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PHOTO ARTS

September 2017

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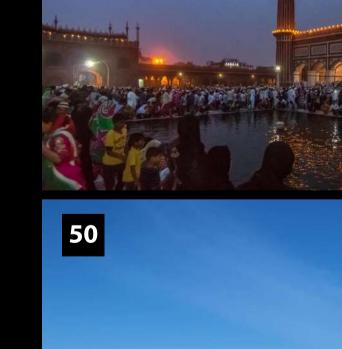
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Editorial

The Last Head-hunters: A Look into the Unique Konyak Past

by Rahul Bera (Editor of Photography & Design)

The lives of people belonging to the Konyak tribe in the northern reaches of the north-east Indian state of Nagaland along the Indo-Myanmar border even in today's time of information boom, has remained covered under a veil of obscurity. There is no well documented history which sheds any light on the ancestry of these people, little light has been shed on their past and there is precious little information about these people which is available to us. Much of what we know about these people today is based on hearsay, folklores and legends which have been passed on through generations and eyewitness accounts. It is a daunting task, nearly impossible to put in facts and figures the origin and ancient history of these people, although a look into this society offers glimpses into its veiled past. The present day Konyak society is a far cry from what it used to be a few decades ago, much of their violent past has been carefully removed from the realms of their current existence, yet the remnants of the long gone past, the fragments of their history remain scattered everywhere, eager to give away a unique account of their unique past. The northernmost district of Mon in Nagaland happens to be the major Konyak stronghold in the state of Nagaland. The quaint town of Mon serves as the district headquarter. The town of Mon appears no different from any other hill town with its narrow winding roads and days which begin even before the first rays of the sun sweep across the neighbourhood. The one thing noticeable about the town of Mon is the significant presence of a number of churches and Christian convent schools across it, a reminder to the time when there was a huge presence of Christian missionaries in the whole of Nagaland. In fact the present day social dynamics in the Naga society can be heavily attributed to the influence these missions



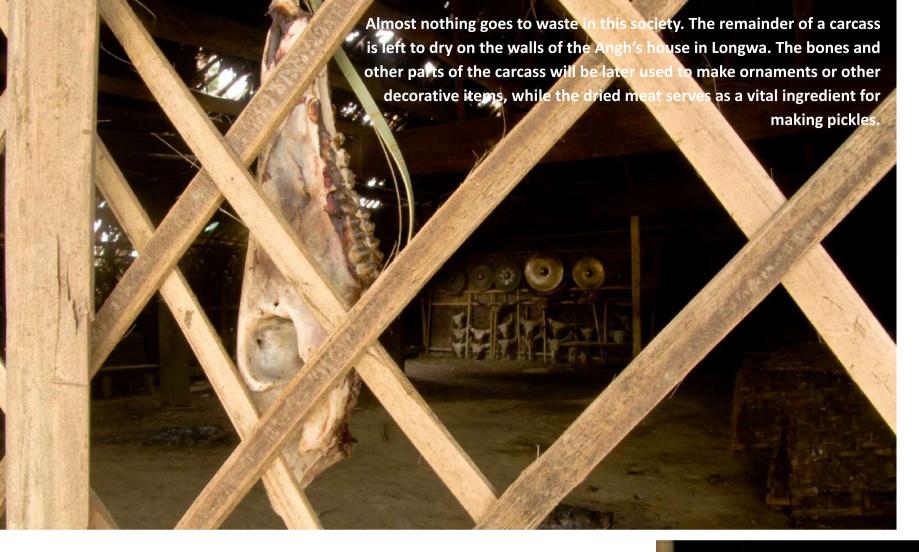


had on the then Naga society. There is little in Mon which sheds in any light on the past of the Konyak people, Mon seems like a town which over time has escaped the clutches of history and metamorphosed itself into a different being with no ties to its past. It is the outskirts of Mon where the villages lie scattered, snippets from their past reveal themselves. One such village is Longwa, which straddles the border between India and Myanmar. One look at the village of Longwa and I realised this was a place still under the domination of these people's past. The village of Longwa at a first glance appeared rugged, dusty, devoid of much greenery which is something the hills all around seem to suffer from. The dusty road which led to the chief of Longwa or the Angh's house was flanked by thatched huts sprawled over large areas with huge living areas inside, something typical to a Konyak household. The custom of monarchy is still prevalent among the Konyaks. It has lost some of its rigidity of the past yet the hereditary chief of a village known as the Angh enjoys a position of power and respect in the society. Even in this day and age, it is a custom among the Konyaks to carry with them offerings whenever they visit the Angh. Naturally I had to adhere to this custom too. With the help of some local villagers I was able to figure out the Angh was particularly fond of packaged food items which made a lot of sense to me. The village tucked in a far eastern corner of the country lacked the basic modern amenities; hence the natural affinity of the Angh for things available in the more developed parts

