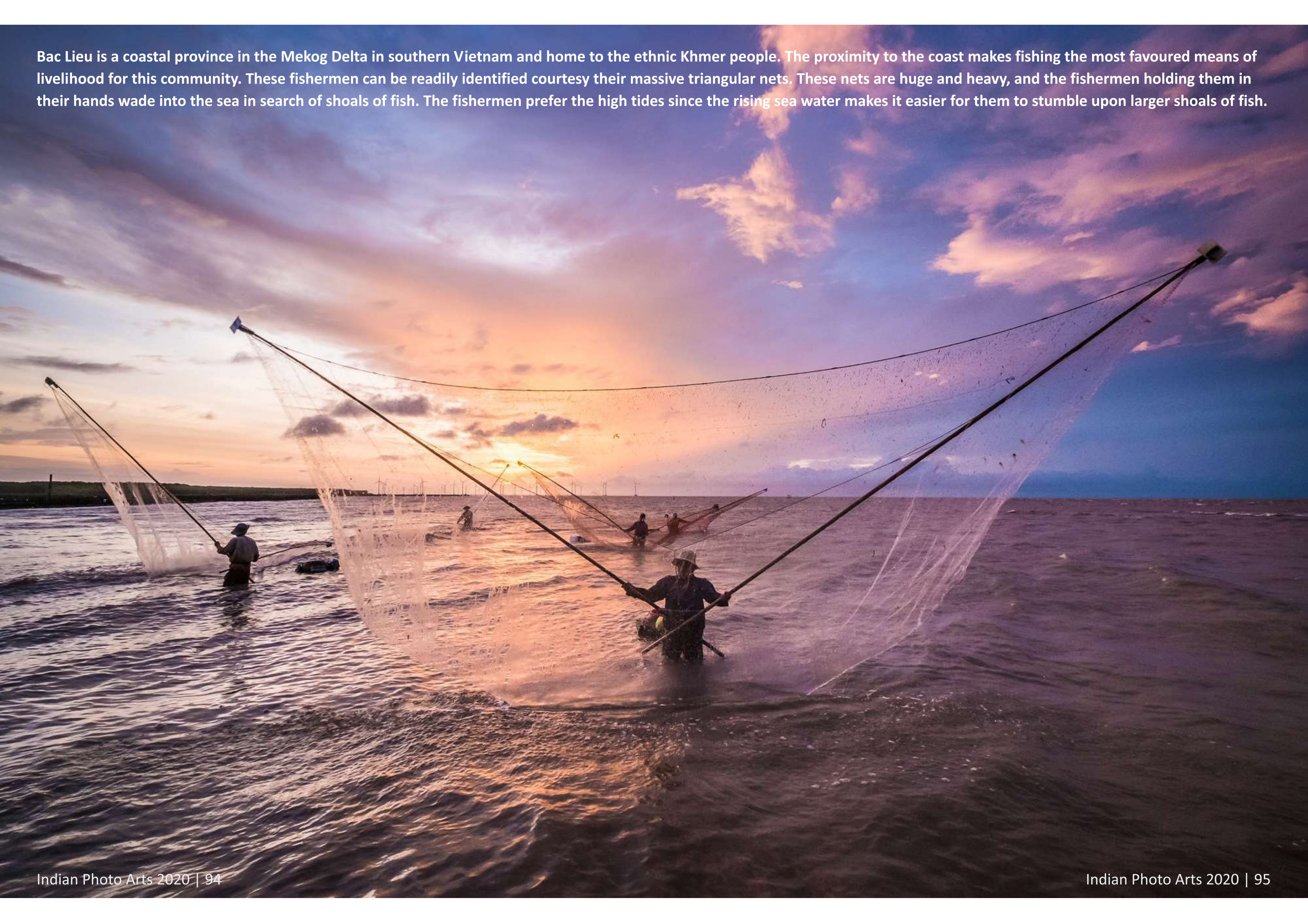
thousands of brick kilns scattered in the suburbs of India face something similar. Their human rights are trampled over, children are forced to work alongside their parents in what can be easily termed as modern day slavery. The living conditions are far from ideal, the wage is abysmally low, and eventually the labourers get sucked into this wormhole of poverty, torture and exploitation. While exploitation and threat to lives reign supreme in some of these lines of work, many traditional professions and craftsmanship are battling hard every day against the threat posed by their multi-billion dollar corporate counterpart. The small scale tofu makers in the village of

Tanjungsari, Indonesia are one corporate glance away from running aground. The same can be said about the traditional fishermen of Bac Lieu in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam. It is only a matter of time before large fishing corporations set their sights on these waters and snatch away from these local people their means of livelihoods thereby crippling the economy of the region. For some it is something which has been in their family for generations, like the Bidriware artisans in Karnataka, India. The intoxicating feeling of shaping up something beautiful with their own two hands possibly explains the dedication towards their craft. Whatever their reasons might be there can be absolutely no room for doubt that these are the people working day in and out in unsuitable often hazardous conditions, who keep the wheels of the society rolling and help in ushering in a new dawn seamlessly. Had it not been for these humble hardworking people the life which we are so used to, would have come to a screeching halt and despite all our privileges we would be looking up to these people to set the wheels in motion once again. While some need preservation, others need our interference demanding for a safer working environment, better wages, restoration of the basic rights they have been robbed off, in other words we need to step out the bubble we have insulated us with and shred off the indifference we have grown so accustomed to.



Hundreds of miners, equipped only with the basic protective gear, climb more than hundreds of feet deep into the heart of the Kawah Ijen Volcano in East Java, Indonesia in search of sulfur. The backbreaking work and the constant exposure to sulfur and other toxic gases which brew deep inside the belly of the volcano result in a much reduced life expectancy for this hardworking miners in addition to the frequent fatalities caused by various accidents. The dangerous climbs up and down the volcano and the hundreds of pounds of slabs which they carry in the baskets attached to their back in return for a meagre wage which they earn on a daily basis, is hardly enough to meet even the basic needs of their families.

Bac Lieu is a coastal province in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam and home to the ethnic Khmer people. The proximity to the coast makes fishing the most favoured means of livelihood for this community. These fishermen can be readily identified courtesy their massive triangular nets. These nets are huge and heavy, and the fishermen holding them in their hands wade into the sea in search of shoals of fish. The fishermen prefer the high tides since the rising sea water makes it easier for them to stumble upon larger shoals of fish.





The net mending workshops perfectly compliment the fishing industry of Bac Lieu. The fishermen hand over their massive triangular nets to these workshops in the nearby net mending village where the workers meticulously repair the damaged portions of the net and patch them up for the next fishing trip.



Inle Lake is the second largest freshwater lake in Myanmar and for centuries has been home to the Intha people. A relatively small population of 100,000 inhabits the banks of Inle Lake. Living by the edge of waters the Intha people have traditionally been a fishing community. However it is their unique fishing methods which set them apart from other fishing communities. The Intha fishermen use their legs to grip the oar and with the other leg and arms operate their signature conical fishing nets, and all of this gets done while the fishermen are standing upright. The thick aquatic vegetation on the surface of the lake reduces the visibility by a great margin. Hence in order to spot a shoal of fish in these shallow waters the Intha fishermen stand up on their boats to see what lies ahead. This unique method speaks volumes of the agility, strength and resourcefulness of these fishermen.



Li River in China, happens to be the very few of the last remaining places where fishermen still practice the age-old traditional fishing method of using cormorants to catch their fish. It is believed this ingenious method of fishing originated in the rivers of Japan some 1300 years ago. Cormorant fishing in the waters of Li River is practiced during the wee hours of dawn or in the hour following sunset. The birds with a snare tied loosely round their neck swim next to the bamboo rafts used by the fishermen. In the shallow depths of the Li River the light of this lamp illuminates the surrounding patch of water and attracts the fresh water fish locally known as "ayu". As fish gather round the raft the cormorants dive into the water and gobble up mouthfuls of fishes. The snare tied around their necks prevents the birds from swallowing their catch and the fishermen retrieve the fish from their birds.



is pressed upon it to give the tofu bar the final shape. At other workshops workers prefer draw the water manually into the pan and stir it with their hands in order to create the frothy paste. The hot and humid Javanese climate and the constant exposure to heat coupled with the manual labour involved make it a tedious and draining job for the tofu workers. Yet this tiny village prefers to hold on to its traditional ways. Their tofu is in high demand across the region and fresh batches which are produced on a daily basis and transported to the nearby daily markets get sold out almost immediately. In this age of automation and a largely machine driven industrial world, the tiny village of Tanjungsari is a gust of nostalgia from the old world.

