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PHOTO ARTS

June 2021



The Whiplash of Storm Clouds

Cover Story
by Debmalya **DAS**

Photo album by EMIR SEVIM where light and shadow play duck and drakes in the streets of Istanbul.
SANDEEP MATHUR documents the surreal beauty of the Lofoten Archipelago in Norway.



Photograph by Debmalya Das

We are living in tumultuous times. 2020 will forever be etched in the history of human civilisation as the year which brought the planet to a standstill courtesy the raging COVID 19 virus. 2021 began with a lot of promise as the number of cases registered a steady decline however soon all notions of a looming respite were dispelled by the second wave of the pandemic which exacted a severe toll and India turned out to be the worst hit country. Amidst freshly imposed restrictions upon our daily lives as we are battling to counter the second wave, Cyclone Yaas brought back the devastating memories of Cyclone Amphan of last year. The cover story highlights the carnage caused by the cyclone and the plight of millions in the wake of this disaster.

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Cover Page photograph by Debmalya Das.

The Whiplash of Storm Clouds

the carnage unleashed by Cyclone Yaas along the eastern coast of India reveals itself in the documentation of **Debmalya DAS**

In the aftermath of the devastating Cyclone Yaas which made landfall in Odisha on the 26th of May 2021, a young boy makes his way on a makeshift raft in the village of Kulpi in South 24 Parganas, one of the worst affected districts in West Bengal.

The prologue:

As the memories of rampaging Cyclone Tauktae are fresh among millions along the coast of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa, yet another cyclonic storm, going by the name of Yaas, battered the coasts of Odisha and Bengal in east India leaving in its wake heart breaking visuals of despair, destruction and losses amounting in billions. Bay of Bengal over the decades, has been known for fomenting one cyclonic storm after the other. A history of tropical cyclonic storms in the Indian peninsula over the last 200 years suggests how the Bay of Bengal has a propensity of harbouring cyclonic formations. For every five such cyclonic formations noted during this period, four of them had their origins rooted in the Bay of Bengal and only one found its origins in the Arabian Sea. In more recent times, a number of cyclonic formations in the Bay of Bengal battered the coasts of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar which resulted in unmitigated disasters. Cyclone Sidr in 2007 wrecked through Bangladesh exacting heavy toll on human lives and properties, Cyclone Nargis left in its wake similar pictures of destruction primarily in Myanmar in 2008, in 2009 Cyclone Aila ravaged huge swathes of the Sundarbans on either side of the international border between India and Bangladesh and in more recent times Cyclone Bulbul in 2019 and Cyclone Amphan in 2020 brought the horrors back in quick succession and left them firmly

entrenched along the coasts of Odisha, West Bengal and Bangladesh. The latest in the long and devastating history of cyclonic formations over the Bay of Bengal was Cyclone Yaas which made landfall in Odisha on the noon of 26th May 2021. Interspersed among these, there have been at least a dozen more cyclonic storms which emerged out of the Bay of Bengal during the above mentioned timeframe, further establishing Bay of Bengal's infamous reputation of being the hotbed of cyclones.

Bay of Bengal – home to cyclonic storms:

A high surface temperature of sea water and increased humidity levels are the two key factors which collude to brew cyclonic storms. In both these regards the Bay of Bengal provides the ideal platform. The Bay of Bengal receives higher rainfall, constant inflow of huge quantities of water from major river systems such as the Ganga and the Brahmaputra and the sluggish wind blowing over its surface together ensure the surface temperature of the Bay of Bengal remains sufficiently high for cyclonic formations. The warmer water towards the surface fails to mix with the cooler water at greater depths thereby creating a scenario ideal for a depression – the bedrock of any cyclonic formation. The Arabian Sea on the other hand, in comparison receives significantly less proportion of fresh water and experiences a strong and persistent wind current

sweeping across it which helps in dissipating the heat and enables the warmer water mingle with the cooler water thereby reducing the temperature and preventing a potential depression like scenario from taking place. Further consolidating the noxious reputation of the Bay of Bengal in fomenting cyclones is the yearlong possibility of cyclonic formations. Stark difference in temperature between the warmer water at the surface and cooler layers in the depths and warm air currents provide the ideal breeding ground for cyclones. Quite understandably such prerequisites are more often met during the pre-monsoon warmer months. However defying all odds cyclones are a round the clock phenomenon in the Bay of Bengal, in fact the Bay of Bengal brews more cyclones in the post-monsoon period. During the summer months the stream of air moving out from the landmass of India out on to the Bay of Bengal prevents the formation of clouds over the Bay, restricting favourable conditions for cyclones. However in the post-monsoon period such air current weakens considerably thereby increasing the chances of cyclonic formations. In addition to these factors, the Bay of Bengal has the affinity to play the generous host to cyclonic formations brewing elsewhere, particularly the Pacific Ocean. The warmer waters of the Bay and the lack of major obstacles in the form of contiguous landmass attract and enable an undeterred path for Pacific cyclones to travel and nest

in the waters of the Bay of Bengal.

In the wake of Cyclone Yaas:

The ever so steadily increasing heatwave due to climate change globally have contributed progressively to the increasing surface temperature of the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists suggested in the prelude to Cyclone Yaas which made landfall on the 26th of May, the surface temperature of the Bay of Bengal reached an exceptional high of 32C particularly towards the north of the Bay. Yaas which was categorised as “very severe cyclonic storm” made landfall in the coastal district of Balasore in Odisha triggering heavy damages in the vicinity as well as in the coastal regions of West Bengal in the districts of East Midnapore and South 24 Parganas. The imminent approach of Yaas triggered large scale evacuation measures in several states of eastern India. The Indian Navy, thousands of personnel belonging to the National Disaster Response Force, huge workforce belonging to the state police and other administrative wings and the Indian Army were all deployed with a view of limiting the loss of lives and property and to ensure the evacuation measures were carried out on a war footing. A total of above 20 lakh people were evacuated to safer zones from low lying lands in the states of West Bengal and Odisha. In the aftermath of Yaas, Mamata Banerjee the Chief Minister of West Bengal suggested at least 3 lakh houses were damaged in Bengal and 134

embankments in low lying areas particularly in the district of South 24 Parganas were destroyed. The local administration reported gigantic waves as high as two storeyed buildings in the coastal towns of Digha and Mandarmoni in East Midnapore district. The ensuing high tides and the soaring river waters have engulfed vast swathes of cultivable lands and rendered hundreds of acres of land useless for the foreseeable future thus impacting the livelihoods of a staggering 1 crore people. Relief material worth 10 crore rupees primarily in the form of tents, dry food, drinking water and other essentials will provide those affected with some breathing space although there can be no denying for millions the rampaging Yaas dealt a crippling blow. The damage caused by Yaas is particularly severe in the villages of South 24 Parganas which lie in close proximity to the Sundarban delta. The soaring sea level led to the ingress of saline sea water into the villages bordering the delta, thereby obliterating hundreds of kilometres of embankments and causing extensive damage to agricultural land, fishery, animal husbandry and horticultural facilities. It must be mentioned, last year to counter the devastation caused by Cyclone Amphan the Government of West Bengal had announced a relief package of a staggering 6250 crore rupees. Similar scenes of destruction could be noted in the coastal towns of Odisha where trees remained uprooted, vast stretches remained



Kulpi village in the district of South 24 Parganas suffered the same fate as hundreds of other villages across West Bengal and Odisha in the aftermath of tropical Cyclone Yaas.

waterlogged without electricity or internet connectivity. In the rural parts of Odisha bordering the coast, mud houses were flattened by the brutality of the cyclone lashing at a speed of 140 kmph and vast swathes of agricultural land remain

submerged. Thousands of families are still marooned in flood and cyclone shelters in the affected districts. The exact estimate of the damages is yet to be ascertained as more horror stories are emerging out of the carnage, however it would be safe to

assume in the aftermath the destruction will amount in billions jeopardizing the life and livelihoods of millions in the two worse affected states.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Yaas millions of people have been stranded homeless in the rescue shelters and are entirely dependent upon the relief supplies being provided by the government.





These rafts serve as the only mode of transport in the affected regions for the supply of essential materials such as food and drinking water in the aftermath of any tropical cyclone like Yaas.

The history of embankments:

The recurring theme of the Sundarbans getting battered after every cyclonic formation in the Bay of Bengal lies in the history of human settlements in the mangrove delta. Approximately 175 years ago the British rule in India decided to make vast swathes of the Sundarbans delta habitable for human settlements. As a result of which hundreds and thousands of people who never owned a piece of land started settling down in the islands of the Sundarbans delta. In order to make the region favourable for human settlements they started off by clearing the mangrove cover and setting up artificial embankments along the shores of the rivers in this region in order to prevent the saline water from inundating the settlements twice daily during high tides. It is estimated a total length of 3500 km of embankment was set up during this period which resulted in a massive clearing of precious mangrove cover. Thus, quite inadvertently, the people settling down in these islands, in order to make the region more hospitable left themselves exposed to the wrath of brewing cyclonic formations in the Bay of Bengal. In this context it must be mentioned such artificial embankments altered the course of the rivers and their numerous tidal creeks and streams. This resulted in a major upheaval in the topography of the region and the altered courses of the rivers and their volumes of water engulfed vast tracts of mangrove forests in some of the other islands devoid

of human settlements which led to further depletion of the mangrove cover. Each year, the authorities undertake certain measures to repair and maintain these artificial embankments which are mostly made up of piling up mud, sand, boulders and bricks. Such upkeeps of the embankments hold firm against moderate rainfall however in the face of cyclonic formations all too common in the Bay of Bengal these embankments fail to provide any kind of resistance, leaving millions exposed to the wrath of the soaring tides and lashing winds. For many decades now the authorities and respective governments have been toying with the idea of setting up concrete embankments which would hold firm against cyclones. A number of proposals have been drawn and a budget of over 5000 crore rupees was proposed. However that project never saw the light of the day. A number of factors are responsible for putting this project on hold. Firstly environmentalists, from the very beginning were sceptical about the sustainability of this project and the long term effect of large scale constructions on the fragile ecosystem of the region. Secondly once the tenders were floated very few construction agencies were found to possess the acumen to construct such structures on topography like that of the Sundarbans's. Acquiring land for such constructions too proved to be a huge challenge as the locals were unwilling to relocate in order to make land available for such structures. Last but not the least

the ever increasing cost of the project dissuaded the authorities from actively pursuing the proposal.

The way forward:

It is beyond the ambit of the most forward technological advancements to tackle the forces of nature. Natural calamities are nature's way of asserting its dominance which nature will continue to do in the most unabashed manner. This is the grim reality which our coastal towns and villages have been living with for centuries now. While millions grapple with such destruction on a yearly basis with the ominous signs of an increasing frequency of such cyclonic storms in the days to come courtesy climate change, the need of the hour is a holistic approach, which would pit nature's own elements against the marauding forces of nature itself. Time and again, the dense mangrove cover in the Sundarbans delta has proved to be the most potent and the only line of defence against such cyclonic storms. The mangroves almost always bear the initial brunt of such cyclonic developments and shield the human settlements inland from catastrophes the severity of which is best left unimagined. Yet over the years we have been the most neglectful towards this green cover, our most trusted ally and treated it with an inconceivable apathy. In the Sundarbans the mangrove cover is vanishing at an unprecedented rate. We have fooled ourselves into believing artificial embankments along the river

banks would hold the fort against soaring tides during such natural calamities. Nature has been prompt in dispelling such misplaced faith in our abilities, as it has been proven repeatedly such artificial safeguards are expensive, fragile and most importantly invasive up to such extents which threaten the entire ecological balance of the region. Amidst such realisation, the only barrier which can prevent the villages in the delta from the whiplashes of future cyclonic storms and prevent the ingress of sea water into agricultural land is a robust mangrove cover which many centuries ago used to dominate the landscape. Renewed efforts with long term planning could bring back the lost green cover. In this context it must be mentioned while implementing such an idea meticulous care must be taken in choosing the appropriate plants. As part of a long term solution, extensive relocation measures need to be put into force especially in the low lying mud flats in the delta. The human settlements along the shorelines need to be relocated further inland making room for the regeneration of mangrove forest cover uninterrupted over stretches of at least 250-500 meters deep from the shores. While planting the trees appropriate care must be taken so that the species which are at the forefront are the most salt resilient and the ones in the inner circle grow taller in order to counter the rising tidal waves during any cyclone. Artificial embankments must be put in place during the formative years of



The carnage which Cyclone Yaas left behind in its wake will set countless families back by decades. Unless long term plans are put into place at the earliest and implemented with the utmost urgency there will be no end to the miseries of millions. Such scenes where someone's home bears such devastated look have become a recurring theme in large parts of South 24 Paraganas district.

the green cover in order for the saplings to grow large enough to be able to fend for themselves. Artificial embankments comprising of layers of soil, plastic sheets and gunny bags filled with sand at the end

of the mangrove cover might prove to be an effective and inexpensive secondary line of defence. The few hundred meters thick mangrove cover comprising of the right species of mangrove plants with

proper care and planning is bound to prove the most effective cover against similar cyclonic formations in 5 to 6 years' time. The other important aspect of looking ahead should be addressing the issue of

affected livelihoods after every such natural calamity. A few hours of rampaging storm can leave months even years of livelihoods at stake. The ingress of saline water during Cyclone Aila in the Sundarbans has permanently rendered hundreds of acres of agricultural land infertile. Animal husbandry, fisheries and horticultural facilities suffer the same fate in the aftermath of such natural calamities. In the wake of such developments it is crucial to provide alternate modes of livelihoods which will largely remain unaffected by the ingress of salt water. The cultivation of salt resistant crops must be encouraged and the seeds of such agricultural produces must be made available in the region apart from providing the technical knowhow. In this context it must be mentioned the government of West Bengal introduced the cultivation of a certain species of salt resistant paddy in the Sundarbans and considering the yields, the project has met with considerable success. Every cyclonic storm in its aftermath leaves vast stretches of flooded land, the freshwater fisheries too fall prey to such developments. The setting up of saltwater nurseries enabling the cultivation of salt water fish could prove to be beneficial and even sustain themselves in the face of such flooding. In order to safeguard the sweet water nurseries from the wrath of cyclones experts have suggested setting up high enough embankments around these nurseries in order to prevent the salt water from



The damage caused by Yaas is particularly severe in the villages of South 24 Parganas which lie in close proximity to the Sundarban delta. The soaring sea level led to the ingress of saline sea water into the villages bordering the delta, thereby obliterating hundreds of kilometres of embankments and causing extensive damage to agricultural land, fishery, animal husbandry and horticultural facilities.

contaminating them. In addition to this such fresh water reserves must be regularly treated with required chemicals to maintain their pH levels and rainwater harvesting should be encouraged in order to preserve the supply of fresh water. Floating vegetable and other agricultural produce farms have been a huge success in many parts of the world, especially places with similar topography such as the Sundarbans Delta. Such an idea could be worth exploring as it would ensure the portability of such farms which can be of utmost priority in the face of a brewing cyclone and secondly it would reduce the dependency on the available land – a resource which is scanty in the delta. The

cultivation of sea weed and certain species of algae could also be promoted in the region. These plants survive in salt water, require nominal upkeep and are important ingredients in the manufacture of animal feed and the confectionary industry. Such endeavours have reaped rich rewards in certain parts of the Sundarbans which highlight the potential of such farming on a large scale. In implementing all of these measures, a special emphasis should be given to safeguard the delicate balance of the Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve. The mangrove is home to hundreds of species and houses an intricately linked ecosystem, the apex of which is graced by the Royal Bengal Tiger. Mitigating conflicts between

the tiger and the human beings should be part of this same endeavour of safeguarding the livelihoods and the forest. Majority of the tiger attacks take place in the narrow tidal creeks which are abundant in crab supply. A generous haul of crab fetches lucrative prices for the fishermen which prompts them to indulge in the fatal play of life and death in these muddy creeks. Artificial means of crab cultivation in floating cages within the confines of the villages have produced encouraging results. This could prove to be yet another vital cog in revamping the economy of the region and provide sustainable livelihood solutions. Additionally such endeavours would ensure a gradually

lessening dependency on the forest and its resources. This in turn would enable the mangrove to regenerate and in the face of decreased human intervention would bring back some of the lost mangrove cover.



It is the indomitable human spirit which musters up the courage and conjures up the strength to continue living amidst such terrible settings. This lady surrounded by the carnage prepares the next meal for her family.



The immense physical, psychological and financial tolls such natural calamities exact upon millions can never be truly ascertained in mere facts and figures.



Cyclone Yaas in the backdrop of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic has dealt a crippling blow to millions and it will take a massive rehabilitation effort to bring back any semblance of normalcy to the lives of the affected.