of the world was clearly understandable. Among other privileges the Angh enjoys, there is the one which allows him to marry as many times as he wishes. The Angh of Longwa too had put this privilege to good use as was evident from the quiet large gathering of small kids in the courtyard of his house. They were all Angh's children from his four different wives. The house of the Angh in Longwa village is bound to draw a lot of attention for its curious positioning. The house is spread across both India and Myanmar. There is no border or fencing or any milestone denoting the border between India and Myanmar. The Angh's house shares both India and Myanmar's real estate. There are other houses which extend deep inside Myanmar border belonging to other Konyak families. My meeting with the Angh went better than I had expected and impressed with the gifts I had brought for him or by my honest curiosity to know more about his culture and people he granted me the permission to venture to other parts of his village for the purpose of documenting their culture. My day long stay in Longwa opened up various avenues for me through which I could journey into the past of these people.

The pride which these people take in their bold and fierce history as warriors is palpable everywhere, it is displayed with pomp, they even chose to wear this aspect of their history literally on their skin as tattoos, in other words it may be their warrior days are over yet this remains one society severely hungover from their battle scarred past. It is widely believed though not historically established; the Konyaks were the last among the Naga tribes to give up the custom of head-hunting. Head hunting was a common practice among the Konyaks and other Naga tribes. They used to believe sprinkling the blood from the chopped off heads of their enemies on their fields would ensure a good harvest and usher in a season of prosperity for them. The warriors in the villages would be entrusted with this perilous task during which they would lie in ambush armed with their traditional machete or "dau" ready to pounce upon their unsuspecting victims who would usually be someone from





slices of his "dau" yet that sheer thought was unnerving. In his seventies now, he clearly has lost his strength and lives with his daughter these days who looks after him. A pale shadow of his past, this once brave warrior leads a life of obscurity now and it is impossible to tell how he feels about that. The rest of the day which I spent in Longwa revealed both the past and the present of this society. There is a reference to their warrior lineage in almost everything, episodes of hunting, battles are carved in wood and grace the walls of the houses, skulls of various animals and birds hunted down by these people are commonly used for decorating their houses, even some of the ornaments worn by them are made of animal body parts. There is little evidence in Longwa village to suggest that much of modernity has made any headway into this remote land. There is no proper and well defined employment scheme, the rickety condition of the only school in the village and its dwindling student population don't augur well for the younger generation, the basic facilities and modern amenities are not available at their doorsteps. In the wake of all this I found most of the Konyak people in this village live off the land. They are heavily dependent on the forests and streams along the slopes of the hills around