At a casual glance the village of Tanjungsari appears no different from other hilly settlements in Indonesia. However a closer look reveals a rather interesting fact about this small village. Tanjungsari is home to a number of families engaged in tofu making using the traditional and archaic methods. In fact tofu making workshops are so common in the village, Tanjungsari has come to be known as the Tofu Village among the locals. The rustic wooden workshops are almost entirely devoid of any machine and are stacked with traditional Javanese tools and utensils. Soya beans are soaked overnight before they are ground into a course paste. This paste is then boiled until froth starts appearing and is then strained through white pieces clothing inside wooden bricks. Once these bricks get filled up another heavy brick

The Raika community in Rajasthan has been traditional camel herders for centuries now. Their exceptional herding skills are put on display each year at the famed Pushkar animal fair in Rajasthan which draws hundreds of thousands of tourists and locals alike. Apart from being a widespread attraction among tourists, camels serve as the lifeline for the various ethnic communities in Rajasthan who still live in the remote corners of Thar Desert. The Raika people have mastered the art of handling their camels and are considered to be the best in Rajasthan when it comes to handling these large animals, which in the wrong hand can prove to be quite an imposing proposition to deal with. Raika people depend on their camels for milk, transportation. However the community and their camels are staring at an uncertain future, which is being fuelled by decreasing demand for camels, restrictions imposed by the government on the grazing and slaughter of these animals.





This 500 years old unique art form is a magnificent blend of local styles of Turkey, Persia and Arabic countries. In India, this form of art flourished in Bidar, Karnataka under the profound encouragement from the Bahmani kings and is popularly known as “Bidri Art” and all the products are famously known as “Bidriware”. Bidriware is a product of an alloy of zinc and copper and the intricate designs on the surface are made of thin silver strips. However the key ingredient in all of this is the moist and blackened mud which can be found only in a select few parts of the historic Bidar Fort. Only the skilled artisans can identify this soil by tasting them with their tongue. Carving the intricate designs requires a lot of skill and these skills are passed on from one generation to the next.



The numerous brick kilns scattered across the outskirts of the cities and the rural parts of India largely remain a part of the unorganised sector. Some reports suggest the annual demand for clay bricks in India surged to a high of well over 200 billion units over the past few years. A large proportion of this workforce comprises of migrant labourers more so in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The other noticeable pattern in the workforce is the higher participation of women workers. An economic analysis of this workforce suggests these workers belong to the economically weaker and vulnerable strata of the society with limited avenues for employment. This in a sense paves the pathway for their exploitation in these manufacturing units, where in spite of the hardships and the exploitations they are left with little or no choice to move out. A further study of the brick kiln workers suggests most of them hail from the marginalised sections of the society – the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, the Dalits who are often subjected to discrimination and torture.



About the Photographer

Ujjal Dey hails from the City of Joy (Kolkata) and presently lives in the City of Lion (Singapore). During his engineering days he came across a photography group which piqued his interest. After extensive trysts with film cameras and the club's darkroom he purchased his first SLR camera- a Nikon D90 and started doing photography a bit seriously. After 9 years with Nikon, he decided to move to Fujifilm mirrorless and currently owns a Fujifilm X-H1. His primary interests are streets, people, travel, and documentary photography. Photography is something that keeps supplying him with the essential oxygen for living. He never felt the urge to use it as a means of earning his livelihood. Hence as a professional he is a senior software developer at an investment bank. Find more of his work at:

<http://ujjaldey.in>

<https://www.flickr.com/ujjaldey>

<https://500px.com/ujjaldey>

<http://instagram.com/ujjaldey>

Event

LENS LEELA



Step Towards Positivity

A Kolkata suburb played host to the exemplary works of a group of young and talented photographers



Photograph by Saumitra



Photograph by Bobby



Photograph by Ayush



The Dreamers: The workforce behind Lens Leela



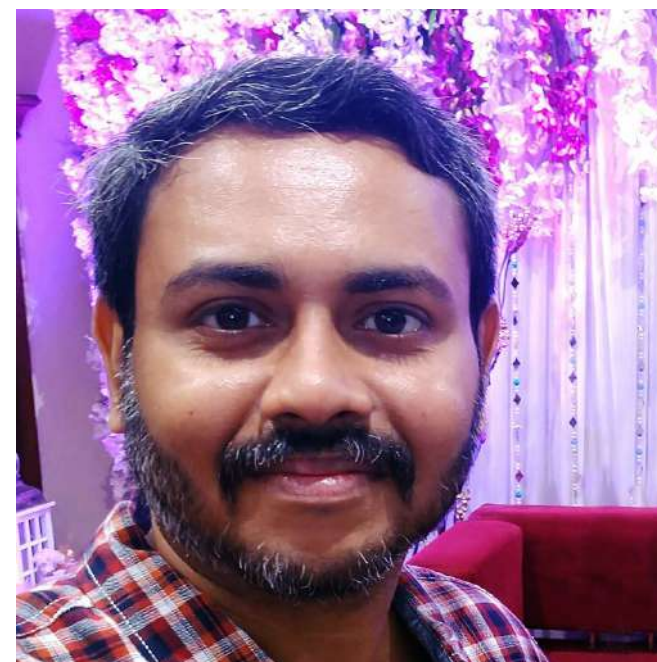
Saumitra, a senior executive at a multi-national pharmaceutical company craves to breathe in through his photography passion in order to relieve himself from job pressure. Travel, people and street are his genres of interest which are being pursued by him since the last ten years. Saumitra's inspiration in photography blossomed through the special Adda on lens culture with his childhood friends. His present inspirations are the remarkable works of Mr. Subir Basak, Mr. Raj Sarkar, Mrs. Lopamudra Talukdar and Mr. Bikash Das. Saumitra also loves to inculcate passion for photography amongst generations and many of them have gained considerable success.



The passion for photography seriously developed in Somanjan, a service holder by profession, ten years back after the sudden demise of his father. He meticulously started observing outstanding works of legendary photographers like Mr. Sebastiao Salgado, Mr. James Nachway, Mr. Benu Sen, Mr. Raghu Rai, Mr. Steve McCurry and others. Films of various eminent Indian directors viz. Mr. Satyajit Ray, Mr. Ritwick Ghatak, Mr. Govind Nihalni, Mr. Shyam Benegal which Somanjan had grabbed since his boyhood days, provided tremendous impetus to his passion to understand people and their struggles, their ways of life and culture. Mr. Himadri Mondal and Mr. Rammohan Pai, two genius yet non-surfaced photo artists changed Somanjan's POV when it came to seeing through the heart.



Master Ayush Chatterjee, the bright little descendant of Debjyoti is also proudly carrying the photographic tradition and has gladly permitted to publish one of his photographs having a completely new POV that propelled Lens Leela to a newer level.



Debjyoti, an entrepreneur, always loves to experiment with various techniques through his lens and mind. He seldom tries

to follow the tracks of legendary photographers. He has a traditional affair with camera and accessories that hails from previous generations. Under the able mentorship of Mr. Joydeep Mukherjee, an outstanding visual story teller of the present era, Debjyoti is now striving to set a path of his own in story telling.



Bobby, a senior executive in the diagnostic industry fell in love with photography in 2015 through his extreme interest in travelling. He endeavours to blend his profession and passion by carrying camera in his office bag most of the time with an intention to pursue moments with people and nature. Under the able hand holding of his hero Dhritiman Mukherjee, a pioneer in nature & wildlife photography along with Bobby's mentor Joydeep Mukherjee, an outstanding visual story teller of the present era, photography is gradually becoming his second love for the rest of his life.