In the grand scheme of things:

It would be myopic on our part to presume the threat of cyclonic storms and other climate induced calamities pertain strictly to the traditionally affected regions, the likes of the Sundarbans or the Coastal towns and villages. Every such storm sets

the society at large back in more ways than we can possibly comprehend at casual first glances. Also it is worth noting in the absence of mangrove covers or extensive sand dunes along our beaches even a relatively safely tucked in inland city like Kolkata will suffer fatal blows. The illusion

which many of us still seem to fall prey to suggests such natural calamities are region specific problems; the truth however could not be further removed from this. There is another worrying trend which has emerged over the last few decades – the steadily increasing frequency of these

storms and the severity of them. At the heart of such developments lie the faculties of climate change – the single biggest threat to the natural world. The Bay of Bengal in spite of its violent predisposition of brewing massive cyclones was never as warm as it is today. The warming waters of the Bay are handiwork of climate change induced activities which pan out on an hourly basis in our cosy homes. The alarming rate at which the ripple effects of climate change can be felt across the planet and the silent toll which it is exacting out of the natural world every single day, ultimately at periodic intervals culminate into such devastating calamities at an increased frequency and magnitude. The best laid out plans, the finest execution and the most noble intents would amount to very little unless we come together as a single holistic unit in reversing the tide of climate change. We cannot allow our cities to register gigantic carbon footprints as we cocoon ourselves with a false sense of security which suggests our swanky city skyline is robust enough to withstand any storm. It would be a foolish endeavour of humongous magnitude to indulge in a test of nature's wrath. Cyclone Amphan in 2020 laid bare the fragile defences of a modern city like Kolkata and brought the sprawling metropolis to its knees. Climate change, the Frankenstein which we have meticulously nurtured, is now lurking in our backyard, and it lacks the ability to distinguish between the rich and the poor, between the urban and the rural.



In the aftermath of Yaas, Mamata Banerjee the Chief Minister of West Bengal suggested at least 3 lakh houses were damaged in Bengal and 134 embankments in low lying areas particularly in the district of South 24 Parganas were destroyed.



While it still is true that the marginalised section of the society is the one to bear the maximum brunt of such catastrophes, the cushion which the more privileged believe they are blessed with is fast slipping away. The fate of the global ecosystem is intertwined, in the absence of a Sundarbans, it won't take Kolkata long to suffer the same fate which hundreds of villages in South 24 Parganas are suffering in the aftermath of Cyclone Yaas. In the grand scheme of things this is not a problem of our coasts, or our deltas, climate change and such induced activities are scourge to every living creature on this planet and since this monster is solely our creation the onus of reining it in lies squarely upon us.

The makeshift shelter camps such as this one provide temporary refuge and thousands of people are left stranded in these camps until the water subsides from their backyards. It goes without saying the living conditions in these camps are from ideal.



Debmalya DAS

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

The ancient traditional festival of Gajan is one such pre-harvest festival which takes place mostly in rural Bengal in the month of Chaitra according to the Bengali lunar calendar which usually coincides with the month of March or April.

Saurabh SIROHIYA documents the various aspects of the festival.



COLOURS FAITH and RITUALS of Gajan

A devotee during the festival of Gajan, a pre-harvest festival which takes place mostly in rural Bengal in the month of Chaitra according to the Bengali lunar calendar.

The popular Bengali proverb- “baro mashe tero parbon” perfectly encompasses the community’s deep rooted and long cherished love for festivities. The proverb which means thirteen festivals within a span of twelve months is the perfect idiom for the abundance of festivities throughout the year in West Bengal. Festivals in Bengal can be broadly classified into two categories governed by the harvest season. The pre-harvest festivals are usually observed before the agricultural season begins, seeking divine intervention for a rich harvest, the regeneration of life and land. The post-harvest festivals generally take place after the agricultural season, once the harvesting of crop is over. The ancient traditional festival of Gajan is one such pre-harvest festival which takes place mostly in rural Bengal in the month of Chaitra according to the Bengali lunar calendar which usually coincides with the month of March or April. However it is worth mentioning the festivities surrounding Gajan are not strictly restricted within the confines of West Bengal. Similar festivities are observed under different names in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Orissa roughly around the same time. Gajan also known as Shiber Gajan is mainly celebrated by the rural communities who are worshippers of Lord Shiva. Like other pre-harvest festivals, Gajan is also aimed at regeneration. During the festivities the villagers seek for Lord Shiva’s blessings with the hope of a rich

produce during the ensuing agricultural season. The festival includes a variety of rituals which are acts of self-penance. But the devotees while performing them transcend the pain and experiences pleasure. In addition, as is the case with every other festival, mostly the festival is about celebrations and ensuring a joyous time for all. Keeping that tradition alive, Gajan too is accompanied by a range of amusements which eventually become the cynosure. There is no concrete theory regarding the origin of this festival. One school of thought points out the uncanny similarities between the rituals of Gajan and the tantric rituals of Buddhism. The acts of self-penance which are at the heart of the rituals practiced during Gajan strongly resemble the tantric rituals practiced by Buddhist monks. Etymologically, the word Gajan comes from the word “Garjan” meaning loud shouts of the devotees. An alternative meaning of the word derives from the word ga meaning “village” and jon meaning “people” which in short can be translated as a ‘festival for the people’. In many ways the festival of Gajan paves a path for the otherwise ignored and peripheral section of the society to rise to a place of prominence. Anyone embracing the rituals of this festival is considered to be an ardent follower of lord Shiva and enjoys a respectable position in the society. In earlier times the peasant class which faced torture and humiliation from the landlords or Zamindars would use the



A young boy meticulously paints his face to resemble the mythological character he is supposed to play in the evening skit.

A devotee dressed in an avatar resembling some mythological character awaits the evening performances – an integral part of the festivities.



festival of Gajan as a platform to prove their mettle as a devotee of Shiva and gain acceptance among the upper classes of the society. However the path leading to the upper strata of the society was by no means an easy one. In order to atone for their sins and be considered as representatives of Shiva the devotees were involved in piercing one's tongue with sharp needles to hang one from sharp hooks hanging from wooden structures. The caste differences are not so rigid these days but these practices of self-inflicted pain and sufferings are still very much prevalent. The festival with all its rituals and revelry pans out for three days. The rituals are usually aimed at pleasing Lord Shiva and dedicated towards him. The devotees also known as the Gajan Sannyasis turn up in colourful costumes and body paintings in an attempt to impersonate Lord Shiva. They parade around the villages as the villagers gather around them to seek their blessings. Usually the elder one among these devotees also known as the Mool Sannyasi or the chief devotee is entrusted with the responsibility of performing the evening worships and other rituals. Before they gather around in one place to perform the evening worships the villagers carry the traditional palanquin which is believed to be the palanquin of Lord Shiva himself. Apart from the religious rituals there is plenty that goes on for everyone to keep themselves entertained. The performers, who take part in various plays and skits depicting various episodes from Hindu

mythologies involving the many Hindu Gods and Goddesses, meticulously prepare themselves for their evening performances. Costumes and headgears are designed carefully, they are provided with the proper props, their bodies are painted in great details so that their resemblances with the mythical characters are spot on. It goes without saying an evening's enthralling performance earns the performers celebrity status in their villages and the adjoining ones which often translates into hot pursuit of them during the next year's festivities. The devotees who cross-dress themselves as various deities, like Shiva and Parvati and Goddess Kali sport signature bright hues smeared all over their bodies. Their depictions of mythological episodes during the street plays and skits may not always be the most accurate depiction; instead there is a conscious effort on the performers' part to inculcate comic elements in their performances. This deliberate tweaking of the mythological episodes to invoke laughter and a sense of light heartedness among the onlookers works just fine, since at the end of the day Gajan more than being a religious occasion is still primarily a festival aimed at providing some much needed respite to people from their everyday mundane lives. In some of the rural settlements of Bengal Gajan happens to be the biggest festival in their lives. Understandably the excitement leading up to the festival is palpable all around. The entire month of Chaitra witnesses relentless preparations

for the festival and some kind of ritual or the other being performed in almost every household. All of this reaches its zenith on the final day of the Bengali calendar known as Chaitra Sankranti. Most Bengali households observe some ritual or the other on this day, followed as it is by Poila Baishakh—the auspicious first day of the Bengali year. Chaitra Sankranti is particularly significant because of the hoof-swinging ritual of Charak, which also happens to be the concluding ritual of Gajan and possibly the most widely recognised aspect of this festival. The ritual of Charak attracts the maximum number of people and audience. Even those who are the least involved in the month-long preparations gather to witness the awe-inspiring spectacle of Charak. The unbelievable feats of strength, self-penance and strength performed by the devotees or the Gajan Sannyasis truly defy all logic and common sense. The devotees at the stroke of dusk are suspended from the top of a Charak tree with the help of a rope at the end of which two iron hooks are attached. These iron hooks pierces the skin and flesh of the devotees as they dig deeper into the backs of the devotees while they remain suspended in the air. In this state of suspension the devotees start revolving around the Charak tree. These jaw dropping stunts where the devotees bear tremendous pain and showcase superlative skills and strength never fail to evoke a collective sigh of awe from the crowd gathered down below.



The Gajan Sannyasis go through elaborate preparations to look the part for the evening rituals and skits. Before they leave for the evening rituals the Gajan Sannyasis make sure they look the part for the scheduled evening skits where they portray various mythical characters.



Gajan Sannyasis turn up in colourful costumes and body paintings in an attempt to impersonate Lord Shiva. They parade around the villages as the villagers gather around them to seek their blessings.



The devotees or Gajan Sannyasis make their way to the performance grounds in their mythical avatars.

Understandably this remarkable ritual during the festival of Gajan has gained the maximum prominence over time and has turned into the biggest attraction of these festivities. It is truly remarkable to see even in the age of high speed internet and myriad other platforms providing a wide array of entertainment at one's finger

tips, the festival of Gajan has not taken a backseat. In rural parts of Bengal, people still feel an emotional connect with these festivities, maybe it reminds them of a time when the world all around used to be less complicated or maybe taking part in these festivities is their way of paying homage to a time honoured tradition,

something that remains a significant aspect of rural Bengal's socio-cultural identity. While Charak remains the most widely followed ritual during the celebrations surrounding the festival of Gajan, the rituals slightly vary in nature in different parts of West Bengal. Some of these rituals take a morbid turn when dead decaying

bodies and other human body parts such as skulls and bones become an integral component of these rituals. In some of the remote villages of West Bengal such rituals which include processions carrying human corpse and skull have been an integral part of Gajan celebrations for centuries now. It is needless to mention the practices are primal enough to challenge the finer senses of the uninitiated. The local administration is believed to be in the knowhow of things and although the legality of some of these practices may be questionable the concerned authorities often prefers to turn a blind eye to such proceedings. Gajan is primarily a rural Bengal festival. In direct contrast to most of the religious festivals and rituals of Bengal, Gajan is a festival primarily for the marginalised section of the Bengali-Hindu community. These people have traditionally enjoyed a much lesser privileged position in the society compared to the Brahmins. Most of these people rely on agriculture for their livelihood, while some are barbers or live off of performing odd jobs. While Brahmins and members from other higher castes of the society do take part in the festivals the main rituals or the worships are not performed by them which again is in remarkable contrast to other Hindu religious festivals. The chief devotee or the Mool Sannyasi who again belongs to the lower sections of the society is entrusted with the responsibility of performing the main rituals and the worships.



The Gajan Sannyasis gather in front of the village temple for the rituals. They will be soon joined by other villagers and the Mool Sannyasi or the chief devotee.

The festival with all its rituals and revelry pans out for three days. The rituals are usually aimed at pleasing Lord Shiva and dedicated towards him. They parade around the villages as the villagers gather around them to seek their blessings.





Chaitra Sankranti is particularly significant because of the hoof-swinging ritual of Charak, which also happens to be the concluding ritual of Gajan and possibly the most widely recognised aspect of this festival. The ritual of Charak attracts the maximum number of people and audience. Even those who are the least involved in the month-long preparations gather to witness the awe-inspiring spectacle of Charak.

In spite of the social complexities associated with the festival and the myriad rituals and the different manners in which they are carried out, Gajan essentially remains an occasion for celebration, mirth and revelry for a vast segment of rural population in Bengal. This is evident in the non-rigid, all-inclusive manner of the celebrations and the performing of the rituals. For the villagers the event becomes a site for social interaction and entertainment, a much needed reprieve from the mundane burdens of their daily lives. Not only have the rituals, fire acts, skits and fair become the cynosure of the festival, but have established themselves as traditions which are followed each year faithfully. During the course of time, the primary objective of seeking divine interventions from Lord Shiva for ensuring a period of vitality and fertility has slowly faded into the background as the laughter, joyous celebrations and the brilliance of the performances put on display by the devotees slowly eclipsed the notion of appeasing the sacred forces. In other words, the festivities surrounding Gajan have not only allowed the communities from the socially decreed lower strata to rise to prominence, they have even in fact pushed the divine into the backstage in an attempt to celebrate the indomitable human spirit, therein lies the true celebration of Gajan.



Devotees lie prostrate and pay their respect in front a shrine of Lord Shiva.



A devotee impersonating God Shiva gently steps on an infant in its mother's arms in an act of blessing the baby. The allure of Gajan is not restricted to rural Bengal alone, such scenes are commonplace during the festival in the towns and cities of West Bengal.



(above) A young girl dressed as Goddess Kali awaits her turn to take part in the festivities. Once she steps out many will queue up and seek blessings from her, in a token gesture of receiving blessings from the Goddess herself.



In spite of the social complexities associated with the festival and the myriad rituals and the different manners in which they are carried out, Gajan essentially remains an occasion for celebration, mirth and revelry for a vast segment of rural population in Bengal. This is evident in the non-rigid, all-inclusive manner of the celebrations and the performing of the rituals. In direct contrast to most of the religious festivals and rituals of Bengal, Gajan is a festival primarily for the marginalised section of the Bengali-Hindu community.



Saurabh SIROHIYA

Saurabh Sirohiya is a graphic designer by profession and a visual storyteller and travel, street & documentary photographer by passion. He has a particular affinity for street and travel photography, a skill which he mastered himself in spite of suffering from hearing and speech impairments. He believes every frame tells a story but creating a story within a frame, is what makes the frame more beautiful. He keeps traveling to achieve his long-cherished dream of capturing and documenting the different cultures, rituals, heritage, and traditions of India. He has won more than 400 international and national photography awards, and his photographs have been published in multiple international and national newspapers and magazines. He has been honoured with EFIP, EFIAP, c*MoL, AAPS, AAPG, GAPU, ACPE, BWPAI, BAPF, and 6 other honorary fellowships.

LOFOTEN – AN ODE TO THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Sandeep MATHUR chronicles the surreal beauty of the Lofoten Archipelago in Norway.

Amidst the freezing cold and turbulent waters of the Norwegian Sea lies the incredibly beautiful archipelago of Lofoten, in the Nordland county of Norway.

Amidst the freezing cold and turbulent waters of the Norwegian Sea lies the incredibly beautiful archipelago of Lofoten, in the Nordland county of Norway. The archipelago falls well within the freezing realms of the Arctic Circle and lies at an approximate distance of 2500km from the North Pole. Such close proximity to the North Pole has shaped a few distinct characteristics of this surreally beautiful landscape. One such characteristic is the ethereal play of the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis in the sky of Lofoten. During the winter months the Lofoten skyscape turns into the canvass of an eccentric artist who in a fit of epiphany paints the night sky in the most vibrant of green and purple hues. The artist in question is none other than nature itself. For the locals, the origin of the Northern Lights is deep rooted in the folklores and mythologies of the region. The Sami community, indigenous to the northern reaches of Norway, Sweden, Finland and even Russia believe the magical lights appearing the sky are the souls of the dead and had magical effects. To honour the departed the indigenous communities observe momentary silence when the lights swish across the sky and believe disrespecting the heavenly lights above would bring them bad fortune and serve as a bad omen.

This landscape of unparalleled natural beauty resembles a setting which has emerged out of some fairy-tale. The

region is steeped in history and tradition with the earliest human settlement in the region dating all the way back to more than 5000 years. The close proximity to the North Pole and the icy cold leash of the Arctic Circle failed to turn this landscape into the typically barren frozen Arctic realms courtesy the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. The lush green fjords, the abundance of giant shoals of fish in the waters, the ever busy cackling colonies of thousands of sea birds, the beautiful vistas of ragged peaks jutting above the wilderness and overlooking the distant sea and the not so distant incredibly colourful local fishing villages can all be attributed to the priceless warm water of the Gulf Stream which nourishes the region. While the scenic beauty is majestic enough to leave one spellbound, the ancient and rich history and tradition of the Lofoten Archipelago come a close second. It can be hard to comprehend amidst such beautiful settings, there once used to be fierce Viking stronghold a claim substantiated by the unearthing of the world's largest Viking chieftain's house barely a few decades ago. Such artefacts and other remnants reminiscent of the region's Viking lineage are carefully preserved and displayed in the museums and galleries in the islands for the thousands of tourist who visit this archipelago each year. The beautiful vistas, the multitude of outdoor activities ranging from mountaineering to surfing and the ancient history and tradition of the region

This landscape of unparalleled natural beauty resembles a setting which has emerged out of some fairy-tale.