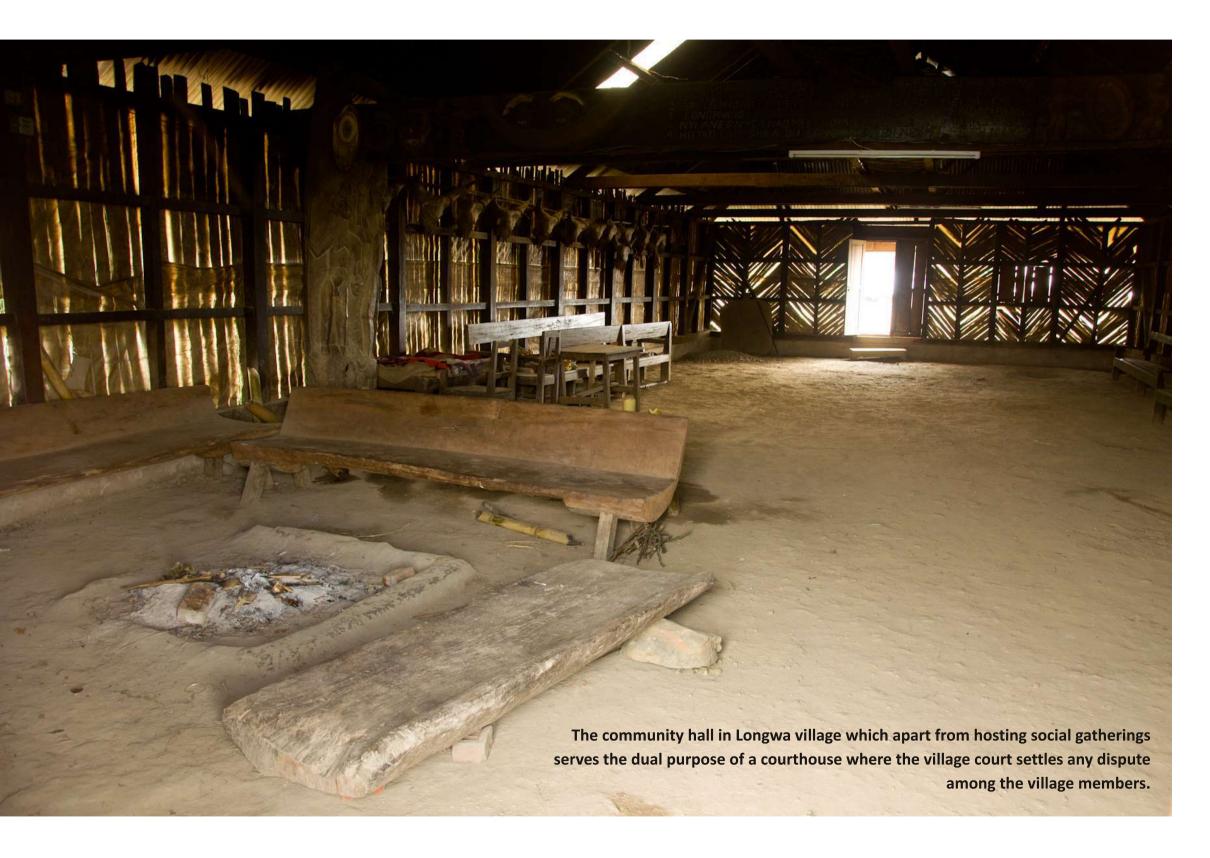
the neighbouring villages. Once they had brought back the chopped head of their victims the queen of the village would reward them by carving out tattoos on their faces which served as symbols of their valour. This practice was widely prevalent among the Konyaks till the early part of the 1980s. However with the arrival of Christian missionaries and with more and more Konyaks embracing Christianity as their religion this brutal practice slowly faded away with time. I was curious to know how the Konyaks felt about their conflict laden past now, in the 21st century. To find that out, I needed to meet someone who had been at the forefront of things. I made my intentions clear and soon I was faced with an elderly man with distinctive facial markings indicating he was a head hunter back in the day. I came to know during his days as a warrior he enjoyed the credit of bringing back 5 heads. He was a gentle man with a bony almost skeletal appearance, heavily addicted to opium a common vice in the Konyak society and dressed in his traditional headgear made of bear skin and hornbill feather. There was nothing which would suggest this man had severed five human heads with the





them for food and other resources. Hunting wild animals for food is still a common practice among the Konyaks, while the forest provides them with firewood and timber. It is anybody's guess for how long the forest around them, the cover of which is steadily disappearing, will be able to serve the Konyaks of Longwa and adjoining villages. While Longwa offered me valuable insights into the much obscure lives of Konyak people, my next destination, the village of Chiu had something incredibly special in store for me, something which would reveal the one aspect of their past for which these people are best known for. The village of Chiu is not much different from that of Longwa, although my initial impression about the place was of one which is more in sync with modern times. A series of events, all in my favour saw me befriending the son of the Angh of Chiu village. This effectively gave me access to almost all corners of the village, yet there was one particular part of the village which still seemed off limits. Without further delay I expressed my desire and my young Konyak friend, the Angh's son agreed to fulfil my wish. A short hike uphill and we were standing in the heart of an extremely sacred and sensitive Konyak burial ground. The ground was covered in thick undergrowth; there was nothing to suggest this was a crematorium except for the human skulls arranged neatly over one another on top of rocky slabs with stone plaques bearing the names of the departed. There was something extraordinary about these skulls. While some were arranged carefully next to the plaques there were others which were lying in neglect in the surrounding thickets. These skulls, hidden carefully away from public glare belonged to their enemies, decades ago these were the heads which the warriors in the Konyak society had chopped off of their enemy's bodies, these were the very same skulls which has given this tribe the fearsome reputation of being head-hunters. Not particularly boastful of such a violent past, the Konyak people since giving up this practice decades ago have made careful attempts at erasing this violent chapter from their history. The warriors from olden times are still respected and enjoy a prominent position in the village societies, however their once exploits which brought with them significant honour no longer form a part of the Konyak society. While their other exploits as skilled hunters in the form of animal skins, body parts grace their homes and their attires the human tokens of their achievements have been carefully buried away or lie in the dense covers in the woods in the outskirts of their society. The village of Chiu introduced me to a couple of other elderly war veterans who during their time as warriors struck fear at the heart of their enemies. Like others they too still wear the ceremonial tattoos on their faces with pride. Apart from these facial markings there was nothing to suggest these polite elderly men once wielded their machetes to severe human heads from bodies and were remarkably proficient at it.