The inauguration of Lens Leela exhibition was graced by the presence of eminent personalities from the photographich community such as Mr Raj Sarkar and Mrs Lopamudra Talukdar.





It was by design, not out of any compulsion the members chose Belgharia to host this event. Such an initiative certainly augurs well for the cultural enrichment of a suburb like Belgharia in the outskirts of Kolkata.



The Herculean effort put in by the members of Lens Leela ensured all the arrangements were completed within a span of only two months which speaks volumes of the passion and dedication of the members.



The Flowerbed of Khirai

by Sandipan SEN

With proper care the blooming fields of marigold and other seasonal flowers might go a long way in changing the economic scape of rural West Bengal

The rural countryside in the state of West Bengal in India has always been a sight for the sore eyes. A thick carpet of soothing green in the form of the lush paddy fields stretch far and wide and the ripple created by the gentle breeze caressing them is bound to tug at the heart of even the most pragmatic. Numerous rivers and streams, which are an integral part of the Bengal landscape meander and snake their ways across small villages where life still flows at a languid pace, completely alienated from the commotion and the breakneck pace of its city counterpart. The river banks are often hotbeds of activities, with farmers tending to their paddy fields, the fishing folk engaged in scurrying through their day's catches, young children turning the sandy banks into their coveted playing fields and old timers gathered around for an afternoon game of cards or some long overdue gossip.

A farmer tends to his field of marigold along the bank of Khirai River in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal.

An incredibly common sight along the banks of Khirai River during the months of December and January when the marigold plants are in full bloom.



One such river in rural West Bengal, in spite of retaining all of these trademark characteristics has carved a special niche for itself. Khirai River which flows past the small village by the same name located in the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal is possibly best known for the riot of colours which adorns its banks during a few months of the year. This is mainly due the large section of Khirai's population which is involved in floriculture. The banks along Khirai River are dotted with vibrant presence of marigold, chrysanthemum and karen, all of which are in high demand during the winter months. In fact floriculture has seen a surge in West Bengal over the years with West Bengal firmly poised at number three in terms of producer of flower in the country. Some of the major produces being rose, carnation, hibiscus along with the winter produces in the form of daisies, dahlia and rare and exotic orchids which are primarily cultivated during the winter months. The village of Khirai too has earned its place in the vibrant floriculture map of West Bengal and in turn has turned itself into a popular tourist destination as well along the vibrant banks along Khirai River. The village of Khirai which is located at a distance of approximately 75 km from Kolkata is a principle supplier of flower to the hundreds of markets across the city. Freshly bloomed marigolds, daisies, chrysanthemums are almost always in high demand, particularly

during the winter months. Work in the fields of Khirai begins at the onset of autumn. The farmers painstakingly and with great care plant the saplings and dedicate their time and energy over the next few months tirelessly tending these fields. As a result of which the fields of Khirai are in full bloom during the months of January-March with marigold being the primary produce in the region. However these same fields, which adorn a cloak of bright yellow or orange during these months, are engulfed by the rising water level of Khirai River during the monsoon. Each year this cycle pans out along the banks of this rain fed river. The engulfing waters of Khirai leave in their wake at the onset of autumn fertile rich stretches of alluvial soils along its banks which ensure the rich produces of marigolds and other flowers during the winter months. The village is well connected with other major towns in the region such as Midnapore, Kharagpur, Panskura and the city of Kolkata by the suburban railway network. Farmers carry their fresh produces from the fields to these towns and cities on daily basis using the elaborate suburban railway network. Fresh blooms of hibiscus, roses are in high demands in the cities throughout the year while seasonal flowers such as daisies, marigolds, chrysanthemums find large number of takers during the winter months. These flowers are regularly used for decorations and are integral part of festivities.

A significant majority of Khirai's population today is engaged in the flower growing business which has reshaped the economy of the region to a large extent.





The village of Khirai and some of the other adjoining villages in the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal have witnessed a huge surge in floricultural activities since the 1990s.

A multitude of socio-economic parameters ranging from the caste and educational status to the economic characteristics of the flower growers largely influence the floriculture sector. In fact the floriculture sector such as the one in Khirai provides a window into a better understanding of the agrarian society of rural West Bengal.



far reaching effects apart from contributing towards a healthier economy. A multitude of socio-economic parameters ranging from the caste and educational status to the economic characteristics of the flower growers largely influence the floriculture sector. In fact the floriculture sector such as the one in Khirai provides a window into a better understanding of the agrarian society of rural West Bengal. Such findings go a long way in understanding the challenges and hardships the flower growers in these parts of the state face on a regular basis. It goes without saying such findings play a crucial role in an overall understanding of this sector, the problems associated with it and in formulation of measures which can play a crucial role in effectively remedying some of the road blocks. Lack of labour, poor educational status and lack of proper training prove to be the biggest obstacle in the way of higher and effective yields leading to more profitability. The lack of education prevents the flower growers from adopting newer technologies and effective methods which eventually get reflected in the scale and quality of their produces. On the other hand the non-availability of labours, use of traditional methods involving large scale use of pesticides and the absence of an effective mechanism to distribute their yields which encourages middlemen to feed off of the hardworking farmers have

The village of Khirai and some of the other adjoining villages in the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal have witnessed a huge surge in floricultural activities since the 1990s. Earlier only a handful of farmers and villagers would be involved in flower cultivation, however in such villages the same

number stands at more than 70% of the population. As a consequence of which the villagers have found newer and more lucrative avenues of generating incomes which have largely contributed towards providing the economies of these regions with a much needed boost. The cultivation of flowers has significantly

increased the profitability for the farmers as compared to paddy cultivation and other produces such as seasonal vegetable produces. From a socio-economic standpoint the floriculture sector of Khirai and similar endeavours in the adjoining blocks of Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal have

The village is well connected with other major towns in the region such as Midnapore, Kharagpur, Panskura and the city of Kolkata by the suburban railway network. Farmers carry their fresh produces from the fields to these towns and cities on daily basis using the elaborate suburban railway network.



significantly hampered the desired growth of this sector. The severe shortages of technical facilities which impart the knowhow to the farmers to adopt newer techniques have hindered the sector from getting rid of the archaic means and methods. Under such circumstances it has been observed farmers who are in possession of larger tracts of cultivable lands are much better off compared to their marginalised counterparts. In the absence of a structured set up and the means to access the recent developments this gap has only widened.

In addition to these the flower growers in Khirai are faced with a newer and more menacing problem. The scourge of pollution has been looming large over the horizon for quite some time now and off late they have been unleashing their wrath on the vibrant fields of Khirai. The thick layer of smog which no longer is a strange occurrence even in the countryside allows only a muted version of sun rays to reach the fields in Khirai. As a result of which the farmers over the last few years have been complaining of stunted growth of their plants and flowers which are of inferior quality or which wither sooner than expected. In addition to this, the rising levels of pollution often lead to the flowers or even the plants wilting away before full bloom. This resulted in huge losses with no immediate remedy in sight in spite of the use of increased amounts of

pesticides and fertilizers. Faced with such grave circumstances the farmers came up with the idea of using LED lights after sunset till dusk in order to provide their plants with a constant source of light. According to botanists this in fact was a rather simple yet highly effective solution to counter the menace posed by pollution and smog. According to them the pollutants and the smog in the air would block the pores on the leaves of the plants thereby reducing their abilities to absorb sunlight which in turn would result in the slowing down of the process of photosynthesis in the plants leading to either untimely wilting or stunted growth. With the use of such artificial sources of light in the form of the LED blubs the farmers ensured a constant source of light which would aid the process of photosynthesis. In fact within a matter of weeks the farmers noticed significant improvement in the health of their plants while many farmers reported an accelerated growth among their plants. Soon more farmers have followed suit and these days it is a rather common practice among the farmers during the winter months especially when the levels of pollution and smog reach its peak. Thus the floricultural sector which was floundering in the face of the challenges posed by pollution staged a remarkable comeback and even rejuvenated itself courtesy such rather ingenious solutions.