Although firmly within the grip of the Arctic Circle, Lofoten displays the striking anomaly of experiencing four distinct seasons. The anomaly is a result of the relatively warmer waters of the Gulf Stream along with the North Atlantic Current and the Norwegian Current.



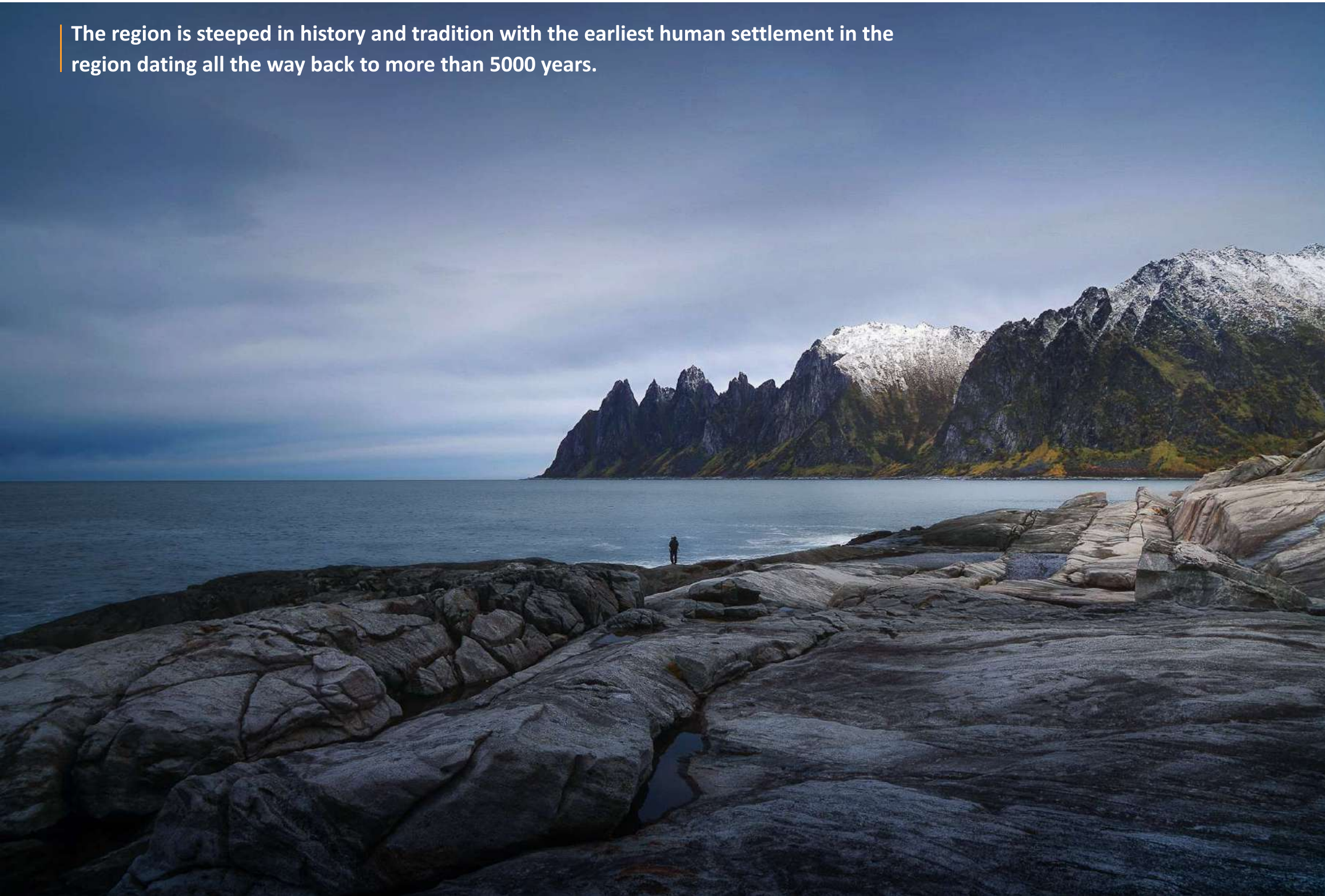
together have combined to turn this region a much coveted tourist destination over the past few decades. Lofoten of today, witnesses an average footfall in excess of 1 million year per year during the tourist season. It goes without saying tourism and other related activities form the backbone of Lofoten's economy. In addition to these,

fishing comprises of one of the major livelihoods for the people living in these islands. Even today, colourful fishing villages can be found tucked in nooks and corners of this magnificent landscape. These fishing villages such as the likes of Nusfjord – one of the oldest fishing villages in Lofoten have turned into

extremely popular tourist destination. Tourists visiting these villages can get a glimpse into the fishing culture of Lofoten and even experience it for themselves while staying in the preserved replicas of fisherman's cabins. Needless to say, these fishing villages are located along the shores against the backdrop of breath taking

scenic views. Such impressive settings have also contributed significantly towards the ever increasing popularity of the fishing hamlets of Lofoten among tourists. While it is true the fishing industry of Lofoten is a mere shadow of its former self, with only a handful of villages and families still indulging in fishing, there can be no

The region is steeped in history and tradition with the earliest human settlement in the region dating all the way back to more than 5000 years.



Stream along with the North Atlantic Current and the Norwegian Current. Typical summer temperatures during the summer months of June to August often reach 27 degree Celsius while the winter months between November to March experience an average temperature of around 0 degree Celsius accompanied by a steep drop to – 10 degree on certain occasions. The warmer summer months quite understandably attract more tourists to these islands with the added attraction of a plethora of outdoor activities which the frigid winter months would otherwise not permit. However tourists start queuing up on the shores of Lofoten as early as end May for this is the time of the midnight sun. In a remarkable turn of events, courtesy Lofoten’s latitudinal position the sun quite literally never sets beyond the horizon, instead keeps hovering above it until it starts assuming its gradual ascent at the break of dawn.

denying the close knit communities in these villages have done their very best in preserving their traditional ways. Some of the cabins in these villages are hundreds of years old, the stores lining the streets have remained almost unchanged, and generations have grown up experiencing the same authentic culture in this

archipelago. The booming tourism industry has paved way for fresh opportunities for retired fishermen, for whom the ordeal of fishing in the rough waters of the sea for a living is no longer ideally suited for their old age. The fishing villages in Lofoten organise regular fishing trips for tourists which provide them a glimpse into the

fishing culture in these islands and also provide the elderly fishermen with a source of livelihood.

Although firmly within the grip of the Arctic Circle, Lofoten displays the striking anomaly of experiencing four distinct seasons. The anomaly is a result of the relatively warmer waters of the Gulf

To honour the departed the indigenous communities observe momentary silence when the Northern Lights swish across the sky and believe disrespecting the heavenly lights above would bring them bad fortune and serve as a bad omen.



The lush green fjords, the abundance of giant shoals of in the waters, the ever busy cackling colonies of thousands of sea birds, the beautiful vistas of ragged peaks jutting above the wilderness and overlooking the distant sea and the not so distant incredibly colourful local fishing villages can all be attributed to the priceless warm waters of the Gulf Stream which nourishes the region.



The beautiful vistas, the multitude of outdoor activities ranging from mountaineering to surfing and the rich history and tradition of the region together have combined to turn this region a much coveted tourist destination over the past few decades.



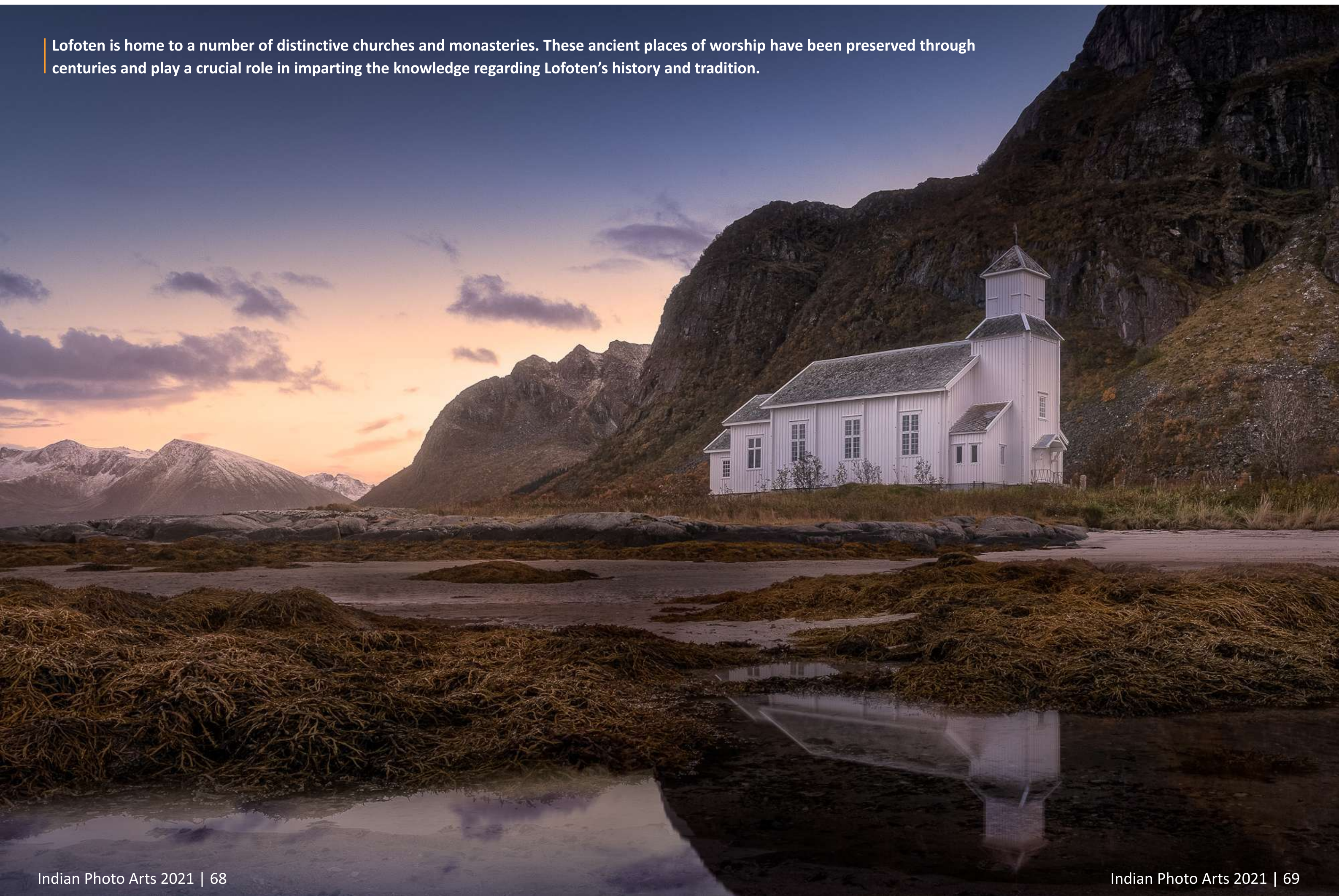
in this part of the world. In keeping with that spirit the people of Lofoten have since ancient times admired and revered the natural settings around them. The reverence towards the Northern Lights and the decision to not set up any oil rigs in the adjoining sea in spite of it being rich in oil reserves bear testimony to that. Lofoten still remains one of those rare places on this planet where the synergy between human beings and the natural world deserves a special mention. As a consequence of which it becomes a greater responsibility on part of us, visiting Lofoten to experience this amazing place, to preserve this harmony and contribute in our way to safeguard the future of this beautiful oasis in the frigid realms of the Arctic.

Lofoten Islands, at their very first sight are bound to evoke the most dormant romantic in each one of us. The jagged peaks of the islands pierce into the skyline like ancient creatures rising from the deep dark depths of the ocean only to be pacified by the lush green fjords surrounding them. This is a place of staggering, almost

otherworldly beauty. The surrounding sea is the islands' lifeblood which offers them a plethora of riches and surrounding which the folklores of these ancient landmasses have traversed through generations. Lofoten remains one of those few remaining places on this planet where life still flows in an idyllic manner, far removed

from the bustling metropolises which certainly seem a world apart from the gently sloping lush fjords of Lofoten. The tiny yet colourful fishermen cabins stand out in sharp contrast to the gigantic granite rocks in the background, who with their stoic presence serve a gentle yet firm reminder that nature still rules the roost

Lofoten is home to a number of distinctive churches and monasteries. These ancient places of worship have been preserved through centuries and play a crucial role in imparting the knowledge regarding Lofoten's history and tradition.



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Even today, colourful fishing villages can be found tucked in nooks and corners of this magnificent landscape. These fishing villages such as the likes of Nusfjord – one of the oldest fishing villages in Lofoten have turned into extremely popular tourist destination. Tourists visiting these villages can get a glimpse into the fishing culture of Lofoten and even experience it for themselves while staying in the preserved replicas of fisherman's cabins.



Sandeep Mathur is a passionate traveller and a serious photography hobbyist from New Delhi. Running an engineering company allows him to travel to various parts of the world. His wife and kids are equally fond of travelling and he makes it a point to plan his photography jaunts around work-travel or family holidays. Every year he tries to tick off his ever-increasing photography bucket list. His choice of photography is shooting natural landscapes and cityscapes and he particularly loves mixing ambient light with artificial light.

More of his work is available at:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sandeep.mathur.photography

Instagram: www.instagram.com/sandeepmathurphotos

Website: www.sandeepmathurphotos.in

1x: www.1x.com/members/sandeepmathurphotos

Sandeep MATHUR

The Colour Palette of **HORNBILL FESTIVAL**

Nilesh Kumar documents the vibrant sights and sounds which pan out during the annual **Hornbill Festival** in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland.

A Naga woman in her traditional attire stands next to the traditional cooking area inside a typical Naga hut during the Hornbill Festival. The use of countrymade guns is still a common affair in the Naga society primarily for hunting.

The history of the incredibly diverse northeast Indian state of Nagaland is a rather complex affair and often leaves historians hotly contesting the veracity of the information available in the public domain. This is largely due to the lack of records or documents which would conclusively point towards the origin and the migration of the 16 Naga tribes. In spite of that, a chat with the elders belonging to the various tribes brings forth the unanimous opinion which suggests their origins are not rooted in India, instead their ancestors migrated from elsewhere, quite possibly entered India across Myanmar and eventually settled down in the north-eastern region of India, largely in today's Nagaland. The exact origin is still shrouded in mystery; in fact many historians are of the opinion that it would be unfair to ascertain one common origin to all the major tribes inhabiting Nagaland today. Some suggest at different points in history tribes from different parts of Southeast Asia as well as Tibet and China migrated and settled down in the Naga Hills – at the tri junction between India, China and Nepal.



The performers at the Hornbill Festival are typically dressed in their traditional attire belonging to their respective tribes and adorned in traditional headgear, ornaments, accessories and even weapons such as shields, spears, bows and arrows.

Such claims are certainly not devoid of merit, particularly when one analyses the cultural similarity which existed among various Naga tribes and those belonging to Philippines, Borneo and Indonesia. One such similarity was the practice of head hunting which was prevalent among many Naga tribes until late 1970s. In a striking similarity with their south east Asian counterparts, the Naga warriors would be entrusted with bringing home the chopped heads of their enemies (who in most occasions would be members of the neighbouring village), in order to sprinkle fresh blood on the cultivable lands to ensure a good harvest that season. In addition to such practices similarities in their attires, jewellerys and accessories also point towards a shared lineage. To further substantiate such claims historians have repeatedly alluded to the similarities in architecture, settlements and various social practices prevalent among the Naga tribes and the tribes from Philippines, namely the Igorots.

Debates will rage on surrounding the origin of the Naga tribes and their migration into India. However there can be no denying the state of Nagaland happens to be the largest and the most diverse stronghold of these communities. Naga communities can be found in the neighbouring states of Nagaland including Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Nagaland has 16 recognised tribes — Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Dimasa Kachari, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha,

Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchungrü and Zeliang. The Kachari and Kuki are non-Naga tribes while the Zeliang comprises two Naga communities — Zeme and Liangmai. Presently these communities are scattered across the districts of Nagaland, with the significant majority belonging to each tribe residing in their respective districts. The 16 tribes together represent the incredible diversity Nagaland is blessed with. Each tribe has their own language and dialect and usually these languages or dialects are unintelligible to members belonging to other tribes. Similarly, the architecture, traditional attire, accessories belonging to each tribe although not vastly different from one another, certainly display their unique characteristics. The one thing which possibly binds all these communities with the same thread is the religion they follow, which happens to be Christianity.