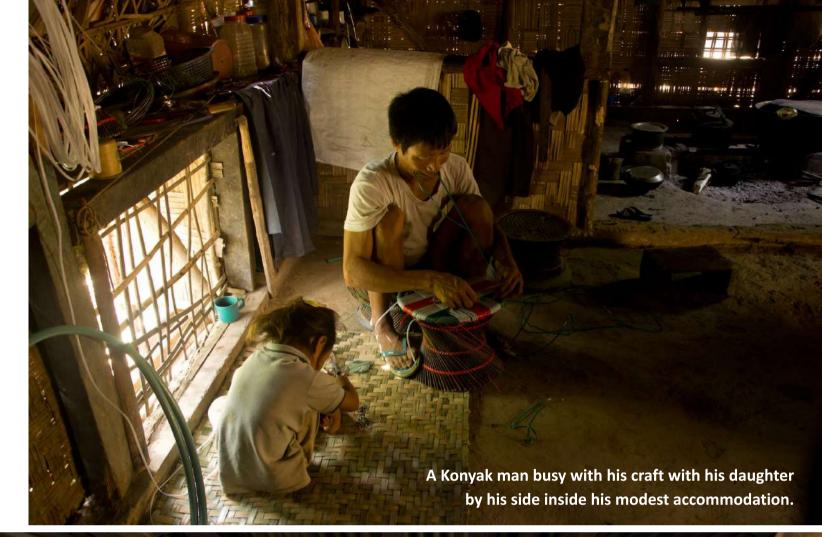




The sands of time have brought about considerable changes in the Konyak society. The giant cylindrical drums carved out of tree trunks which were used to warn the village of an imminent enemy attack have long fallen silent. The muskets which were introduced to them by the British now grace the courtyards of the Anghs and are rendered useless. Modern ways of life are steadily making inroads into this remote society. Yet in the middle of all this, surrounded by the rugged hills and the thatched houses, time seems to have stood still. The young generation seems particularly disconnected from their ancient past and are opting for a life which is far more mainstream, they are constantly striving for a future laden with opportunities which unfortunately their ancient society in the hills of Mon doesn't provide them with. It is not at all uncommon for younger people moving away from their home turfs to the bigger cities of Kohima or Dimapur or even other parts of India. They are no less proud of their Konyak lineage, they are extremely enthusiastic in depicting the brave tales of

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their ancestors, how fiercely they fought, how bravely they defended their turf, how skilled they were at wielding their machetes at their enemies, how pompously they rejoiced a good harvest, yet there is a sense of pessimism in their voices regarding their future. Caught in between a remarkable past and a future which doesn't promise much, these young people are left to fend for themselves. They gladly embrace the change their society has undergone, yet for thousands of them the change has failed to keep pace with the rest of the world, even the rest of India. There will come a point in time when the last of the headhunters, will rest in their graves carrying underground with them an intricate and possibly the most significant identity of their existence, a time when any human bridge between their present and the past will cease to exist, yet the battle of this remarkable society against obscurity, against poverty, lack of opportunity and indifference will continue. Their violent rather simplified past has paved the way for a much complex future, the great

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(Right) These skulls, once belonging to their enemies lie in one corner of the sacred burial ground of the Konyaks in Chiu village. The Konyaks used to believe sprinkling the dripping blood from the chopped off heads of their enemies on their fields would bless them with a good harvest.



warrior community has a new battle at their hands, a battle to carve a niche for themselves, a battle to uplift their entire society, a battle which asks for young and fresh warriors and a battle in which the traditional "daus" will be rendered meaningless. Only time will tell the outcome of this struggle although given the courageous warrior spirit of their ancestors which lives in them there is every reason to believe the young generation of Konyak warriors will be successful in riding the waves and reach the promised land.

(Below) The sacred burial ground of the Konyak people in the village of Chiu.









(Top left) A young Konyak boy busy with his homework in his humble establishment. Their ancestral lands provide them with limited opportunities to these youngsters who as they grow up are left with little choice but move out to other parts of the country in search of a future which promises more.

(Top right) For the young generation of Konyak people hunting trips to the nearby forests followed by picnics remain primary means of entertainment.