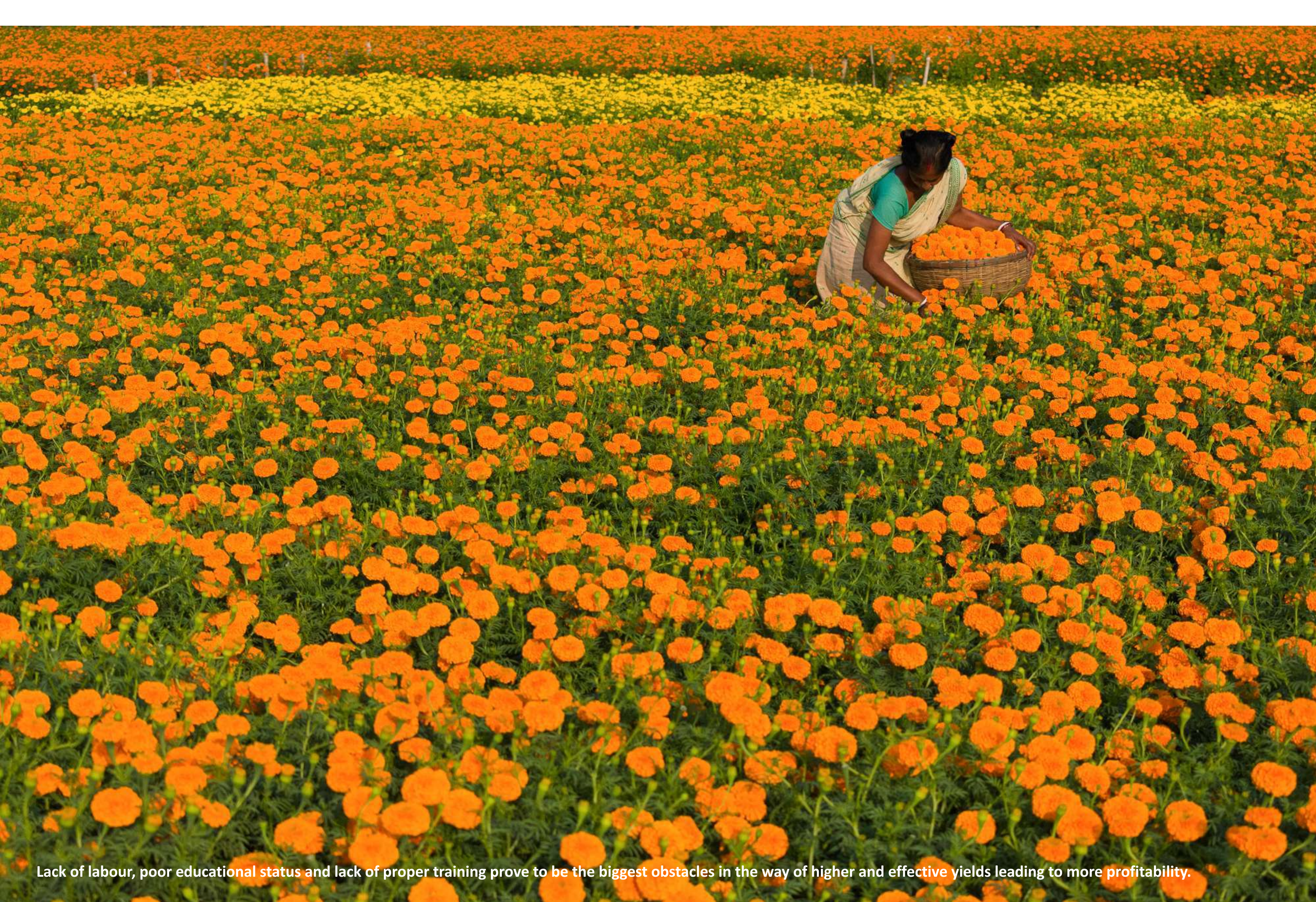
Over the past three decades the

floriculture sector in the state of West Bengal has flourished rapidly. Within a short span of time it successfully established itself as a profitable sector and one with the potential to bolster the economy of the region. However as this sector grew in prominence it probably didn't receive the much needed facelift. In absence of newer techniques and technologies the floriculture sector will cater to the needs of a handful of farmers who own vast tracts of cultivable lands. The marginalised farmers are already feeling the pinch from the middlemen, increasing expenses and the lack of education and technical knowledge which prevent them from embracing the more modern methods. In the face of such circumstances it becomes the responsibility of the concerned authorities to address these problems. The need of the hour certainly is to educate the farmers regarding the newer methods and techniques and make these techniques available to them. The policy makers should also address the ever widening disparity that exists between the educated upper caste background farmers and their lesser privileged lower caste counterparts. Such disparity unfortunately exists in terms of both financial strength as well as opportunities. The floricultural sector is without a shred of doubt one with a lot of potential and it has already delivered on multiple counts to verify any such claim. However it needs looking after.

The colourful fields along the banks of Khirai River are more than mere pretty sights. Every fresh bloom breathes a new lease of life into the economy of this region. The socio-economic impacts of these vibrant stretches of orange, yellow and other myriad hues stretch far beyond painting a pretty picture in the eyes of outsiders. Yet this entire sector is as delicate as the flowers themselves, without proper care and nurture, the floricultural scene in Khirai and adjoining areas of West Bengal too will wilt away.

Fresh blooms of hibiscus, roses are in high demands in the cities throughout the year while seasonal flowers such as daisies, marigolds, chrysanthemums find large number of takers during the winter months.





Lack of labour, poor educational status and lack of proper training prove to be the biggest obstacles in the way of higher and effective yields leading to more profitability.



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About the Photographer

Sandipan Sen is a science teacher by profession and a hobbyist photographer. He started photography back in 2015 with his point and shoot camera. He considers his grandfather who used to shoot with a film camera back in the days, to be the biggest influence behind his decision of pursuing photography as a hobby. Photography provides him with a medium to express himself . More importantly photography has enabled him to see the world through different perspectives which wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

Unwrapping the **Beauty** by Omprakash GHOSH that Hides

Omprakash Ghosh's photographs unveil the unparalleled beauty, the intricate patterns and textures which exist in the insect world and reveal how this tiny realm is of paramount importance to any ecosystem



Fresh dew drops on the wings of a butterfly perched on a leaf can be seen in maximum detail.

The tiny creatures often pave the way for such dramatic scenes, which serve as a reminder that every species in the natural world is a master of its domain, no matter how small it appears.



When you love someone or something, you are also in love with all the small parts or play of it. This is particularly applicable in case of the natural world around us. The more imposing elements of the natural world by dint of their sheer grandeur appeal to our collective conscience, our aesthetics, although hidden in the crevices and the tiny nooks and corners, the natural world unfurls its unmatched artistry and craftsmanship in its very own miniature

realm. The hugely popular genre of macro photography and the ardent followers of this genre tirelessly invest their time and energy in exploring the beauty and the mechanism of the natural world which often pan out on these miniature platforms. Omprakash Ghosh is one among them. A celebrated macro photographer, Omprakash although interested in other genres of photographer harbours a strong sense of affection and belonging towards the genre of macro photography. Almost

every photography enthusiast tries his/her hand at macro photography at some point. Extremely close up shots of a butterfly, the eye of a caterpillar or the minute details of a pollen grain flood our minds when we think about macro photography. All these details while appealing to our aesthetic senses, do go a long way in documenting the natural world and the behaviour and ecology of millions of species which are intertwined with the fate of the eco-system all around us.

In spite of being a keen student of photography and various genres of photography, Omprakash realised nothing attracts him more than the tiny world of insects and bugs all around us. His love for macro photography blossomed more as he started exploring this world around him. The details on the back of a bug, the patterns and the intricacies, all of which exist at such a miniature scale yet in such a precise and perfect manner spell bounded him. Since then his love for this genre has



A dramatic backlit composition of a praying mantis.