Amidst such diversity, the annual Hornbill Festival organised in Kohima provides the perfect platform to all the communities to come together under the same roof and showcase to the rest of the world their proud heritage and vibrant culture. Every year the festival is organised in the first week of December under the patronage of the government of Nagaland in the Naga heritage village of Kisama in the outskirts of Kohima. The festival is named after the Greater Indian Hornbill, a bird of impressive proportions with a huge, powerful and colourful beak. The bird features prominently in the folklores of

most Naga tribes. Sadly, once abundant in these forests, deforestation and illegal hunting have led to rapid decline in their population. The festival offers glimpses into the myriad celebrations, rituals, song and dance routine performed by members of the respective tribes. The performers are typically dressed in their traditional attire and adorned in traditional headgear, ornaments, accessories and even weapons such as shields, spears, bows and arrows.

The festival was launched by the government of Nagaland in the year 2000 with a view of propagating a sense of harmony among the various Naga tribes and encouraging cultural exchange among them. In addition to this the festival also sheds some much needed light on relatively lesser known aspects of Naga culture and way of life. Over the course of the next two decades the festival has only grown in stature and attracts thousands of visitors from all over the country and even across the globe. The ever growing popularity and stature of the festival can be attributed to the vibrant nature of it. The 7-10 days of celebrations are rife with elaborate song and dance routine, folksongs, elaborate feasts, vibrant accessories and costumes on display and opportunities to interact with people belonging to the different communities. In other words the Hornbill Festival highlights the various slices of life from the various Naga communities and plays a pivotal role in promoting the indigenous cultures and traditions.

cultural assimilation, the festival also plays a vital role in boosting the economy of the region. The Hornbill Festival is by far the biggest and the most prominent tourist attraction in the state of Nagaland. The tourism sector of Nagaland is largely dependent upon this festival and there can be no denying the festival has significantly bolstered brand Nagaland as a tourist destination in India. During these 7-10 days in the first half of December each year Nagaland witnesses a huge influx of tourists from all over Indian and the world. The fortnight is a crucial period in the economic calendar of the region with hundreds of tour operators and other related businesses reaping the benefits during this time of plenty. At the festival ground one is bound to stumble upon series of makeshift stalls which display handicrafts, food items, costumes and countless other items manufactured and prepared by the members of the different tribes. The sale of these items provides a lucrative source of revenue for the members of these communities many of whom are largely dependent on the meagre returns from terrace farming for most part of the year. The ripple effects of this festival can be felt long after the festival draws to a close. Courtesy the Hornbill Festival, other tourist destinations in the state have gained prominence. The festival has piqued the interest of many outside the state regarding the Naga communities. As a combined effect the once narrow trickle of tourists into the state has slowly

but steadily grown in proportion. The festival has put Nagaland on the global cultural map, courtesy the music concerts which take place after the day long festivities and often witness collaborations between the local artists, rock bands, musicians and their international counterparts.

Unfortunately the Hornbill Festival too couldn't escape the scourge of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic. In 2020 the festival was organised virtually with only a handful performers sans the much coveted fanfare. The event was televised although it goes without saying the affair was only a shadow of its former self during normal times. This was done to prevent mass gatherings which certainly would have led to the unchecked spread of the deadly virus. With ever increasing numbers, the raging pandemic has yet again cast serious doubts on the future of the festival this year as well. The statistics surrounding the pandemic do not augur well for the festival and for the thousands of people dependent upon this festival for a significant chunk of their earnings.

The Hornbill festival is a remarkable event which showcases the rich heritage of the Naga communities and acts a wonderful tool for assimilation and cultural exchange. The vibrant nature of the festival and the cultural exchanges which take place successfully dispel a plethora of misconceived notions and myths about the Naga people. Such ill-founded notions



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for long have alienated the Naga communities and many other indigenous and ethnic communities. Celebrations like that of the Hornbill Festival can go a long way in bridging the gap and bring us all

together on the same platform and help us understand each other better and embrace each other in spite of our differences.

A group of performers in their tribe's traditional attire awaits their turn to perform during the Hornbill Festival.





The festival is a wonderful platform for the communities to display their handicrafts in the stalls at the ground and also provides a boost to their economy.



The festival offers glimpses into the myriad celebrations, rituals, song and dance routine performed by members of the respective tribes. The 7-10 days of celebrations are rife with elaborate song and dance routine, folksongs, elaborate feasts, vibrant accessories and costumes on display and opportunities to interact with people belonging to the different communities.

The Hornbill Festival provides glimpses into such elaborate celebrations in front of Morungs or traditional dormitories.





The 16 tribes together represent the incredible diversity Nagaland is blessed with. Each tribe has their own language and dialect and usually these languages or dialects are unintelligible to members belonging to other tribes.



A Naga man takes a much needed break in a quieter corner of the festival grounds to adjust his attire.



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Nilesh KUMAR

Nilesh Kumar is an Indian travel and documentary photographer from Ranchi, Jharkhand. He has been practising travel and documentary photography for the last two years. Through his travels, Nilesh started documenting people, culture and places around India. The majority of his works revolves around the indigenous communities and festivals of India. Nilesh loves to do solo trips all around the country and dreams to travel and explore the world.

Istanbul

in light and shade...

a photo album by Emir SEVIM where light and shadow play duck and drakes in the streets and alleys of Istanbul.



Istanbul, the economic, cultural and historical nerve centre of Turkey, is a city of immense varieties. Busy, bustling business centres in the city gradually pave way for a more scenic and tranquil setting by the sea overlooking the continent of Asia. The vibrant nightlife in one part of the city stands in sharp contrast to the calm that prevails in other part. From a historical perspective it is hard to think of any other city on this planet which has been at the heart of so many conflicts, the wealth and riches of which have attracted plunderers and conquerors making a beeline outside its walls. A once proud insignia of the mighty Byzantine and Ottoman Empire, Istanbul occupies a very special place in the world map. The city sits astride the continents of Europe in the east and Asia in the west, courtesy which the city of Istanbul has historically been the melting pot of cultures, a place of influx between the eastern and the western world. A city made for trade and business Istanbul since centuries is no stranger to the rest of the world. The waters of Bosphorus used to teem with merchant fleets stacked with a plethora of goods from different parts of the world.

Their numbers have since dwindled courtesy other popular means of transport, yet Bosphorus of today remains a busy waterway where oil tankers and passenger ferries carefully manoeuvre their way in this busy stretch of water. Istanbul of today still remains the vibrant, diverse entity it has always been. A true melting pot between the oriental and occidental the city has embraced them all and seamlessly blended them to form a unique culture of its own, a culture of diversity and pluralism. The streets of the city, akin to its culture, present their different sides time and again. Busy streets, empty sidewalks, laidback beachfronts, corporate high-rises, colourful graffiti – all co-exist and blend together to shape the Istanbul of today. This photo album highlights the different shades of the city, a true melting pot of diversities.