(Left) The old KOnyak headhunter attends ti his business with his grandson by his side who is in the eighth grade in the nearby school.





A confluence of more than 100 million people over two months, the logistical and organisational challenges which it brings along with it, the pressure of copying up with a sudden upward surge in the population, the increased and never ending need for additional resources and medical attention, all of this when combined together, particularly when at such a massive scale does have the potential to turn into a terrible nightmare for everyone involved within moments. Yet the organisers of the Maha Kumbh Mela held in Allahabad, in 2013 were able to pull off this mammoth task overcoming the countless hurdles without too many hiccups. Allahabad plays host to Kumbh Mela every 12 years, the last time Kumbh Mela was organised in Allahabad was way back in 2001.

Kumbh Mela, the largest spiritual gathering of mankind on the Earth, is held every 12 years on the banks of the 'Sangam'- the confluence of the holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. Millions of devotees take a holy dip in the sacred water during the occasion. Maha Kumbh Mela on the other hand, is held exclusively at Prayag, once in every 144 years. This is enough to give a clear idea about the significance and the sanctity of the 2013 occasion in Allahabad. It is a common belief among Hindu pilgrims that on the historic occasion of the Maha Kumbh Mela, the river turns itself into sanctity

spots filled with 'Amrita' (Panacia or elixir of immortality). The pilgrims make the most of this once in a lifetime opportunity to bathe in the spirit of holiness, auspiciousness and salvation and absolve them of all the sins they have committed in their past.

An occasion which marks the largest gathering of human beings on this planet finds its root firmly planted in one of the medieval Hindu mythologies. The ancient legend of Samudramanthan or the churning of the ocean contains accounts of the origin of this festival. The legend gives a detailed account of a time when Gods (Devtas) and Demons (Asura) used to reside on Earth. The Gods however were struck by the curse of a spell under the influence of which they were consumed by a reign of fear which robbed them off their powers condemning them to the lower levels of mere mortals. In the wake of such dire circumstances, Brahma, the supreme creator advised the Gods to churn the milky ocean to obtain the elixir of immortality (Amrita). A Kumbh (Pot) was the spot chosen to store the nectar of immortality recovered from Samudramanthan. The Asuras got a wind of it and they wouldn't give up the right to lay their hands on that coveted Kumbh without a fight. A fierce battle ensued among the Gods and the Demons which continued for twelve heavenly days and twelve heavenly nights, equivalent to twelve Earthly years, during which the Gods were

chased by Demons for the possession of Amrita. During this emulous quest for the Amrita, few drops of this elixir out of its 'Kumbh' (Pot) fell on four places now known as Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. The festivities surrounding the Kumbh mela (carnival) and its cycle is a remembrance of this mythological story. The mela takes place in all these four places. Out of these the one celebrated at the Holy Sangam in Allahabad is the largest and believed to be the holiest. The allusion to the elixir or the Amrita has had a profound impact on the psyche of the Hindu devotees and can be cited as one of the probable causes for the Kumbh Mela becoming one of the main religious festivals of Hindu pilgrims as well as the largest spiritual gathering of mankind on earth.

The 2013 Maha Kumbh Mela witnessed a footfall of approximately 120 million people from all over India and also from different corners of the globe over a period of two months. These numbers easily dwarf all the statistics accounted during the 2001 edition of Kumbh Mela in Allahabad which recorded a gathering of approximately 60 million people. The pressure on the organizers and the concerned authorities were immense, and they were expected to put in a mighty effort to get things in order before the first batches of devotees started arriving. Needless to say, this was no task for the faint-hearted, the expectations were high, the demands were endless and time was limited. The list of things to be done seemed endless, which included the setting up of tents where the devotees could spend the nights, medical camps well equipped to attend to any medical emergency, information centres, help desks, ensuring proper vigilance and monitoring, crowd control among many others. It included the mammoth task of setting up nothing lesser than a town at the very least, with even its own market. Some reports suggest that the government had set up 80,000 toilets and even make shift hospitals during the 2013 Maha Kumbh Mela. The sheer number of personnel, who were involved in an official manner to ensure order and discipline, is nothing less than staggering. Ensuring safety and security to the devotees and visitors was of paramount importance to the organisers. Over 30,000 police and para-military personnel were deployed who kept a strict vigil on the proceedings and provided safety and security to the visitors. It goes without saying such a huge gathering of people often falls prey to lawlessness, even acts of terrorism in some cases. The next big challenge was looking after the health and hygiene of the visitors. An estimate puts the quantity of drinking water arranged by the authorities at 80 million litres to ensure the supply of which the organisers had laid down 571 km of water pipelines. A total of 800 km of electric wires were used to distribute electricity across the mela from 48 power