A close up shot of dew drops accumulated on the rim of a mustard flower.



only grown. What really sets him apart from others in this genre of photography is his intent of mastering this genre in a more sustainable and affordable manner. He believes such an approach will inspire scores of young and upcoming

photographers to take up this genre of photography instead of getting tangled in the details of technical specifications of the equipment and the ever present question of affordability. He chooses macro over other categories

due to the availability of subjects in every sphere of nature. According to him small subjects/insects are one of the most beautiful creatures on earth. He believes documenting these creatures and understanding their behavioural patterns

can go a long way in developing a better understanding of the natural world around us. In fact it certainly serves as an extremely effective tool for the conservation of various species. A well-documented photograph can certainly play

Lantern bugs can be easily identified courtesy their signature snout. This close up shot reveals the detailed texture and patterns on the wings.



a huge role in connecting the dots between the behaviour of a tiny bug and the huge impact that behaviour has on nature and the ecology of the region. Such an understanding is imperative in taking

forward the cause of conservation of nature. With his heart firmly set to achieve this, Omprakash always aspires to present his macro photograph in two separate ways. His first approach involves

documenting the tiny insects, birds and other species from an incredibly close range. He believes this brings out the minute details and the beauty every creature, no matter how small is blessed

with. His second approach involves documenting these tiny creatures in their natural habitats, in order to portray how these creatures have always been a crucial and essential component of any ecosystem.

The signature spider is a master craftsman of nature and produces such beautiful patterns when it spins the web.



He believes it is absolutely essential to develop a deeper and scientific understanding of the natural world in order to be a successful macro photographer. He invests a lot of time and effort in conducting thorough and proper researches on his subjects, their behaviour and the nature of their habitats before he sets about documenting them.

His research, which is always detailed and meticulous involves an accurate understanding of the temperature, soil type and pattern and the behavioural pattern of the species among others, so that it can help him to understand them better. His advice to the young photographers who are interested in macro photography would be to develop a stronger affinity for nature

and embrace nature with their whole hearts. He firmly believes it is the love for nature and its tiny subjects which can help someone develop into a successful macro photographer. However for that to happen our hearts should belong to the right place, which according to him is the lap of nature.

In this photo album we present to you

some of his photographs which are reflective of his visions and his superlative skills as a macro photographer. This photo album celebrates the beauty and the drama which pan out on a daily basis in the most minuscule theatres of the natural world.

A tiny damselfly hangs on to the blade of a paddy plant.



A wide angle shot of a lantern bug in its natural habitat.

A mantis in its natural habitat. Such tiny creatures are invaluable to nature's machinery and they are as integral and crucial part of any eco-system as other imposing creatures.

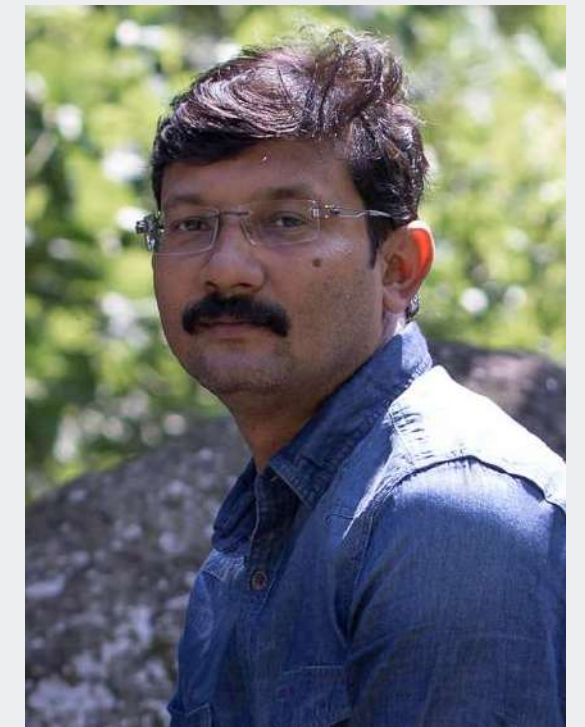


Weaver ants are known for their craftsmanship when it comes to nest building. Like most ant species, weaver ants are capable of heavy lifting as is evident from this photograph.





A chalcid wasp perched on a freshly bloomed marigold. These insects derive their energy from the sugar rich nectar of flowers and are invaluable for the process of pollination.



About the Photographer

Omprakash Ghosh was born and brought up in a small town at Habra, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. He completed Hons in Economics from Barasat Govt College and is a businessman by profession. His interest towards photography started from childhood. He bought a DSLR camera and associated himself with DCP group in 2016. Till date he has received numerous national/international awards on wildlife photography. He conducts various workshops in different parts of India. Presently he is associated with World Photographic Forum and DCP expedition. His works have been featured in numerous prestigious wildlife magazines and publications such as Sanctuary Asia, Saevus and Smart Photography.
Facebook:<https://www.facebook.com/omp.ghosh>
Instagram:<https://www.instagram.com/ghoshomprakash/>

Ama Dablam

daughter of the **Himalayas**

by **Prasun MITRA** | the motherly embrace of Mt. Ama Dablam has nurtured the
Himalayan kingdom of Nepal for centuries.

Mt. Ama Dablam gracefully towers over the surroundings and is one of the most prominent features of the Himalayas.

Ama Dablam which in Nepali language translates into “Mother’s necklace” is the most prominent feature in the vicinity. The ridges on either side of the peak at 6,812 meters spread out resembling the open embrace of a mother as the glacier which rests beneath the peak resembles the traditional necklace worn by the women from the Sherpa community.





Home to some of the highest peaks in the world, including the highest in the form of Mt. Everest, the Himalayas is the world's highest mountain range. While the ones above 8000 meter garner much of the attention by dint of their sheer proportions, the Himalayas is home to hundreds of peaks, passes, ridges, glaciers, valleys and lakes, all of which stand out in their own right and add to this mystic charm.

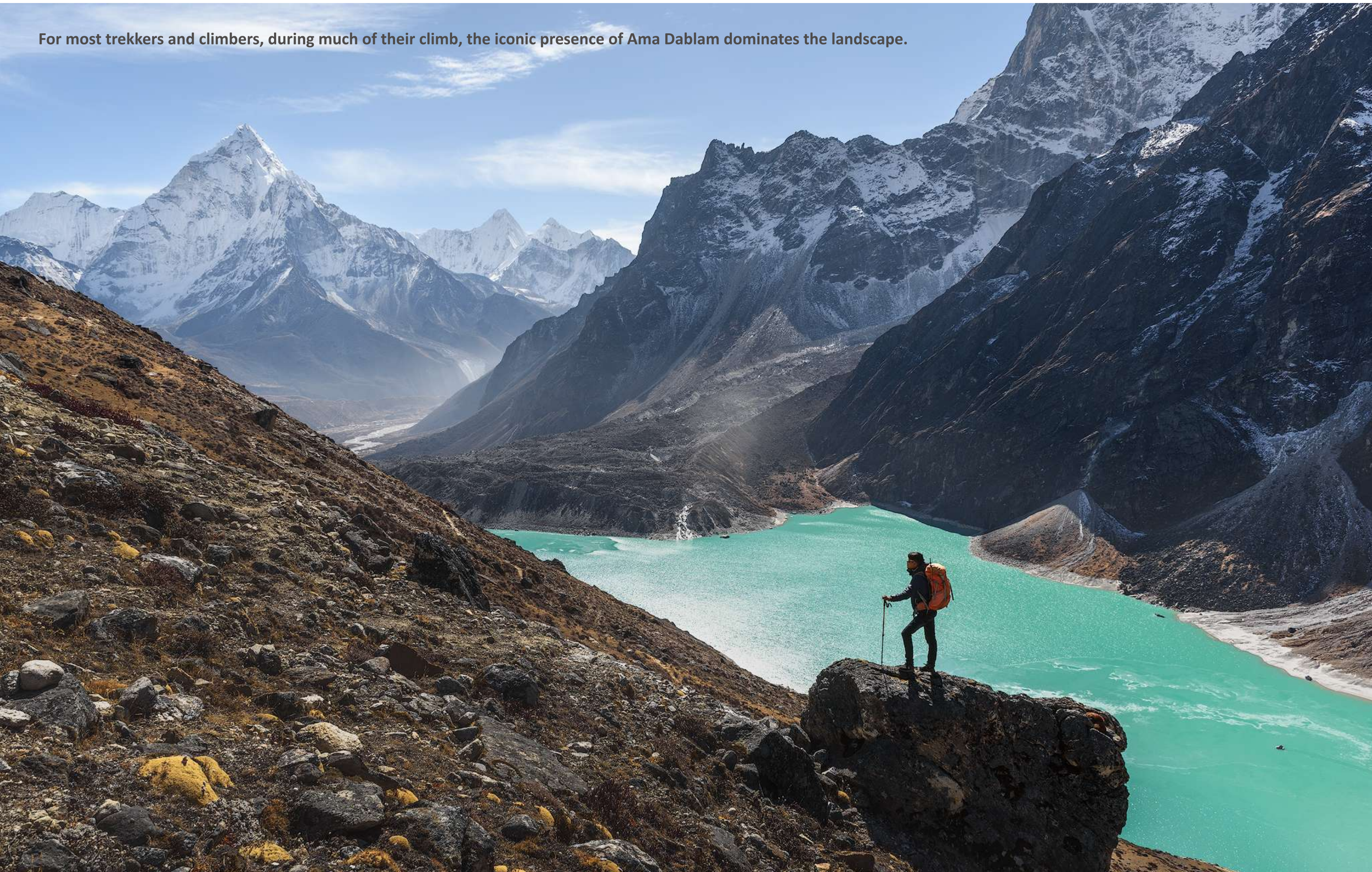
In the ancient mountain kingdom of Nepal, the Himalayas is the silent old sentinel who keeps a close watch on the proceedings below. The snow clad white peaks, stoic and steadfast in nature have been the dutiful guardians of this land for centuries now. It is here, in the mountain kingdom of Nepal, the Himalayas flaunts its might most unabashedly, the high peaks, the snow covered crevices, the mystery, the enigma that still remain shrouded in the thick veil