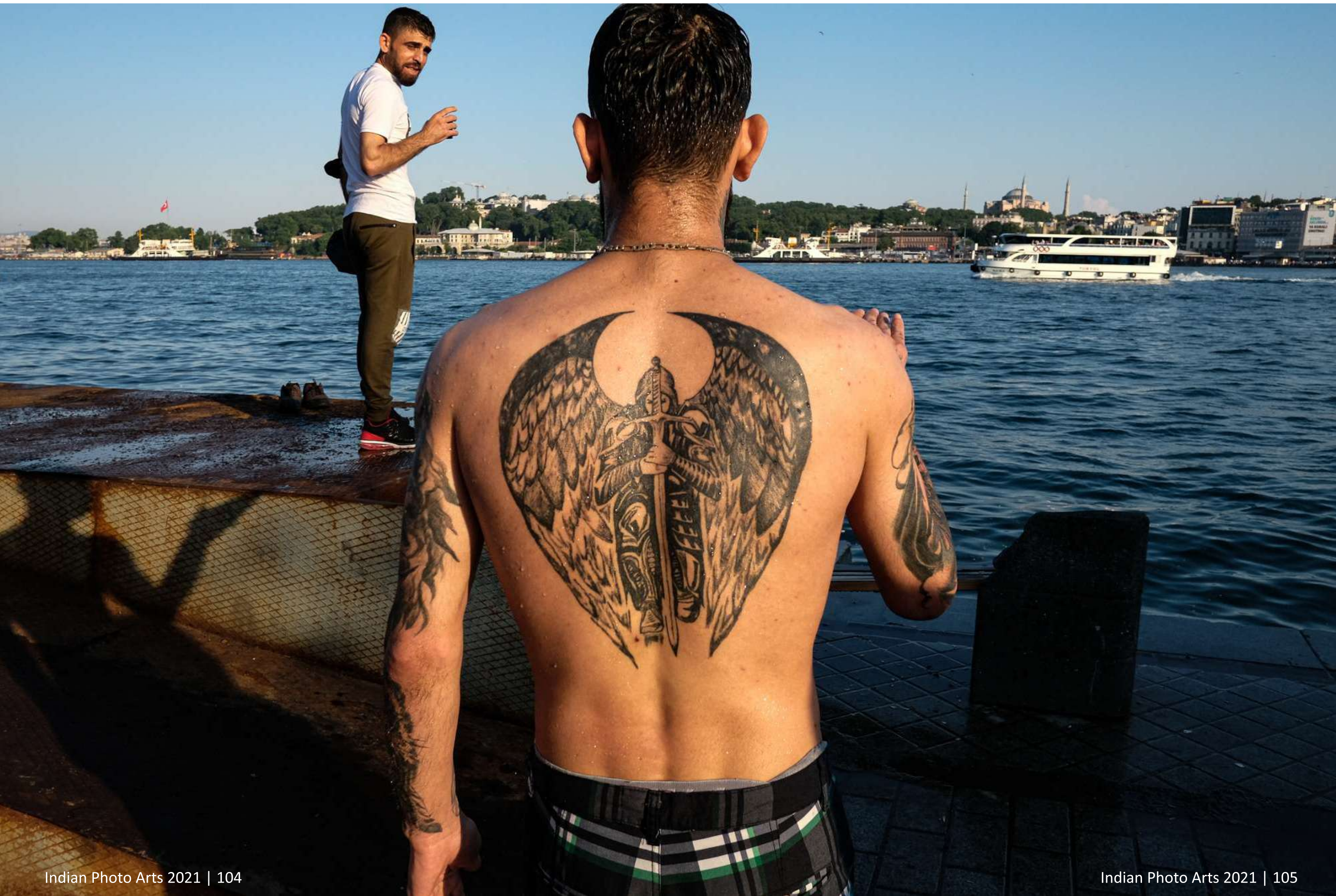


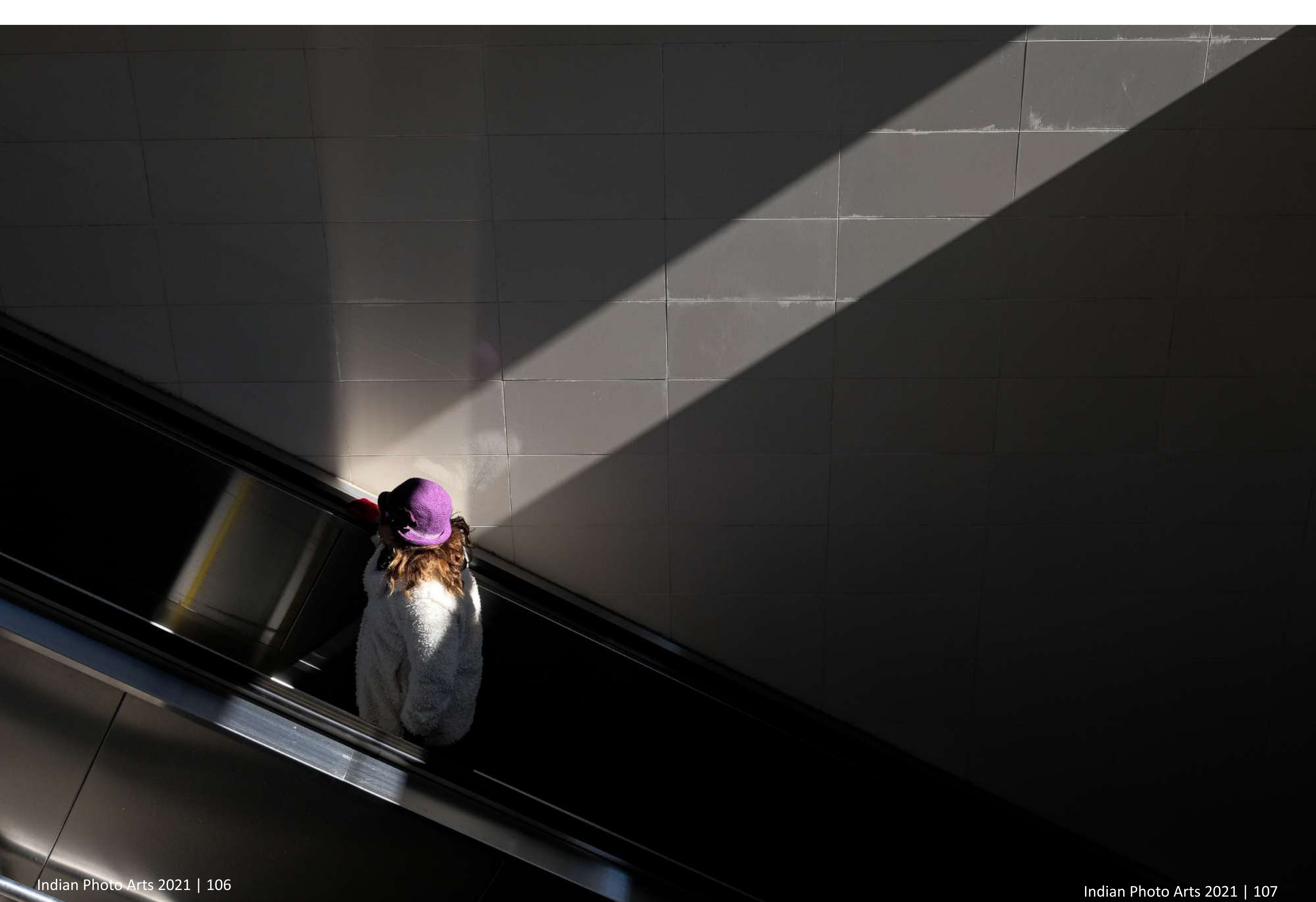
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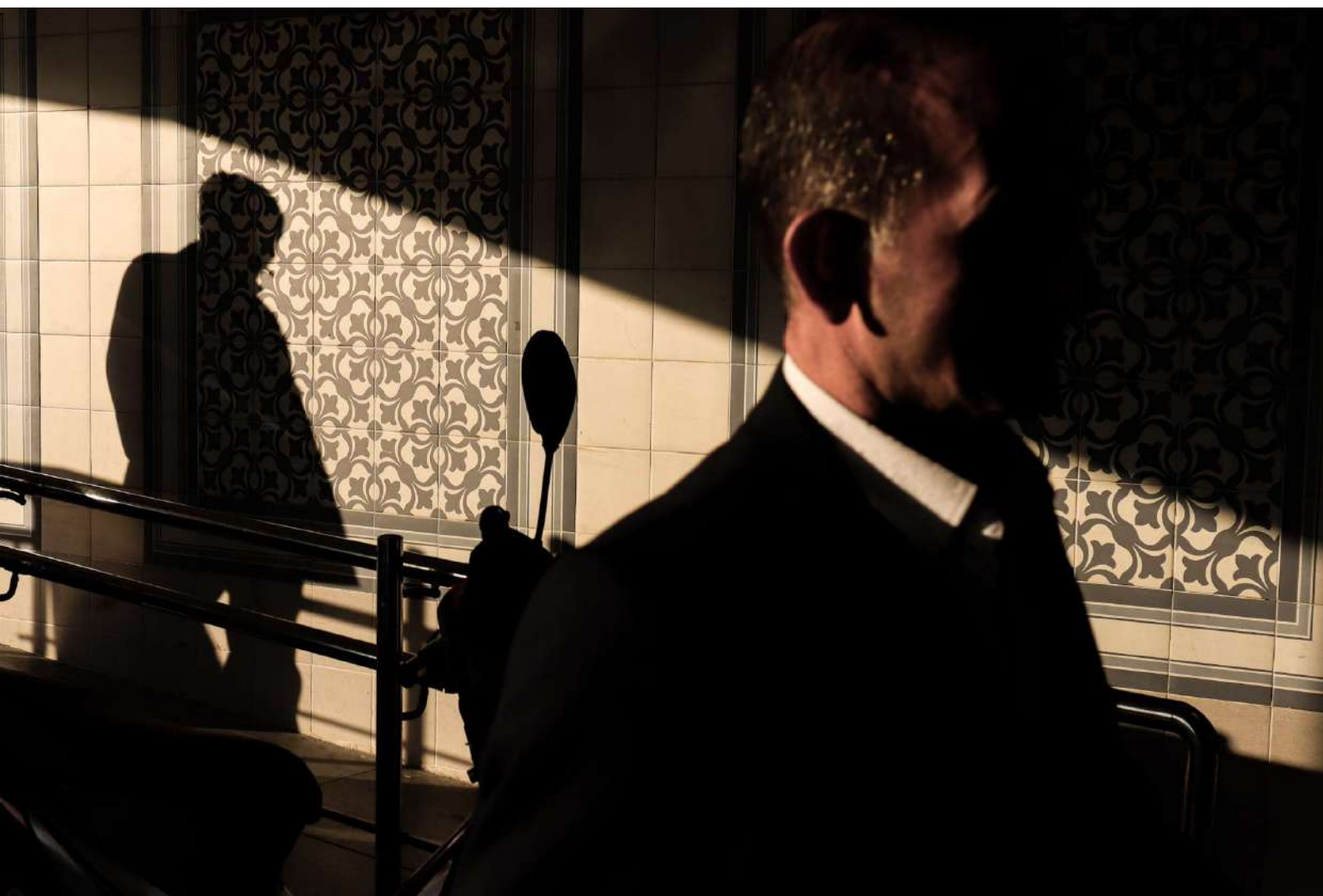
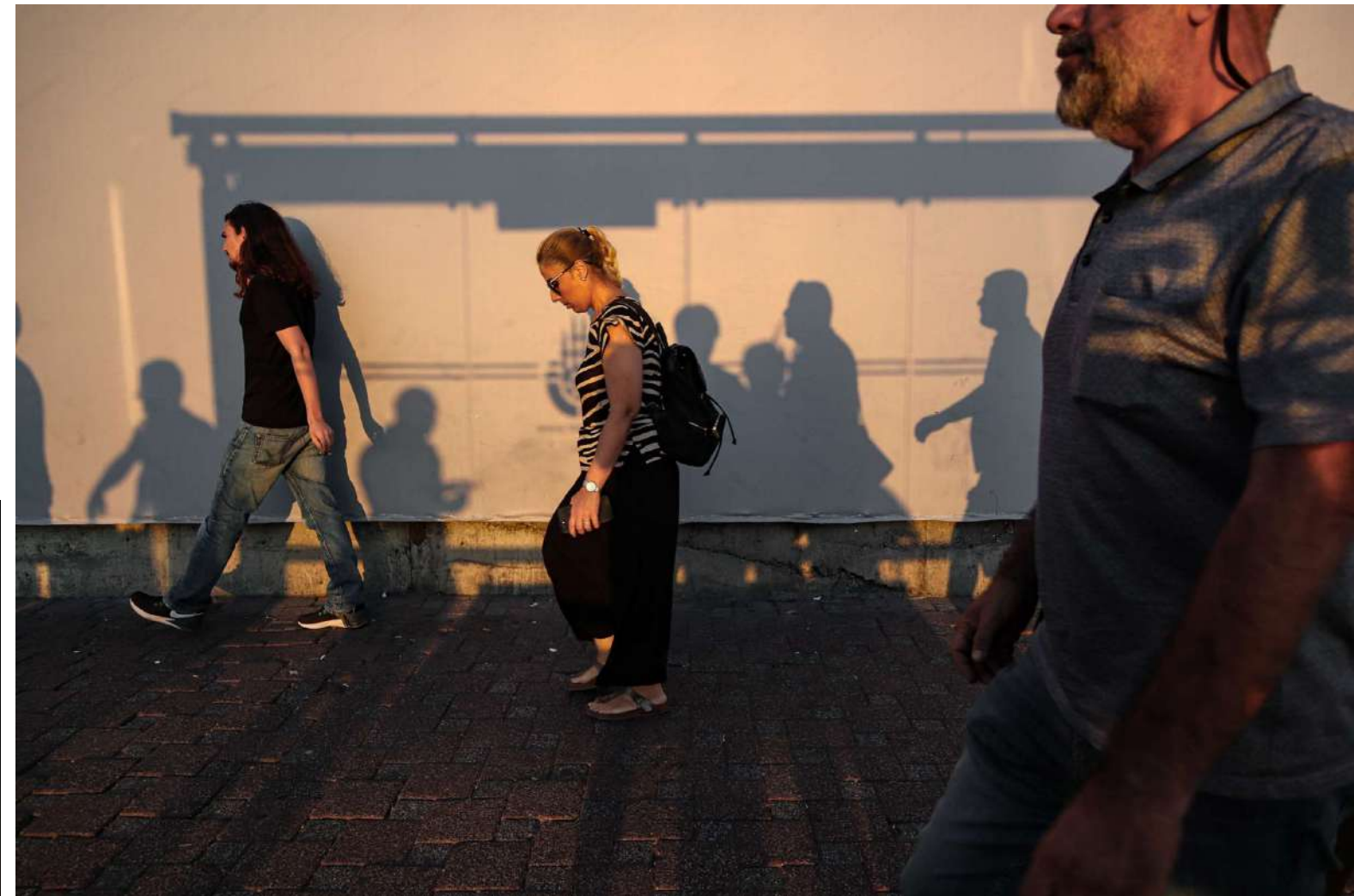
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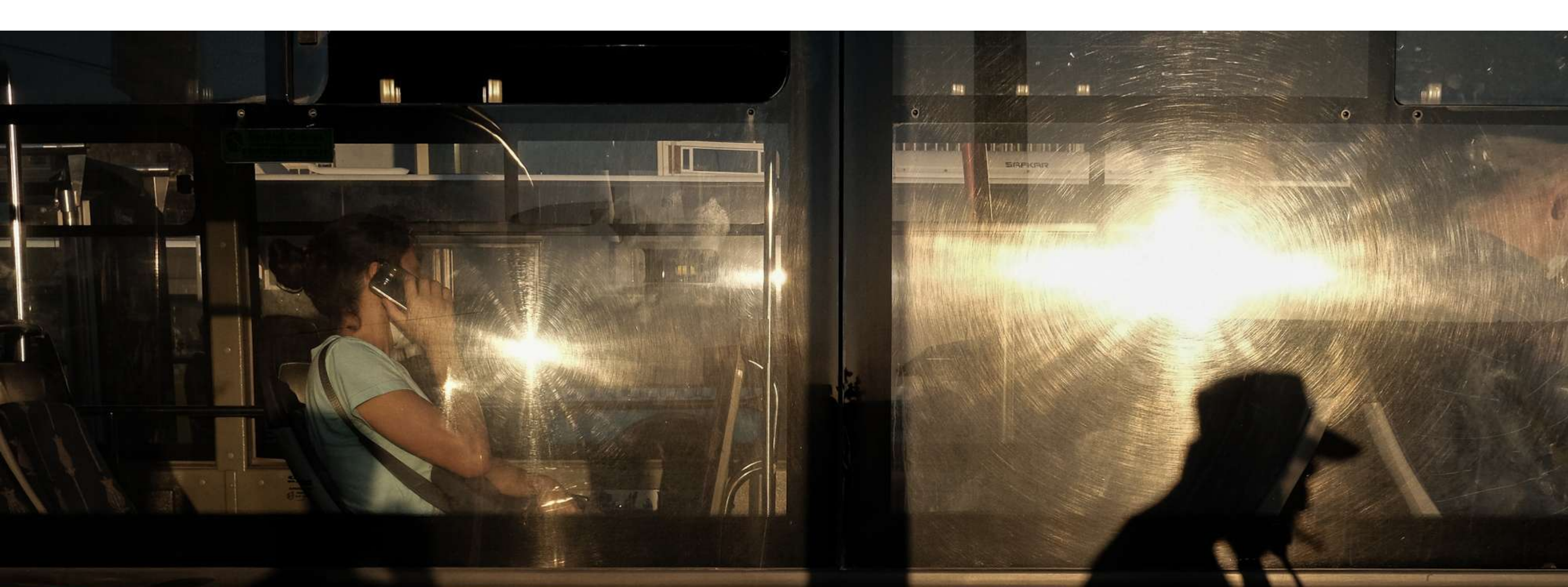
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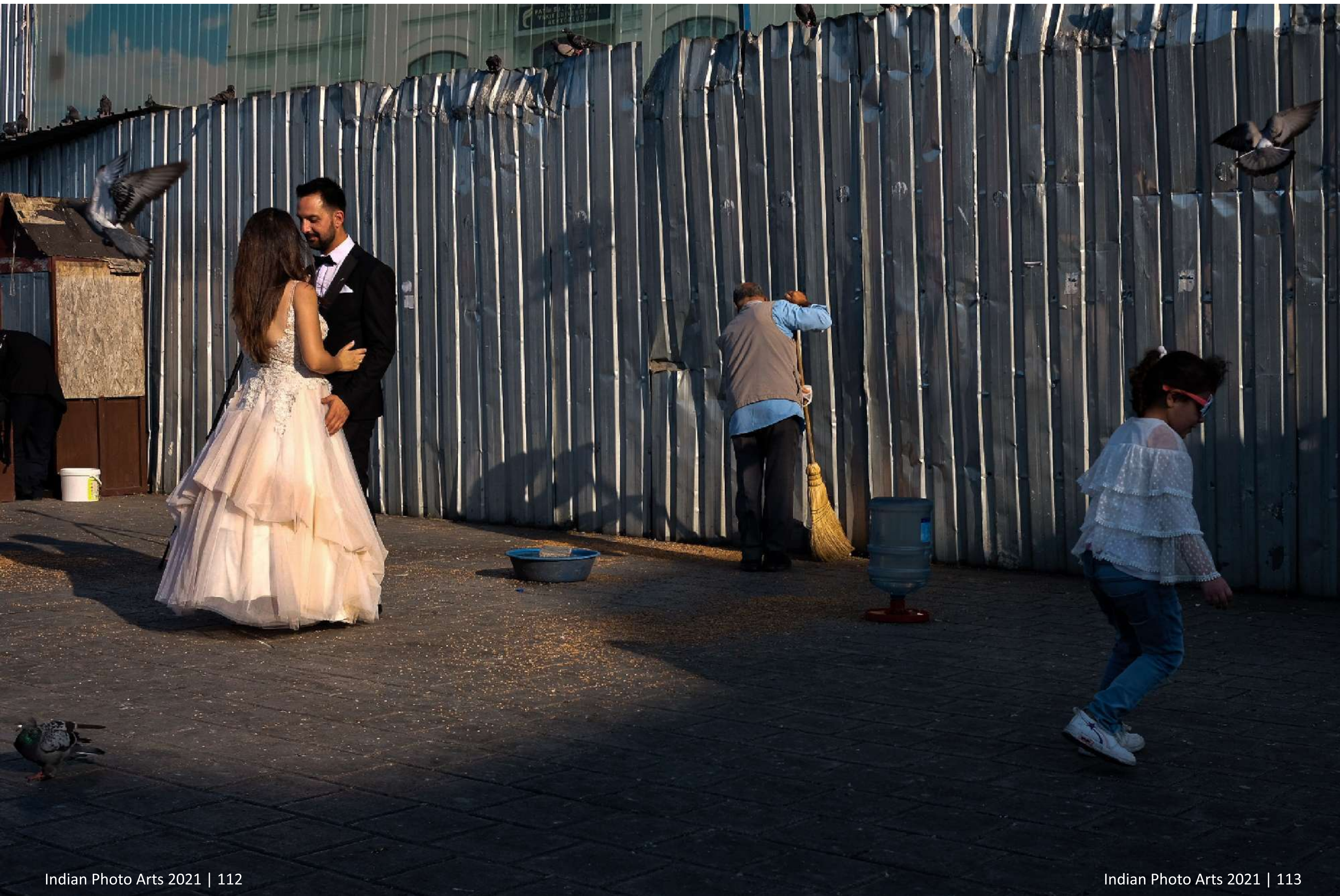
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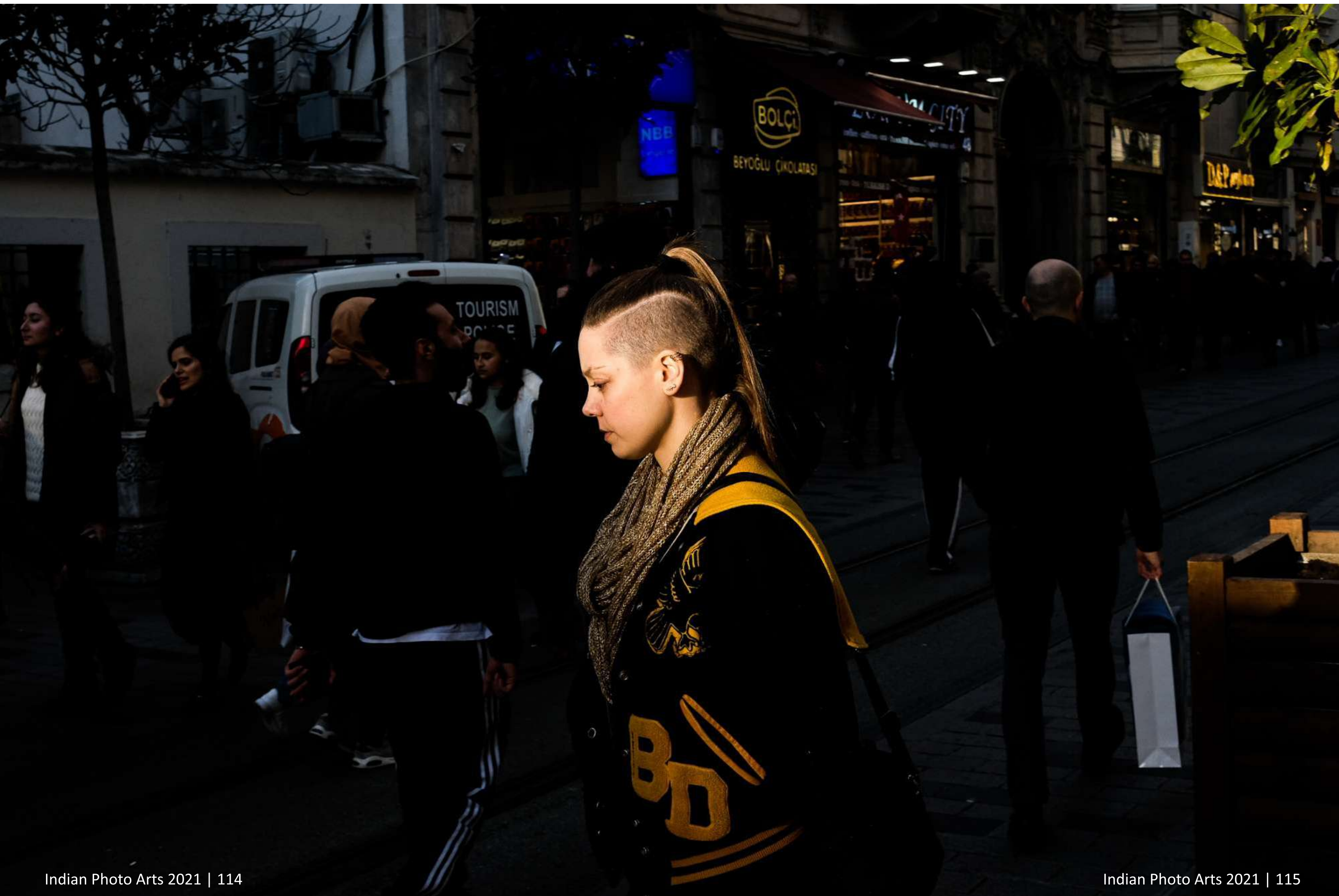