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sub-stations which had been set up here. Approximately 250 doctors and medical personnel were stationed at the 14 hospitals which were set up for this occasion. The never ending demand for food and supplies were efficiently met through the 125 operational ration shops which provided grains, groceries, vegetables and other essential commodities and 4 additional warehouses which stored supplies for future use. Fire and emergency services were stationed all over the place, ready to deal with any crisis or emergency. 120 CCTV cameras acted as the third eye for the organizers and ensured a meticulous vigil across the 50 odd square kilometre of area in which the mela was organised. It truly is incredible how much the authorities managed to achieve within such a short period of time. The Maha Kumbh Mela apart from its religious and cultural significance, from a purely administrative perspective can be looked upon as a model of efficient governance.

The sixty odd days of Maha Kumbh Mela while provided the pilgrims and devotees with opportunities to cleanse their souls, absolve themselves of their sins and start afresh, it also provided hundred others involved with it lucrative business opportunities. The huge economy associated with this mass gathering is often overlooked, although it played a crucial role in the lives of hundreds of traders or small and large scale business people alike. The socio -economic impact on

the lives of these people has been immense. The 2013 Maha Kumbh Mela opened up new opportunities for the tourism sector. With a grand total of more than 1 million foreign tourists visiting the shores of Ganges and millions others from different parts of India the revenue generated through tourism industry was in hundreds of millions of dollars. An estimated half a million jobs were created locally, the government invested hundreds of millions of dollars which together contributed to the overall betterment of this region.

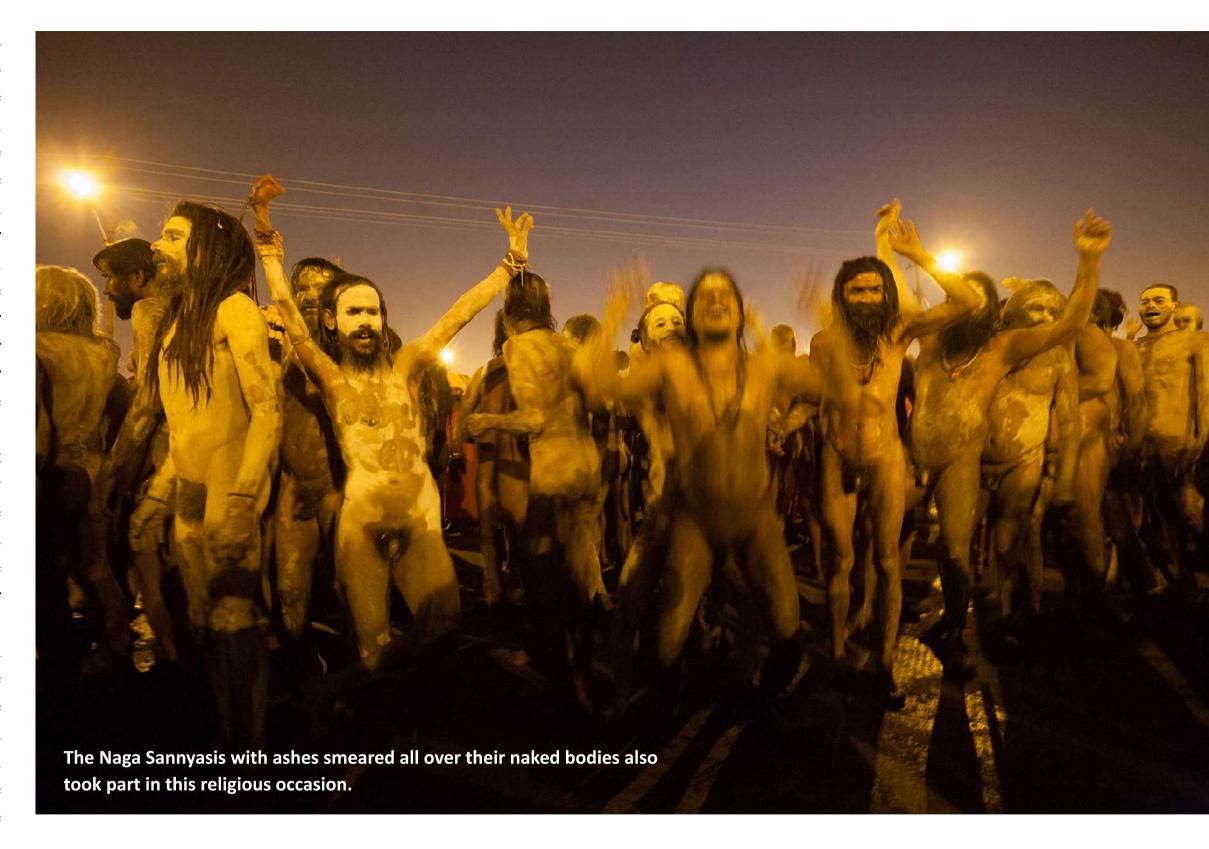
Like every other religious gathering, the Maha Kumbh Mela stood witness to elaborate rituals performed by the pilgrims and the devotees. Apart from the holy dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges, the devotees indulged in other rituals such as religious discussions, mass feeding the poor, singing devotional songs even debates on religious doctrines. Thousands of Sadhus (Holy men) made conspicuous by the saffron robes which cover them and Vibhuti (Ashes) smeared all over their faces and bodies formed an integral part of this gathering. The more eccentric ones were the Naga Sanyasis, who can be thought of belonging to a particular sect where they choose not to wear any clothes, and roam from one religious place to the other with their naked bodies smeared in ashes with the aim of achieving penance. The Sadhus who form an integral part of Kumbh Mela were present in thousands for the purpose of Darshan. Darshan simply refers to the