of clouds, all have contributed to this near mythical status which the mountain range enjoys in this nation. Life in the cities, hilly towns and villages in Nepal is thoroughly dominated by the might of the majestic Himalayas. The whims of the mountain can sometimes prove to be a test of resolve for the locals, which the mountain often wields as a show of strength. The same whims often lure climbers, trekkers and adventure enthusiasts from across the globe. This

lure is often fuelled by the seductive charm of the mountain range which tugs at the very heart of any adventure enthusiast. Home to some of the highest peaks in the world, including the highest in the form of Mt. Everest, the Himalayas is the world's highest mountain range. While the ones above 8000 meter garner much of the attention by dint of their sheer proportions, the Himalayas is home to hundreds of peaks, passes, ridges, glaciers, valleys and lakes, all of which stand out

in their own right and add to this mystic charm. One such mountain in the Himalayas is Ama Dablam which in Nepali language translates into "Mother's necklace". The ridges on either side of the peak at 6,812 meters spread out resembling the open embrace of a mother as the glacier which rests beneath the peak resembles the traditional necklace worn by the women from the Sherpa community. One of these arms, the southwest ridge, is one of the most popular climbing routes.

For most trekkers and climbers, during much of their climb, the iconic presence of Ama Dablam dominates the landscape.





Ama Dablam is fast turning into a popular trekking and climbing destination in Nepal. A porter accompanying one such climbing team makes his way up this rugged terrain.

In fact official figures and estimates put this as the third most popular climbing route in the whole of Nepal. Like countless other sentinels which the Himalayas has deployed to look over this mountain kingdom, Ama Dablam towers above the Kumbhu Valley like a silent guardian.

The towering stoic presence lies in sharp contrast to the countless trails along its slopes which gently carve their way into the valley, unveiling the more affable side of the mountain. It is possibly this contrast, the blend of detachment and embrace which draws thousands each year to the

folds of Ama Dablam.

Those betrothed with the surreal beauty of this majestic lady from the Himalayas choose Lukla to be their preferred destination for beginning the ascent. A 20 mile hike negotiating the crests and troughs of a typical Himalayan landscape leads to

the basecamp. As is the case with most other peaks in the Himalays, climbers prefer to summit Ama Dablam in the spring, since with every passing day the scope of a warmer weather and prolonged daylight become a reality. Largely considered to be a difficult and technical ascent, Ama Dablam is generally attempted by experienced and seasoned mountaineers who are well versed with the technical aspects of mountain climbing and most importantly are familiar with the whimsical nature of the Himalayas. However it would be wrong to assume Ama Dablam doesn't lure anyone other than the hardcore adventure enthusiasts. In fact there are thousands who choose to dwell in the shade of this beautiful mountain instead of trying to assert their dominance over it by summiting it. While the seasoned climbers grapple with ropes, ice axes, snow gear and take thorough note of the weather pattern and meticulously schedule their climbs down to the smallest detail, some choose to indulge in the intoxicating presence of the mountain and its surrounding. The panoramic view including Ama Dablam unleashes the ethereal beauty of the Himalayas, where very single element of nature, the insignificant nameless lake, the stunted shrubs, the rocks and boulders carved out of the mountain slopes by wind – all come together to weave this beautiful tapestry and words certainly do fall short in trying to explain this almost otherworldly scenic beauty.



A lone hiker makes his way up the slopes as the sun sets over the ethereally beautiful turquoise water of Gokyo Lake.



As the sun rises above the Gokyo Lakes it reveals the unparalleled beauty of the region and the tiny hamlet of Machermo which lies in the lap of some of the mighty subjects of Himalayas.

In this ethereal setting lies the Gokyo Lakes system – a network of six major lakes located in the heart of Sagarmatha National Park at an altitude of approximately 5000 meters above sea level. In addition to being the world's

largest freshwater lake system, the Gokyo lake system and the adjoining wetlands were designated as a Ramsar Site in 2007. The vicinity of Gokyo Lakes offers a stunning view of Mt. Everest and Mt. Cho Oyu, which is one of the main reasons

why the Gokyo Lakes trek has steadily gained widespread popularity among trekkers and mountaineers. In the midst of such ethereal settings tiny villages with a handful of families residing in them lie scattered. One such tiny human settlement

lies in the picturesque village of Machermo. This tiny hamlet is of particular significance to the trekkers and mountaineers since it is located just south-east of Gokyo Cho – the principal waterbody of the Gokyo Lakes system and close to the Ngozumpa Glacier which is primarily responsible for feeding the Gokyo Lakes system. Over the years the village of Machermo has turned into a crucial refuge for weary trekkers. For the handful of families which have made these mountain slopes at an altitude of almost 5000 meters their home the waters of Gokyo Lakes system is of great religious significance. The waters are considered sacred by those belonging to Hindus as well as Buddhists. The Gokyo Lakes are considered sacred by both Hindus and Buddhists. Each year followers from both the faiths gather around the freezing waters of the lakes to pay homage to their revered deities which include deities of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. This results in a significant footfall around this lake system in spite of which the ecological balance of the region has remained unaffected which can be attributed to the religious teachings of these two faiths promoting the harmonious existence with nature and its elements.

The other mighty and loyal subject of the Himalayas which towers above the vicinity and pierces into the clear blue sky above is the mountain peak of Cho Oyu. The snow clad peak, which rests magnificently at an altitude of well above 8000 meters,

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The other mighty and loyal subject of the Himalayas which towers above the vicinity and pierces into the clear blue sky above is the mountain peak of Cho Oyu. The snow clad peak, which rests magnificently at an altitude of well above 8000 meters, is the sixth highest mountain peak in the world and proudly casts its image on the turquoise waters of the Gokyo Lakes.





Lenticular cloud formations are common occurrences along the downwind side of any mountain. However when such a formation garlands Mt. Everest - the highest mountain peak on this planet, it is bound to give rise to such dramatic scenes. The detailed and dramatic appearance of the clouds, the deep blue sky in the background and the presence of the mighty Everest together have contributed towards this stand out frame which is a dream come true for any mountaineer.

is the sixth highest mountain peak in the world and proudly casts its image on the turquoise waters of the Gokyo Lakes. Cho Oyu lies incredibly close to the China-Nepal border and is yet another mountain which has turned into a popular climbing

destination among mountaineers from all over the world.