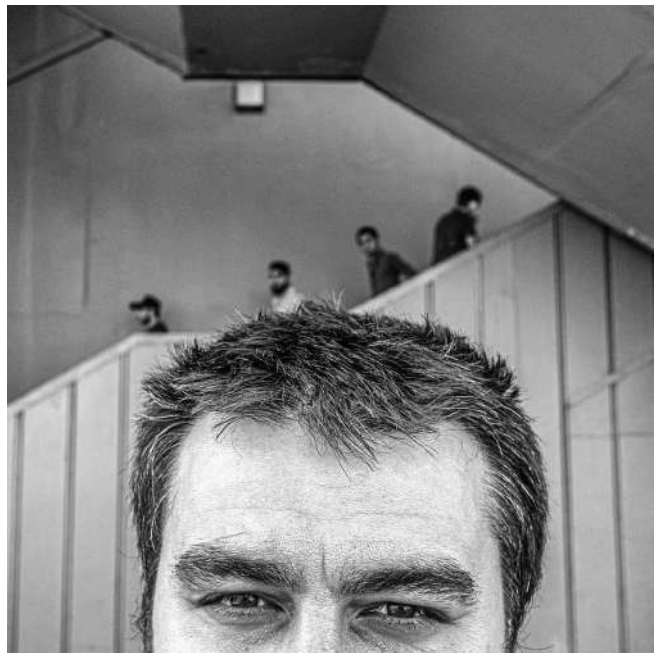
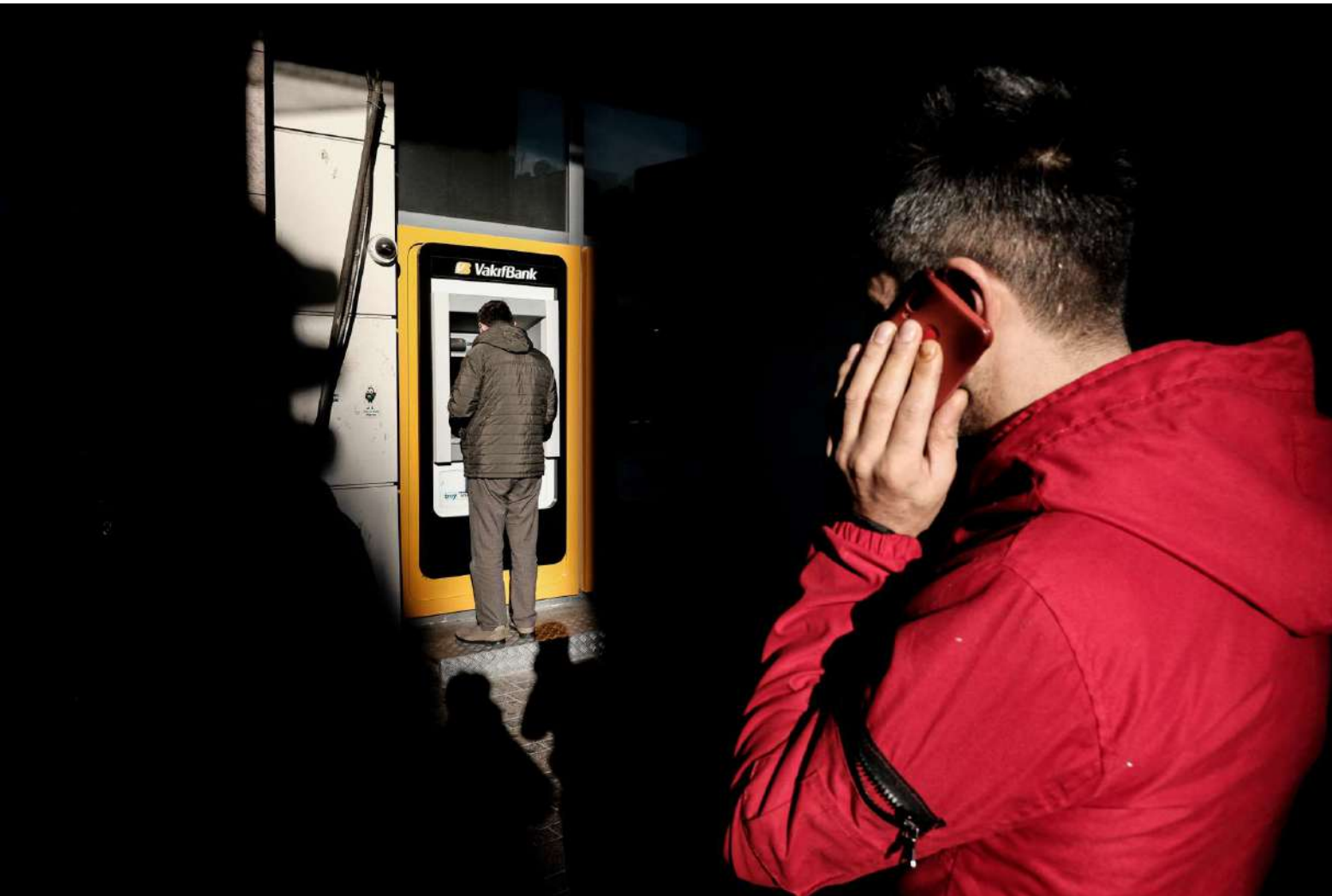












Emir SEVIM

Emir Sevim was born and lives in Istanbul. The early photographs taken by him were mostly architectural, landscape and portrait photographs. He later discovered street photography and realised that the nature and approach of street photography suited him very well and he got hooked on taking street photographs. He believes Istanbul is one of the most beautiful cities to take street photographs in the world. He considers himself very lucky to be living in a city like Istanbul where he feels the prospects of street photography are immense. In his photographs, Emir mostly uses people's movements, light and shadow, sometimes reflections and geometries. He likes to include himself in some photos as well. The Light of Istanbul project – his independent project, has been going on for several years and it is not clear when it will end. In the future, Emir wishes to give concrete shape to a photozine and photobook projects.

Darjeeling

Mandarin -at a crossroads...

Debmalya DAS travels through the orange orchards of Mirik in Darjeeling and highlights the state of affairs at these plantations.

The lateritic soil in the hills of Darjeeling particularly favours the growth of Darjeeling mandarin. The gentle slopes of the hills ensure proper drainage which favours orange cultivation.



The orange trees reach maturity in their fifth year and start bearing fruits. On an average a regular sized tree is capable of producing as many as 700 fruits during one harvest season and may continue to do so until they are 25 to 30 years old.

India is the second largest fruit producing country in the world with China occupying the frontline.

Among the fruits which are extensively grown in India, banana and mango deserve special mention and along with their different varieties occupy the top two spots in terms of cultivation in the country. Citrus fruits such as varieties of lemons, oranges together account for the significant fruit production in the country next to bananas and mangoes. Among the citrus fruits which are cultivated in various states across the country such as Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the mandarin orange or simply known as mandarin has carved a niche for itself as one of the most significant commercial citrus grown in the country. In the state of West Bengal the finest variety of mandarin orange hails from the hills of Darjeeling.

The cool climate along with moderate levels of precipitation provide the ideal platform for cultivation of oranges in the hills of Darjeeling particularly in and around Mirik subdivision of Darjeeling district, which has traditionally been known for being at the forefront of orange cultivation in the state of West Bengal. For decades now Mirik has been the largest supplier of oranges in West Bengal. The orange harvest from the hills of Mirik has proven to be of superior quality in comparison to its counterparts from the plains of Bengal. The orange orchards are in full bloom during December to

February, which coincides with the winter months in the country. Mandarin orange has proved its worth in India as one of the most grown citrus fruits and accounts for almost 40% of the total citrus yield in the country. Mandarin orange grows in a wide range of settings which receive an average annual rainfall of 120cm and experience a temperature ranging from 10-35 degree Celsius. Typically these ranges are found at a minimum altitude of 1500 meters above sea level and experience a tropical or sub-tropical climate. The lateritic soil in the hills of Darjeeling particularly favours the growth of Darjeeling mandarin. The gentle slopes of the hills ensure proper drainage which is another key requirement for orange cultivation. In the hilly slopes of Darjeeling the orchards are planted using the method of terrace farming and special care is taken to dig up trenches of small canals in order to ensure smooth flow of excess rainwater and avoid water stagnation as citrus plants react adversely and quite sensitively to waterlogging and excess water might lead to hampered growth and the rotting of the roots. Before planting the trees it is essential to carry out a thorough testing of the soil to ensure the pH level of the soil is appropriate for orange cultivation. A lot of effort goes into preparing the soil thoroughly for the orange orchards. A pH value ranging from 6-7.5 is ideally suited for orange cultivation. Prior soil testing also reveals the nutrient content in the soil and in case

of any perceived deficiency fertilisers and other supplements are added in order to enrich the macro nutrients in the soil. Planting usually takes place in the month of June or July, which is at the onset of monsoon. The monsoon rains softens up the soil which in turn favours the roots to penetrate deep into the soil substrate and establish a firm hold on the bedrock. The orange trees reach maturity in their fifth year and start bearing fruits. On an average a regular sized tree is capable of producing as many as 700 fruits during one harvest season and may continue to do so until they are 25 to 30 years old. In the winter months, the slopes along the towns of Mirik, Sittong, Sukna and Kalimpong are dotted with orange trees overburdened with clusters of ripe oranges. From these slopes the ripe juicy oranges make their way to the local markets and a significant proportion of them are packed and transported to the wholesale markets in the city of Siliguri for large scale commercial distribution. The orange farms also facilitate a number of local cottage industries involved in the manufacturing of jams, marmalades and other products which use orange as the primary ingredient. A number of homestays catering to tourists from across the globe have sprung up around the orange orchards. Tourists opting for a quite vacation in these orange towns can receive a first-hand account of orange farming along the slopes of Mirik and other parts of Darjeeling. The trickle-down effect of

orange cultivation can be felt at a number of levels in the economy of the region. The trend observed over the previous three years unfortunately does not augur well for the future of the famed Darjeeling mandarin variety of oranges in the country and more worryingly for the orange farmers in the Darjeeling hills. There has been a steady decline in the produce, both in terms of quality and quantity. Farmers have been complaining of abysmally low yield for quite some time while consumers have been reporting reduced size, sweetness as well as overall quality of the mandarin oranges from the hills of Darjeeling. A number of socio-economic factors can be attributed towards the steady decline in the quality of Darjeeling mandarin. The two major complaints which emerge out of such a steadily worsening situation are weak management of the orange orchards which eventually translates into lack of workforce and a not so robust irrigation facility. These two factors have contributed significantly towards the steadily declining fate of orange cultivation in the hills of Darjeeling. In the last few years from an average produce of 2.5 lakh quintals orange production has fallen to a paltry 1 lakh quintal in the hills of Darjeeling. This fact gets reiterated in the versions of the local farmers who often claim the truckloads of oranges which they used to dispatch from their respective orchards have fallen drastically. In addition to an overall mismanagement and fledgling



In the winter months, the slopes along the towns of Mirik, Sittong , Sukna and Kalimpong are dotted with orange trees overburdened with clusters of ripe oranges. From here they make their way to the local markets and to the wholesale markets in the city of Siliguri.

infrastructure viral and fungal infections along with pest attacks have contributed to this downfall. Orange trees are particularly susceptible to viral and fungal infections, and in the absence of modern farming practices often the early warning

signs evade the watchful eyes of the farmers. As a result of which when they detect the problem there is very little that can be done and they have to concede yet another year of poor yield. In yet another worrying turn of events a staggering

40,000 odd trees were lost in 2018 to a virus which seemed to make its appearance in the orange orchards of Darjeeling for the first time in decades. The presence of this particular virus affecting orange plantation had been known to

horticulturists yet it had never made its presence felt in the hills of Darjeeling. Farmers and local administration attribute this sudden emergence of the virus to the huge influx of tourists into the region from almost all over the country. Unprepared to deal with this new foe which had sneaked its way into the terraces of the orchards the farmers were mystified at the rapidly declining yields and before the concerned authorities were able to identify the culprit most farmers had registered losses amounting to hundreds of thousands. The authorities have time and again pointed out at the lack of modern knowledge and techniques when it comes to cultivating orange and have repeatedly emphasized how the archaic methods and techniques will be of no safeguard against an emerging virus or a season which receives less rainfall than usual. Only a handful of farmers have migrated to more modern methods of farming and irrigation. This particular apathy towards modern techniques can be attributed to the unwillingness of the farmers to invest in modern methods of cultivation. The farmers on the other hand are unwilling to accept the blame can be attributed squarely upon the archaic methods of farming and the emergence of deadly virus. They feel it is the administration which has left them in such a lurch. Many farmers were quick to point out the absence of a minimum support price for their oranges which leaves them susceptible to the exploitation by middlemen. They also feel



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the government has been doing little to distribute adequate quantities of saplings to the farmers as a result of which the 30-40 year old plants which are way past their prime cannot be replaced with younger plants which hold the potential to bear fruits. It goes without saying such blame game and finger pointing is only going to hurt and cripple the future of the famed mandarin orange from the hills, a variety which still finds millions of takers across the globe. It is absolutely imperative to implement steps to safeguard the future of this produce from the hills, in order to

keep the heritage alive and keep a vital cog in the economy of the region alive. The steadily declining situation has already exacted a huge toll on the orange farmers in the region and experts are of the opinion that it won't be before another 5 years the situation will take a turn for the better if proper measures are adopted and implemented on a war footing. There needs to be collective effort on part of the administration and the farmers in order to revive the dwindling fortunes of mandarin orange. The Darjeeling mandarin is an important produce of the hills, a region

where cultivable land is not in abundance. Under such circumstances it is absolutely vital to preserve the local produces of the region since they contribute significantly to the economy of the region. The local authorities and administration have taken a stock of the situation and certain steps such as distribution of saplings, equipping the farmers with modern farming and irrigation techniques are being put in place. One can only hope such steps will be implemented at the earliest and with utmost urgency to stem the rot which has crept into the orange orchards of Mirik,

Kalimpong and other parts of Darjeeling hills renowned for orange farming.

Workers inspect the day's harvest in one of the orange orchards in the outskirts of Mirik.
Only the prime ones will be handpicked and sent for packaging.