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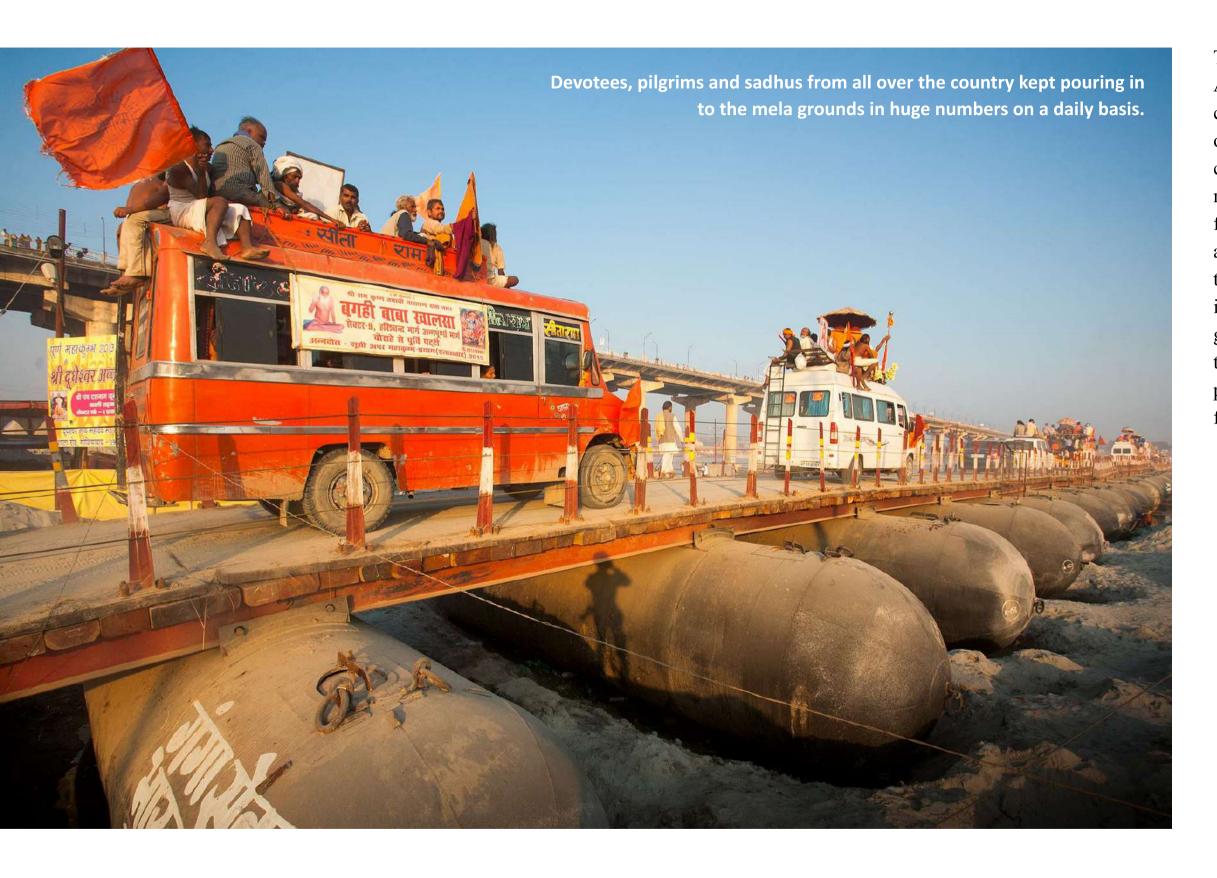