This is a land of mysteries, an ancient land where time has long frozen into the icy crevices, in this icy realm the mountains dictate terms, they enthrall and lure, their

sheer majesty evokes a sense of reverence and all this while the beautiful tapestry all around meticulously camouflages the ruthless alter ego of the Himalayas. Life in this mountain kingdom is far from a smooth sail, the mountains challenge their

denizens in every step of the way. Even a breath of fresh air doesn't come cheap at these dizzying heights. The human beings, the animals who call these rugged slopes their homes, are truly at the mercy of the whimsical nature of the Himalayas.

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Yet this has been the way of nature and this is how it should be. The most potent force on this planet – life itself, has managed to carve its own domain in some of the most inhospitable settings like these. However that force is never in direct conflict with the elements of nature, in

fact the elements of nature have carved, moulded, reshaped, even ruthlessly destroyed life, all for a fresher and stronger beginning. This has been the way on this planet, nature will never cease to test life, life on the other hand will find newer ways to overcome those hurdles. Such

picturesque settings in the lap of the Himalayas, where the skyline is dominated by mighty Mountain Peaks are a world apart. Life flows in these rocky crevices and beautiful valleys in the most unadulterated form, nature reveals its most untarnished images at these lofty heights

and all of this seemingly exists to remind us the true wealth of the natural world which this planet we call home is blessed with, something which often stays obscured amidst the smoggy frontiers of our cities.



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About the Photographer

Prasun Mitra is driven by the passion for travelling in the Himalayas, exploring indigenous tribes, endangered cultures, human stories and has a secret interest in capturing the nomadic life. His interest in photography picqued as he started documenting his initial travels and later fell in love with this form of art as he started looking more seriously at the works of some of the amazing photographers he was familiar with. For him photography has been an immersive experience and a wonderful opportunity to see the world from a different perspective. This allows him to get closer to the nuanced stories which he wants to tell to the world by freezing those moments. A corporate professional living in Gurgaon who spends most of his time at the desk between 9-5, it would be appropriate to say he photographs between work and sleep.

AN AWAKENING

by Debrani Das

PHOTOGRAPHY CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL EVEN TO FIGHT OFF OUR INNER DEAMONS.

ONE OF THE FINEST CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS, **DEBRANI DAS** SPEAKS FROM HER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES DURING THIS ONGOING LOCKDOWN AND THIS PHOTO ALBUM COMPRISING OF HER SELF PORTRAITS DEMONSTRATES THE EFFECT PHOTOGRAPHY CAN HAVE ON OUR OVERALL WELL BEING.



“Keep paddling. Don’t stop till you have breathed your last”- she shouted.

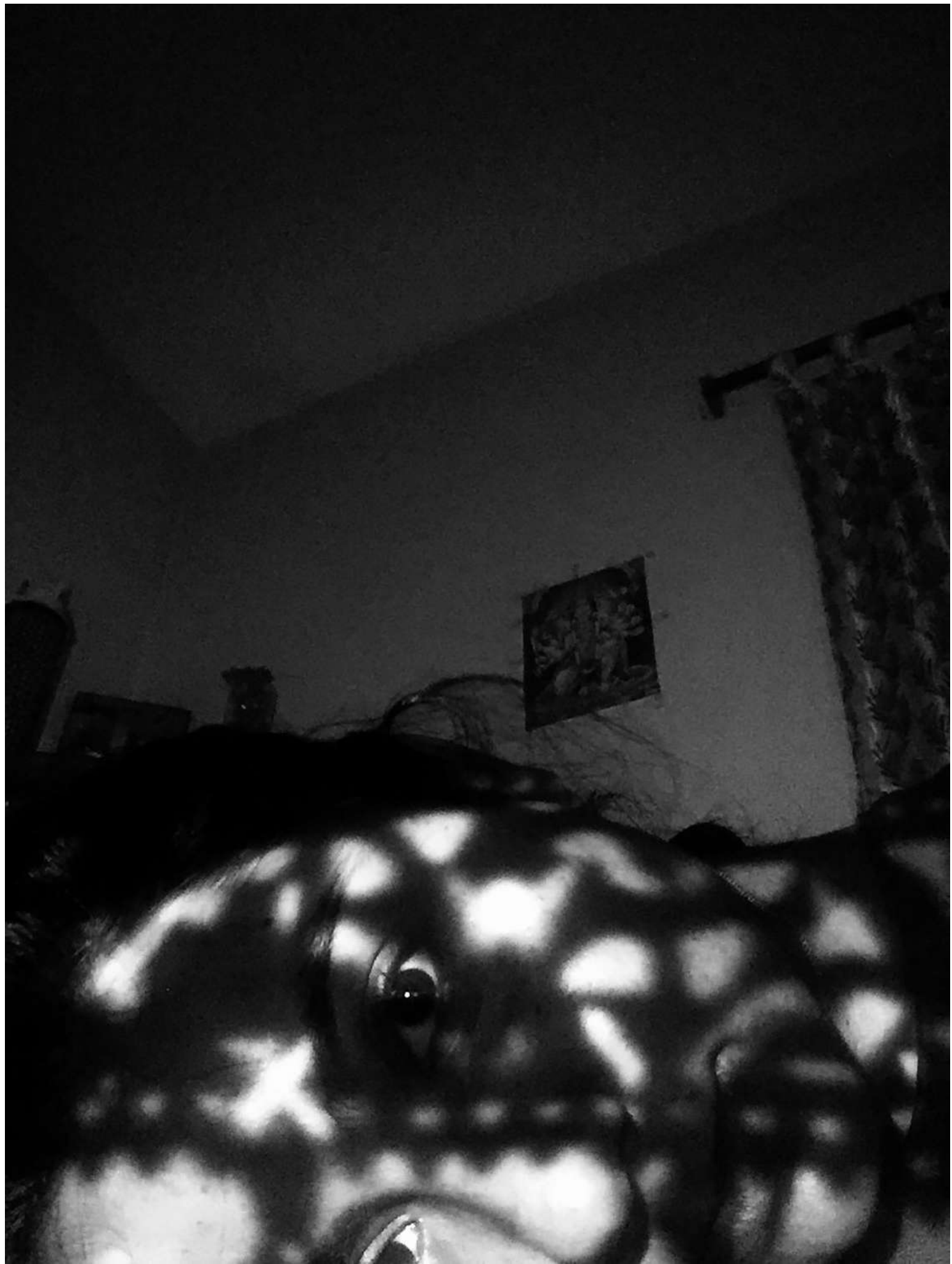
The darkest phase of mankind had begun. All I could see was black everywhere. I screamed with fear in my eyes. I couldn’t find my soul in the dark.

It almost collapsed my brain, suffocated my soul. I was desperately searching for a hand for rescue. But all had confined themselves in their world. I was sinking into an abyss. I had lost all hopes. I was about to close my eyes and then I saw someone. She looked like me - frustrated but desperate. I heard her voice – “Keep paddling. Don’t stop till you have breathed your last”- she shouted. My soul woke up.