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

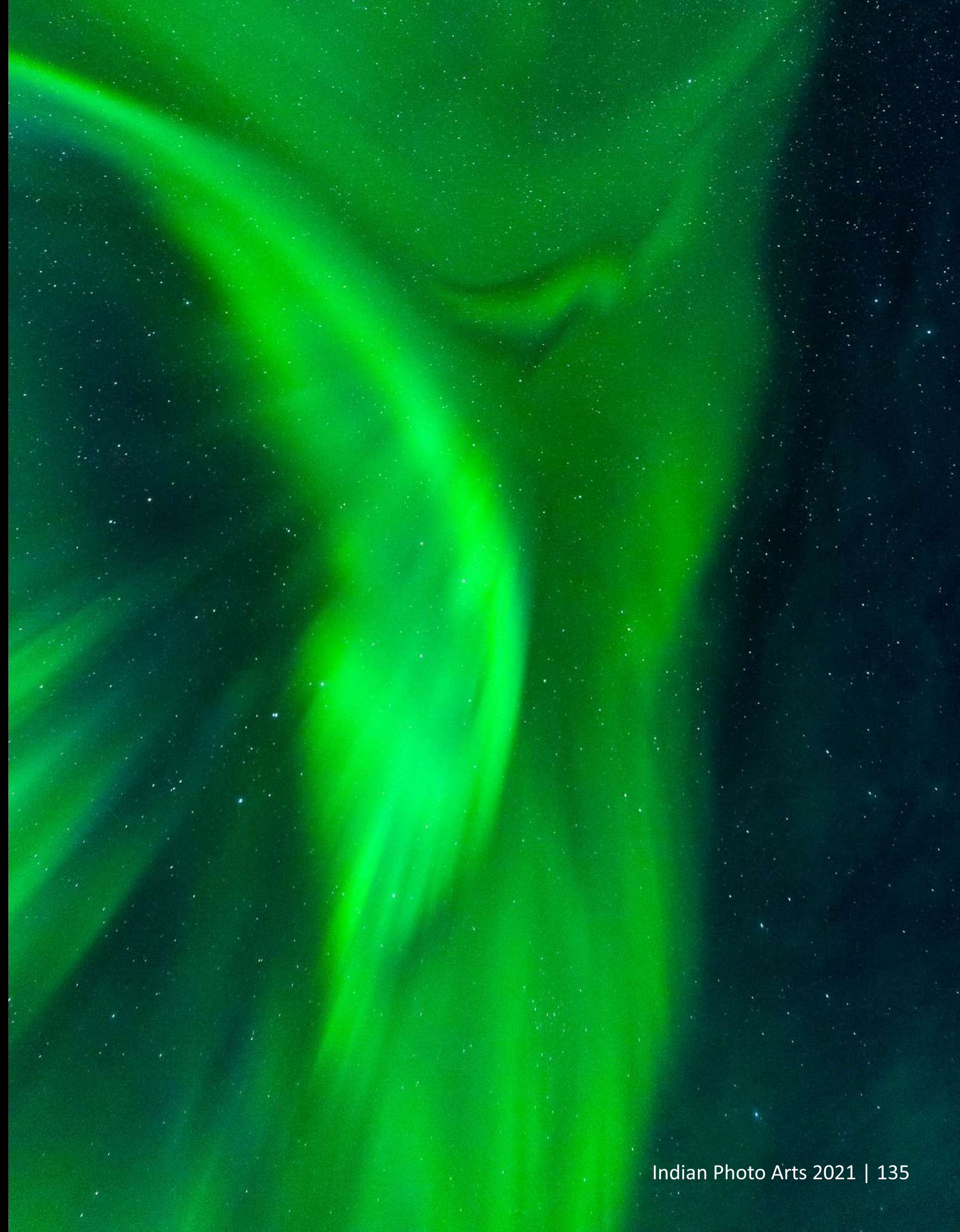
Debmalya Das

THE ARCTIC AND GLEN COE

AN ANTITHETICAL TALE OF NATURE

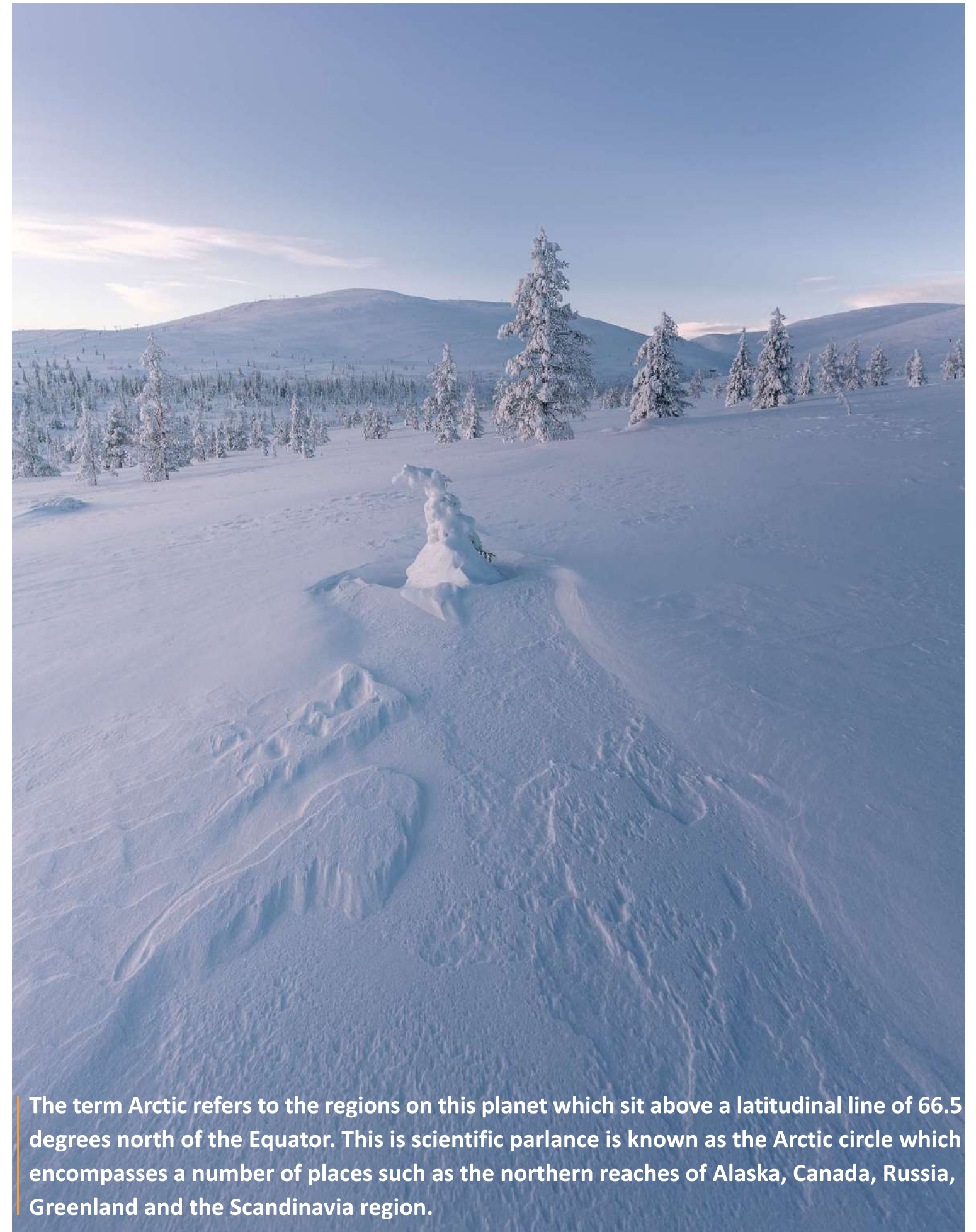
THE EXTREMES OF THE ARCTIC AND THE
SUPREME ARTISTRY OF GLEN COE COME
TOGETHER IN THIS REPORTAGE BY PAPPU
SARKAR.

Aurora borealis or the Northern Lights is a common phenomenon in the Arctic sky. These shimmering colours are a result of reactions between the Earth's atmospheric atoms and molecules and the sun's charged particles.



The Arctic is a region of extremes, extreme climate, extreme geographical location; the Arctic had set its mind on the superlatives since the day this planet was born. The term Arctic refers to the regions on this planet which sit above a latitudinal line of 66.5 degrees north of the Equator. This in scientific parlance is known as the Arctic circle which encompasses a number of places such as the northern reaches of Alaska, Canada, Russia, Greenland and the Scandinavia region. One look at this icy realm and it becomes evident the Arctic took a lot of pain in setting up its defences in order to make itself impregnable. Gigantic icebergs, massive slow moving glaciers, vast stretches of ice cold water and vast swathes of permanently frozen ice land have made the Arctic the most secluded place on this planet. The Arctic however plays an incredibly important role in maintaining the ecological balance of this planet. The Arctic glaciers are source of more than 20% of the freshwater supply of Earth. In spite of the elements of nature displaying not a very generous or merciful disposition, life managed to find a way in the Arctic. The permanently frozen Arctic may appear devoid of life at the first glance; however the Arctic is teeming with a thriving ecosystem where some of the giants of the animal kingdom roam free. The Arctic is also home to human settlements belonging to various indigenous communities such as Chukchi, Evenks, Khanty and Sami.

Lately the Arctic has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. This icy kingdom is facing brutal onslaughts like never before in the form of climate change and global warming. The steadily increasing average annual temperature of the Earth has contributed immensely towards the melting of Arctic ice caps and glaciers. Such developments are taking place every minute at such gigantic proportions that the cumulative effect trickles down all the way down to the southernmost shorelines. The vanishing ice cover in the Arctic due to global warming threatens to obliterate the diverse yet incredibly fragile Arctic ecosystem. The melting glaciers are contributing towards steadily increasing sea levels across the world, which are inching closer to our landmasses every day and have already engulfed vast swathes of mangroves and coastal plains in many parts of the world. Many climate scientists and activists are of the opinion that we have woken up to this harsh reality too late and the damage that has been caused to the Arctic is permanent and irreversible. However in spite of that there should be no reason for us to concede defeat and let the Arctic melt. We can still salvage whatever little is left and preserve the remaining of the Arctic. The entire planet needs to come together and save the Arctic from quite literally, a complete meltdown, for the fate of the planet is firmly engraved in the frozen nooks and corners of the Arctic.



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Gigantic icebergs, massive slow moving glaciers, vast stretches of ice cold water and vast swathes of permanently frozen ice land have made the Arctic the most secluded place on this planet, yet life managed to find a way in this snowy realm.



The Arctic is also home to human settlements belonging to various indigenous communities such as Chukchi, Evenks, Khanty, Koryaks, Nenets, Sami, Yukaghir among others.



Glen Coe is an explosion of colours and a myriad collection of nature's elements which have seamlessly woven an ethereally beautiful vista.



Glen Coe in Scotland, on the other hand stands in sharp contrast to the frozen, white, icy realms of the Arctic. Glen Coe is an explosion of colours and a myriad collection of nature's elements which have seamlessly woven an ethereally beautiful vista. The word "glen" is often used to describe a narrow valley where the gentle slopes of the surrounding mountain meet in Scotland and Ireland. Located in the county of Argyll within the confines of the picturesque Lochaber highlands, Glen Coe happens to be the most iconic Scottish glen. The iconic glen is a handiwork of

ancient glaciers and series of volcanic eruptions through centuries. The glen is named after River Coe which cuts through the valley and flows in a direction towards the west of the valley. The ethereal setting, the towering mountains along the valley and the aura of the Scottish highland have turned Glen Coe as one of the most visited tourist destinations in the whole of Scotland. It did not take much for the otherworldly setting of this glen to tug at the heart of artists and creative geniuses. Glen Coe was the chosen location for the shootings of a number of movies in the

Harry Potter franchise as well as the box office sensation Skyfall – the James Bond movie. Glen Coe has also been a favoured destination for campers and trekkers. Glen Coe provides the ideal gateway to exploring the Scottish highland in all its magnificence. In order to maintain the fragile ecological balance of this place and conserve the ecosystem Glen Coe was classified as a National Nature Reserve in 2017. In addition to this the region is listed as a Category IV protected area by the IUCN. In addition to these a number of legislatures have been put in place by the

concerned Scottish authorities to safeguard the scenic beauty and the ecosystem of the entire region.

The Arctic exudes a sense of calm, its vast stoic presence draped in all white stretching beyond the realms of human perception, holds in its realms a hidden world, a world which emerges in various shapes and sizes, in different forms, yet does its best to conceal the magnanimity. Glen Coe on the other hand flashes its brilliance like a true showman, one who welcomes every attention that comes its way. The brilliant colours, the multitude of features in the



topography, the gently sloping lush green slopes interspersed with marshes covered in thick undergrowth together knit a true masterpiece. The Arctic and the Glen Coe could not have been more different from each other and together highlight the incredible natural diversity the planet is blessed with. These are the true treasure troves on this planet, one which promises eternal bounties to anyone choosing to come within their folds.

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The brilliant colours, the multitude of features in the topography, the gently sloping lush green slopes interspersed with marshes covered in thick undergrowth together knit a true masterpiece. The Arctic and the Glen Coe could not have been more different from each other and together highlight the incredible natural diversity the planet is blessed with. These are the true treasure troves on this planet, one which promises eternal bounties to anyone choosing to come within their folds.



Pappu SARKAR

A professional in medical device industry, and a nature and travel photographer by inclination, **Pappu Sarkar** was born in West Bengal, India. Imaginative and creative as a child, he had vivid images in his mind that he wanted to portray to the world but was not sure how. Always drawn to nature, he kept searching for the best way to capture her majestic beauty while putting his own flair on it. So, when he was handed a DSLR camera by his

first employer he was intrigued about how it works. He then embarked on a self-taught journey filled with adventures and new discoveries and he is thankful for it.

Currently based out of Shenzhen, China, Pappu enjoys taking solo trips in search of unseen, majestic landscapes. Nature is still his inspiration and his artistic soul thrives on taking the right photographs and sharing it with the world. For him, photography is bigger than just taking photos – it's an experience, and a way of truly discovering oneself. Art, to him, is therapy for the soul. Capturing Mother Nature in all her glory allows him to express bits and pieces of the artist inside him. He hopes to inspire people with his photos and may be make them pause and reflect a bit – on this beautiful world we live in, that we often forget in our busy, everyday lives.

More of his work is available at

Website: www.sarkarphoto.com

Instagram: @pappusrkr

Photo Essay

The broad concrete slipways of the ghats which lead to the river form that neural connection between Kolkata and Hooghly River. Most of these iconic ghats were set up during the British rule in India, when Kolkata or erstwhile Calcutta used to be the nerve centre of the British administration in India.

Ghats of Kolkata

- connecting dots to the city's past

A photo essay by **Sayantana Barik** depicting an average day in the city along its ghats.





These boats retrofitted with a diesel motor against the backdrop of the Vidyasagar Setu represent one of the most recognisable vistas of the city of Kolkata.

Babu Ghat by the Hooghly River in Kolkata springs to life in the wee hours of dawn. While another gruelling day is yet to knock at the doorsteps of the city for a few more hours, an average business day in and around the ghats by the river is already a few hours old. The ghats or the promenades constructed along the Hooghly riverfront have always featured prominently in every

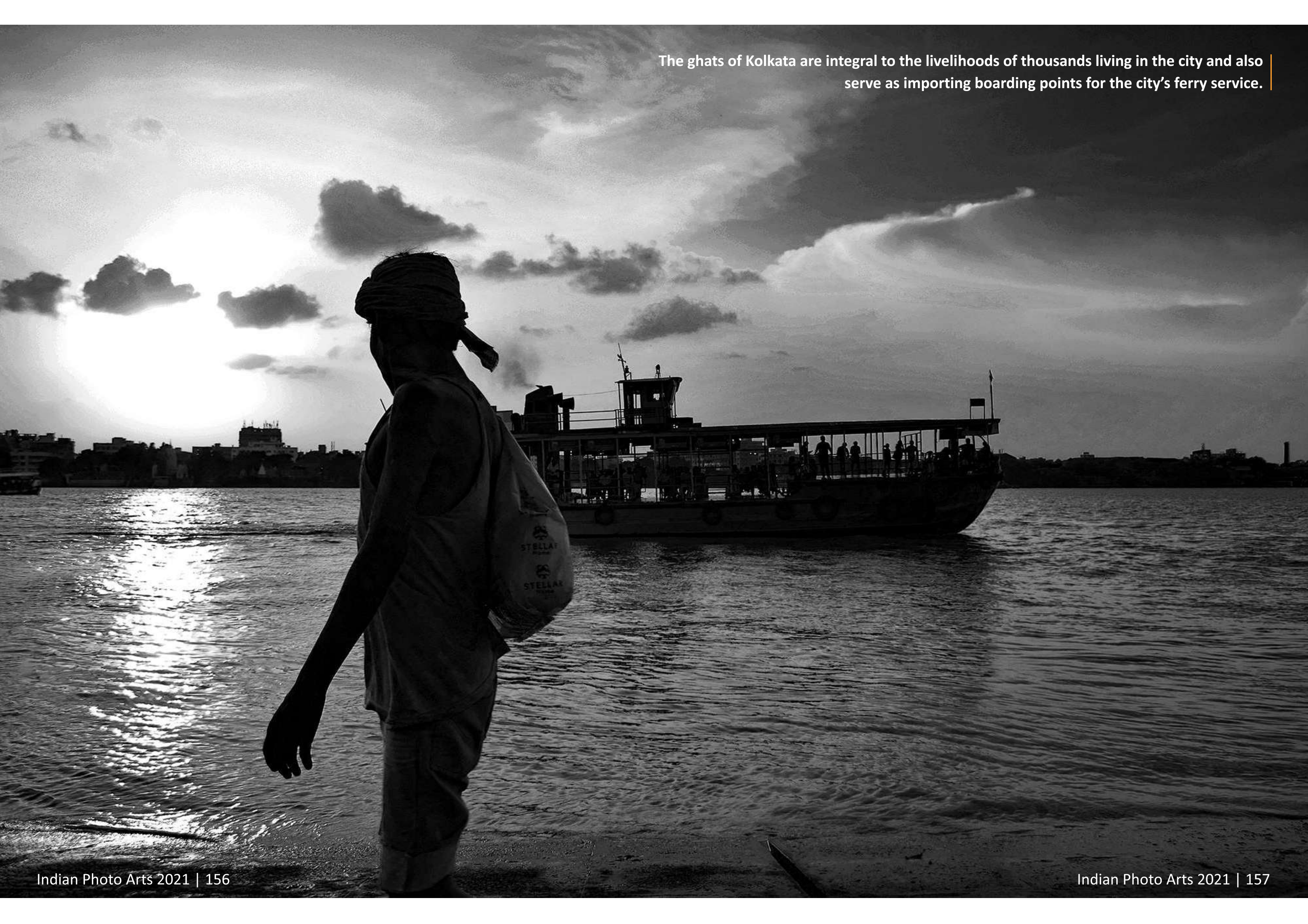
depiction of Kolkata. In fact these ghats stood silent witnesses to the gradual transformation of a small village into the bustling metropolis that the city of Kolkata is today. The iconic Hooghly River, before disappearing into the Bay of Bengal flows along the city of Kolkata. The river shaped and nourished the city and still remains the heart and soul of Kolkata. The broad concrete slipways of the ghats which lead

to the river form that neural connection between Kolkata and Hooghly River. Most of these iconic ghats were set up during the British rule in India, when Kolkata or erstwhile Calcutta used to be the nerve centre of the British administration in India. Quite understandably the architecture of the facades or the promenades bears striking resemblance to the brand of architecture which represents