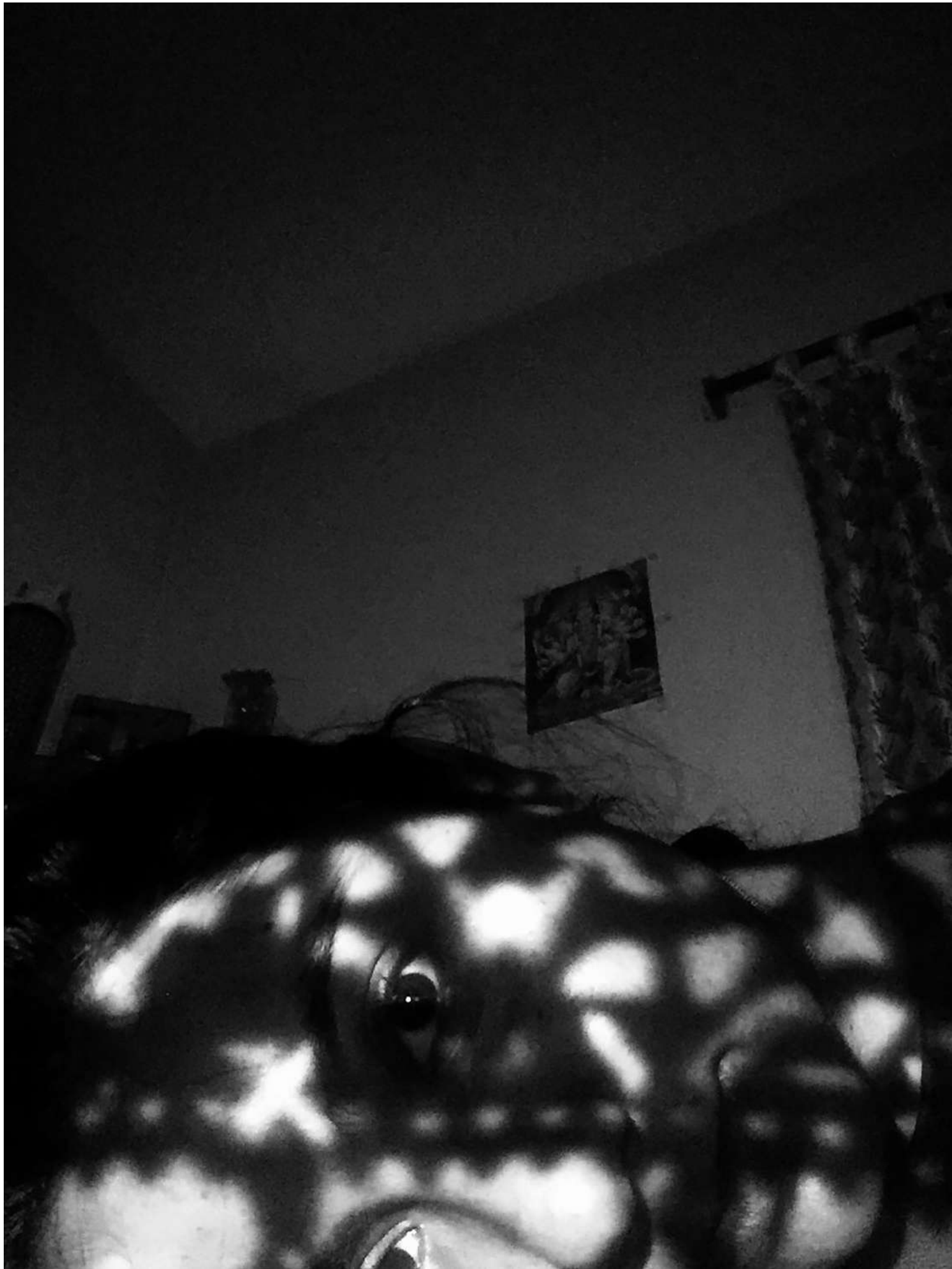
It is the lockdown period in India courtesy the COVID 19 pandemic. The situation is getting worse both in the outer world as well as in the inner world. There is nowhere to go, nothing much to do, except piles of household chores. Days are getting longer and nights are turning sleepless. I started losing control over my sanity. Every news channel, every newspaper, every social media update is about this ongoing crisis and I realised it had started taking its toll on me. The world all around appeared very bleak to me. But one day I got a wake up call from inside. I realised I had to take to take refuge in my passion, I needed to take photographs. However at first nothing seemed of much interest to me. Then gradually I started capturing my mood, emotions, my journey through this

tough time with my phone and I discovered the possibilities in everywhere. I had started my journey from darkness towards light. I started noticing the small details in every corner of my home. Due to the lack of bright sunlight throughout the day I used mobile flash whenever I felt like. This is for the first time I have used mobile flash. I believe that nothing is permanent and this too shall pass. But this phase is making me stronger from within to face the eye of any storm. It is teaching me to push the boundaries I had previously set for myself. To fall and to rise again is what life is all about.













About the Photographer

Debrani Das is a Kolkata based street photographer and an Electrical Engineering graduate. Debrani Das is one of the curators of World Photographic Forum on Facebook and on Instagram. She is a member of StreetEye Collective. She was the guest curator of womeninstreet and Hardcore-Street-Collective for thematic contest. Her works have been published in Eyeshot magazine, Chiiz Magazine, National Geographic, IPA magazine ,121clicks.com and others. She was the winner of Hardcore_Street-Collective for Self-portrait in street category. Her works were chosen as one of the winners of #womenstreetphotographers and was exhibited in NewYork City and Kuala Lumpur. She was also one of the finalists of StreetFotoSanfrancisco festival in single image category in 2019. Recently her work got selected for "double trouble" by Unexposed collective and womenstreet , which is a part of Head on photo festival of Australia.

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Breaking the Glass Ceiling

Swati Mohapatra an entrepreneur by profession became the first woman photographer from Odisha, to open her first solo photo exhibition in the state of Odisha at Lalit Kala Akademi on Saturday 18th January 2020. The occasion, a historic one in the state of Odisha is bound to usher in a new era and serve as an inspiration for countless aspiring women photographers across the state.





Women are breaking the glass ceiling all over the world with their spectacular achievements.

Adding to this ever-growing list is photographer Swati Mohapatra. Mohapatra opened her first solo photo exhibition in the state of Odisha at Lalit Kala Akademi on Saturday 18th January 2020.

While looking back at her career graph, one will find Swati Mohapatra a smart young lady with an M.B.A. degree to her credit and an entrepreneur by profession to be the first woman photographer from Odisha.

Swati is the daughter of Odisha's well known educationist Prof. Nilima Mishra and the late Somanath Mohapatra. Her husband Gourishankar Mishra happens to be a young entrepreneur who is always willing to extend his cooperation and inspiration to her endeavors.

A total of 45 photographs were exhibited at Swati's solo show out of which 7 photographs were on wildlife, mostly migratory birds of Chilika at Mangalajodi sanctuary. The landscape photographs flawlessly encapsulated the scenic beauty of Himalayas, Ladakh, Himanchal Pradesh, Nepal, Shikim, Meghalaya and the Kashmir valley which were taken by Swati during her visits to these places. Swati had also included some of her photographs taken in Thailand and during her visit to the Middle East.

Swati's exhibition was inaugurated by the senior Member of Parliament Pinaki Mishra and was reviewed by former



Swati's exhibition was inaugurated by senior Member of Parliament Pinaki Mishra and was reviewed by former diplomat Abasar Beuria and photographer Raj Sarkar.

Diplomat Abasar Beuria and Photographer Raj Sarkar. Raj Sarkar, an eminent photographer from Kolkata said, "Swati Mohapatra is a brilliant photographer and one can easily connect her soul with her photographs which helps one to understand the beauty of the pictures captured by her.

To showcase such an array of photographs it needs a lot of potential."

Swati Mohapatra an entrepreneur by profession and a promoter of the biotech industry has taken up photography as a passion. Her clicks have been widely acclaimed at various state and national

level exhibitions. A passionate nature lover and an avid landscape photographer, she has captured nature with a great sense of aesthetic and beauty.

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The exhibition was graced by the presence of eminent personalities from different fields of work.

her photographs are on display at “ODIART” museum in Chilika. Her unique body of work has been on display on multiple occasions at various exhibitions organized by “World photographic Forum” Kolkata, “Mushroom photography Circle” Odisha and “UNICEF”.

Titled “A Rendezvous with Nature”, the six-day exhibition was inaugurated by MP Pinaki Mishra. Mishra, impressed by the photographs, said, “Such exhibitions promote tourism and people get to see nature through the eyes of a photographer who saw the beauty that nature bestows upon us.” It must be noted that Swati’s works speak volumes of her aesthetic

sense. She effortlessly captured the serenity and vibrancy of wildlife sanctuaries across the country such as Bharatpur, Kuldiha and Simlipal in her trademark fashion.

(right) Swati Mohapatra a smart young lady with an M.B.A. degree to her credit and an entrepreneur by profession became the first woman photographer from Odisha to open her solo exhibition.



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