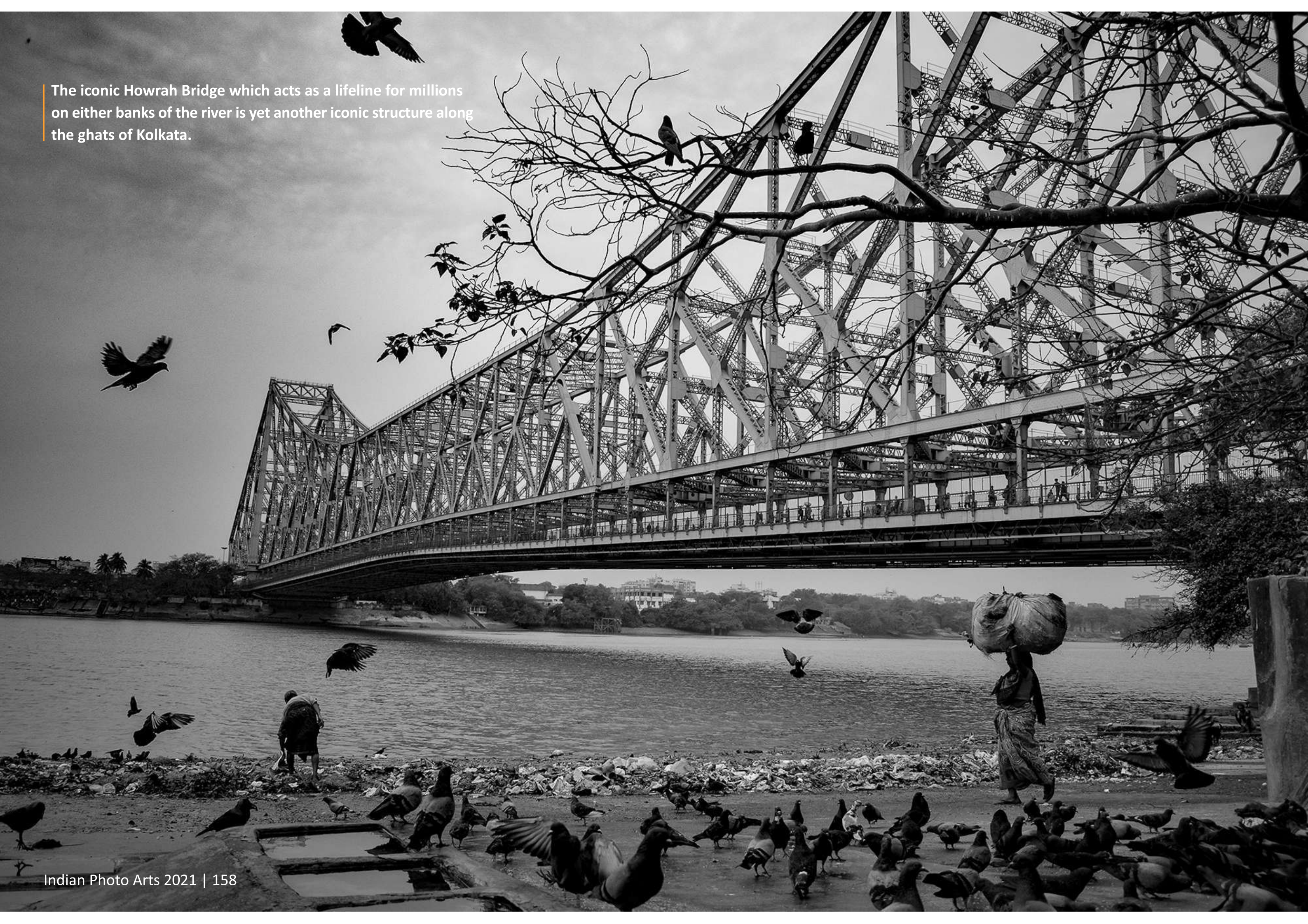
a bygone era. Once indispensable to the way of life in the city, most of the ghats are now dilapidated and bear a look of neglect and apathy. Yet for many, the ghats remain their favoured destinations in the city of Kolkata, either to conduct their respective businesses or to escape the rigours of city life. Some have been converted to designated points for availing the Kolkata ferry service while others notably the Nimtala Ghat is a designated crematorium for performing the last rites of the departed. Princep Ghat on the other hand has turned into a much preferred hangout for the city dwellers and the ghat along with its iconic porch repeatedly featured in the popular culture of Bengal. Babughat one of the oldest ghats, is a busy pick up point for the city's ferry service, ferrying thousands across the channel between the cities of Kolkata and Howrah on either banks of the river. Irrespective of their principal purpose, every such ghat is lined with shops selling a variety of items ranging from garlands of flowers to providing services such as haircuts and a clean shave at attractive rates.

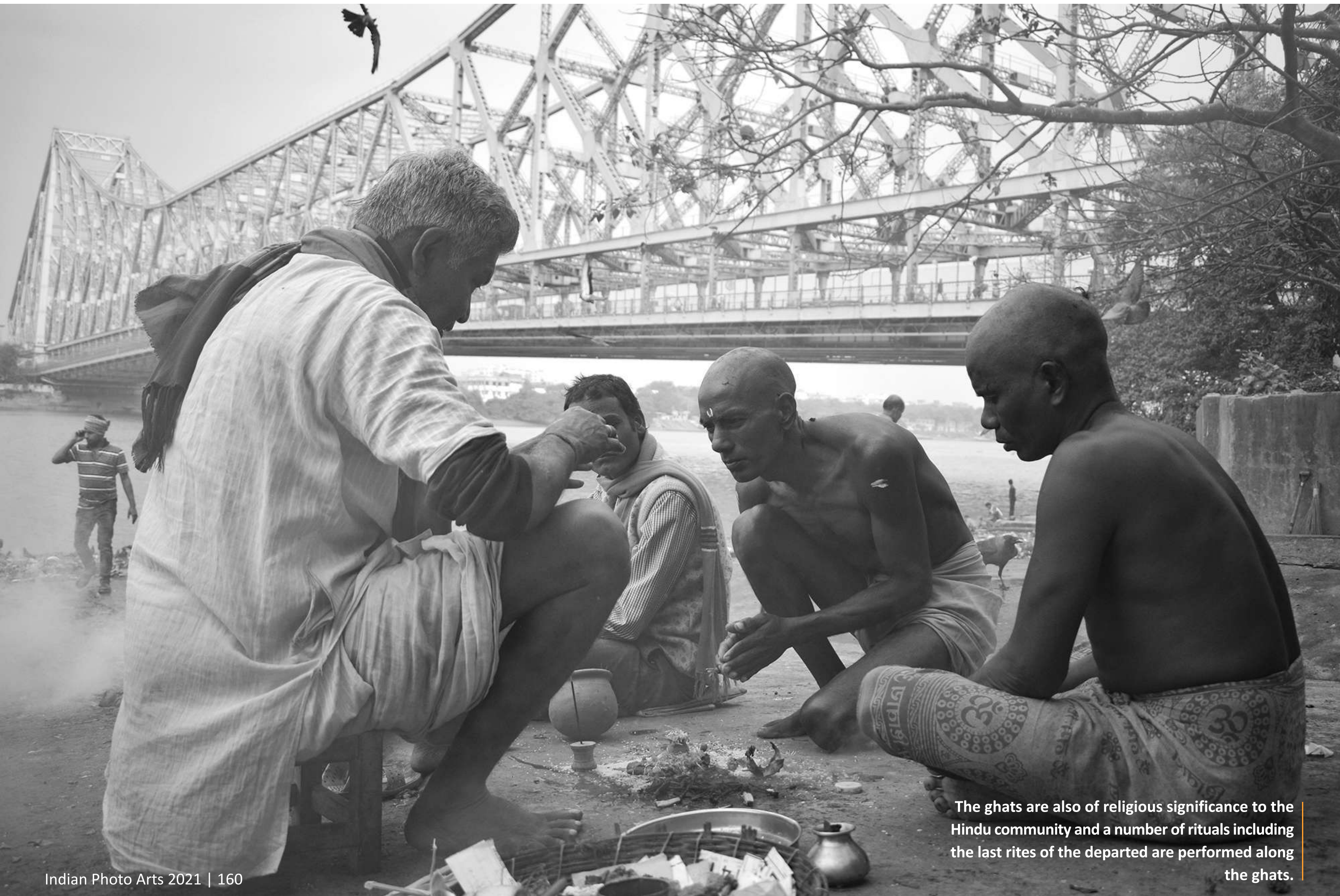
Accompanying them is the usual assortment of roadside stalls selling tea in the familiar earthen cups and other refreshments.

The ghats of Kolkata are integral to the livelihoods of thousands living in the city and also serve as important boarding points for the city's ferry service.



The iconic Howrah Bridge which acts as a lifeline for millions on either banks of the river is yet another iconic structure along the ghats of Kolkata.





The ghats are also of religious significance to the Hindu community and a number of rituals including the last rites of the departed are performed along the ghats.

Some of the ghats serve as boarding points for the Kolkata ferry service connecting the city of Kolkata with Howrah on the other bank of Hooghly.

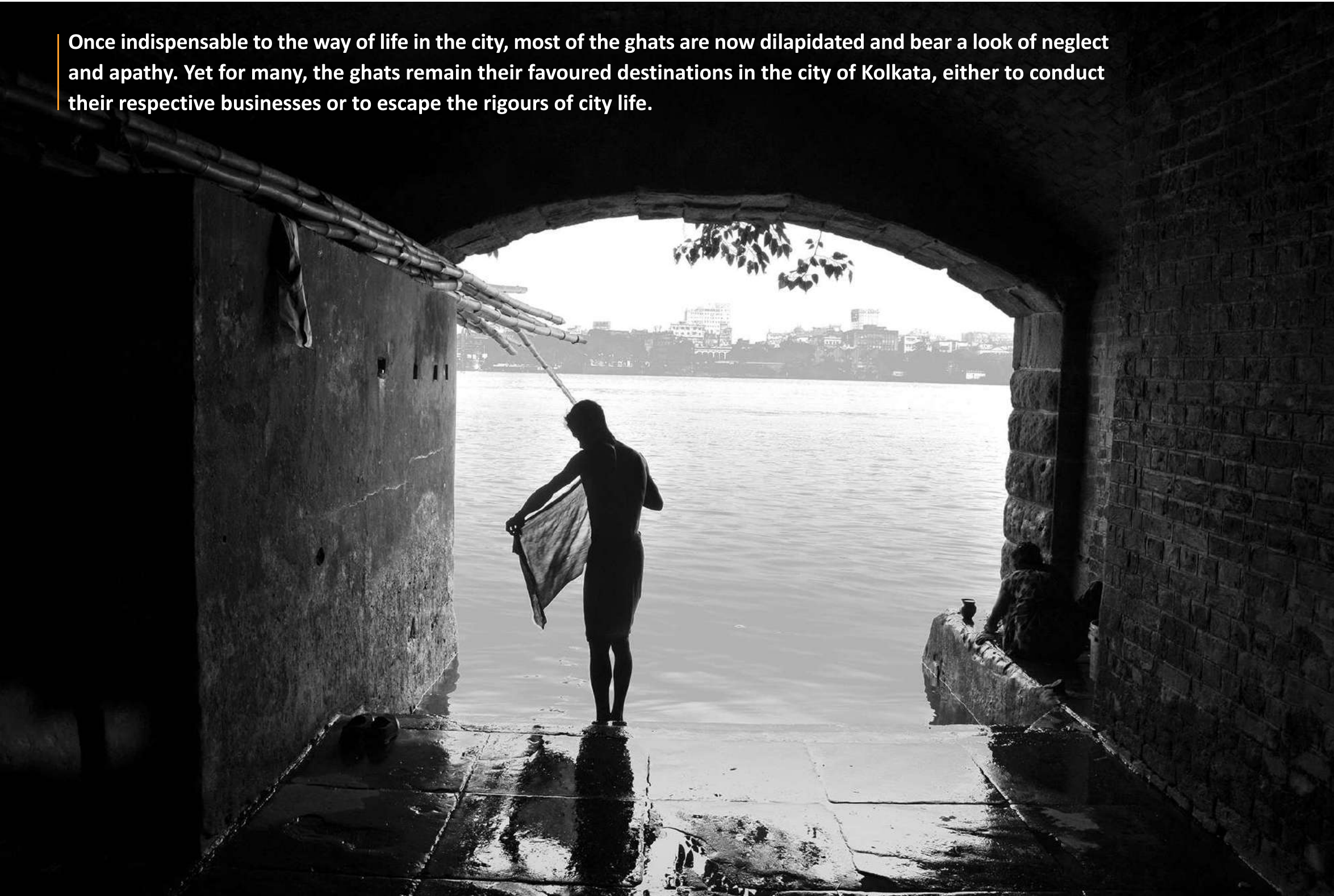




While another gruelling day is yet to knock at the doorsteps of the city for a few more hours, an average business day in around the ghats by the river is already a few hours old. The ghats or the promenades constructed along the Hooghly riverfront have always featured prominently in every depiction of Kolkata.



Once indispensable to the way of life in the city, most of the ghats are now dilapidated and bear a look of neglect and apathy. Yet for many, the ghats remain their favoured destinations in the city of Kolkata, either to conduct their respective businesses or to escape the rigours of city life.



These ghats once used to be the pride of the city's waterfront. They used to enjoy the patronage of wealthy businessmen such as the likes of Babu Raj Chandra Das and Mutty Lal Seal – a noteworthy name in the then business fraternity and a renowned philanthropist. Mutty Lal Seal commissioned the Mutty Lal Seal ghat, which bears testimony to the influence of Greek architecture on the ghats of Kolkata. There is no denying their once glory days are far behind them. While some stretches along the city's waterfront have been renovated and bear a polished look, most of the iconic ghats paint a picture of neglect. The shanties and countless makeshift structure have obscured the architecture. Yet the ghats along the riverfront remain an integral part of the identity of the city, despite it taking giant strides to don the cloak of a modern city in keeping up with the changing times. The history of Kolkata remains etched in these stone slabs, significant portion of the city's workforce still jostles around these ghats and an average early morning stroll along the ghats reinstates the belief – the ghats in spite of their struggle, are here to stay.



Sayantan **BARIK**

Sayantan Barik is a Kolkata based IT Professional and a photographer by passion. He started photography in early 2017 using a smartphone in Trivandrum during the training period of his job. Since then the passion for photography became an integral part of his life. He upgraded his gear with a DSLR and is constantly grooming himself with help of various online magazines, tutorials and other photographers' works. He aims at capturing actions, reactions, moments of life through a lens.



The End that leads to a Beginning

A photo essay by Debasish Kundu
juxtaposing life and death along the
sacred ghats of Varanasi.

The rising sun casts its soft gleaming rays across the ripples on holy water of the Ganges, sages carrying their measly earthly possessions gather around the ghats to offer their prayers to the rising sun, their disciples make a beeline for the blessings, the ancient temples, lined along the ghats create a befitting façade for a city which is the holiest of all places to millions of devout Hindus. Amidst such a setting the pyres burn endlessly, the air thickens with the rising smoke which carries with them the souls of the departed leaving behind an eternal void in the hearts of their loved ones. This is Varanasi, one of the most ancient cities, a place shrouded in folklores, where the chasms between real and mythical, ancient and modern, tumult and tranquillity often get blurred out, where the eternal cycle of life and death pans out in an almost ritualistic manner every day. Beyond the tranquil settings of the ghats, the series of temples, the all too familiar cacophony of sea gulls and the incessantly burning pyres lies the ancient city of Varanasi, where even among the modern settings of the 21st century life quietly flows along the ghats deeply intertwined with the ethos of Hinduism.



In this ancient land, sagas of hope, acts of faith and observance of beliefs remain juxtaposed against morbid scenes of death and despair. The pyres along the ghats signify the end of the ancient, making way for the ensuing dawn which brings with itself promises of a new beginning rippling along the holy waters of the Ganges. For the devout Hindus, Varanasi or Banaras is the city of Death and Rebirth. It is believed that one who is cremated in Varanasi by the Ganges, will attain “Moksha” easily, thus breaking free from the cycle of death and rebirth. This photo essay by Debasish Kundu in a way is symbolic of that eternal saga of death and rebirth. A narration which highlights the poignant setting of death is only a veil to a fresh beginning. One’s thoughts meander through the many mazes of time to a period when these temples were being built, when the Ghats were being erected, when the city was beginning to wear the lapel of the edifice of Hinduism. The Ganges has been a silent witness to all these episodes from the past, in its depths it carefully preserves countless such anecdotes from a time long forgotten, if only the river could speak it would have brought to life many a tales from the city’s glorious youth.















Debasish KUNDU

A chef by profession Debasish Kundu took a liking towards photography in 2011. Being the only food stylist in Kolkata, he used his professional knowledge and expertise to master the nuances of food photography during the initial days of his journey with the camera. As time went by he started taking keen interests in other genres of photography and soon started taking an active interest in the genres of fashion and street photography. The two things in life which are of utmost importance to him are – food, his love and photography, his passion.

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Photograph by Sanjay Joshi

Editor's note: The beautiful patterns on the dunes, the playful attitude of the handler and the brilliantly decorated camel - all add to the rustic charm of the desert in this image.



Photograph by Soham Krishna Lohra

Editor's note: The iconic blue walls of Jodhpur further accentuate the vibrant red hue of the turbans of the two men in their traditional attire. The uniformity in this frame receives a much needed splash of colours courtesy the bright red turbans.



Photograph by Prathamesh Shewale

Editor's note: The muted light, the composition and the placement of the deity in the background and the priest in the foreground at once render a sense of reverence to this frame. The beautiful combination of the predominantly yellow hue and the blue wall further adds depth.



Photograph by Tanusree Mitra

Editor's note: The various logos of popular websites and online applications and the group of kids gathered round the smart phone are symbolic of the changing times all around us.



Photograph by Jignesh Chavda

Editor's note: This street lamps apart from providing brilliant contrast to the night sky, serve as the perfect leading line adding depth to the frame. The lone cyclist in the foreground and the droplets of rain all around create that extra drama.

Editor's note: The presence of the iconic Howrah Bridge in the background gives this photograph an unmistakable identity while the depiction of the beautiful moment between the father and his daughter adds the warmth and heart to this image.

Photograph by Shubhdeep Roy