practice of observing these religious rituals and experiencing them and also understanding the secular aspects of these occasions. The ritual of Darshan has been practiced by both the Sadhus as well as the devotees for over centuries now. The presence of Sadhus gave the pilgrims an opportunity to interact with them, seek their blessings and gain valuable spiritual knowledge from these Holy men. The pilgrims thronged in huge numbers for Darshan to seek divine knowledge or blessings from the Sadhus in return for which they left tokens of gratitude at the feet of the Sadhus.

Once the rituals and other festivities got over, the devotees and pilgrims slowly made their way back to their homes, the commotion lasting over the past two months led way to an emptiness, leaving the volunteers and the authorities with another mammoth task of cleaning up the premises, dismantle the structures, reflect back upon their successes and failures only to brace themselves for the next Kumbh Mela. The grounds of Maha Kumbh Mela witnessed a confluence of millions of people from all strata of the society. Rich and poor alike undertook this journey to explore the spiritualties of the Kumbh Mela.



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The Maha Kumbh Mela of 2013 in Allahabad was much more than a mere confluence of more than hundred million of human beings; it was a confluence of culture, a momentous occasion which saw millions of people from all walks of life, from all sections of the society pouring in at one place, an occasion which transcended the differences in cultures, the differences in socio-economic status, the largest gathering of human beings on this planet truly turned into the largest platform which propagated the idea of harmony and respect for all.



It is a common practice among the devotees and pilgrims to offer their pujas in the sacred waters of the Ganges.



A Sadhu accompanied by some of the devotees makes his way to the mela ground.



The confluence of millions of people along the banks of the river was an unbelievable spectacle and the scale at which it played out defied all logic.



About the Author

Apratim Saha is a commercial photographer specializing in people photography, portraiture, lifestyle & editorial clients. Besides commercial works, he takes a keen interest in any project which stimulates his visual or emotional sensibilities. He is blessed with more than thirty years of experience in the field of photography from analogue to digital. He has been a national Geographic Stock photographer for the past 12 years and also a Getty Image member since the last 10 years. He holds the distinction of being the brand ambassador for Datacolor, the leader of colour technology, for India since the last 3 years and a mentor and brand ambassador for Tamron Lenses too from this year.

His work has been featured in reputed global publications on many occasions which include the National Geographic, Italy's most prestigious magazine 'The Postinternazionale' and 'We Photo' which published his work on Maha Kumbh Mela. His work "Making of a Devi" was exhibited at Camden Centre in London in 2016. He has been involved with Chiiz magazine for a little mora than a year now in the capacity of a consultant. Asian Photography covered some of his work in one of their editions along with an interview and featured it in their "Pro Photographer" section. 121clicks.com a prestigious online magazine too has published one of his interviews. He is a featured photographer of Life Force Magazine which has published several of his works. In spite of his busy schedule he regularly conducts several photography tours across India and elsewhere and is involved in mentoring budding talents. He takes time out of his schedule to judge various photography competitions all over the world and encourages the works of upcoming young talents.

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The indelible image of Africa, the one which makes its way into every budding travel enthusiast's mind, the one which forever occupies a niche in the heart of a naturalist, a wildlife explorer, into every young mind, is that of the great plains of this continent, where some of the most iconic representatives from the animal kingdom reign supreme. The continent of Africa is not only about these plains, there is a lot more to this great land mass, a continent abundant with natural wonders, yet the visuals of these vast stretches of land covered with golden yellow grasses, which play host to the giants of the animal kingdom, have always found a special mention. There can be no better place on this planet to witness the unfolding drama in the heart of these plain lands than the Masai Mara national Reserve in Kenya. These great plains interspersed with circles of shrubs and trees with the overhead clouds casting their shadows resemble a vast expanse of dotted land.

Understandably the Masai people inhabiting this landscape for centuries describe this land as "Maa" which in their native tongue means spotted and gives a clear account of the curious nomenclature of this magnificent wilderness. Masai Mara is one of the world's seven natural wonders. And it is not without reason. A safe haven for a thriving population of some of the top cats in the form of lions, leopards and cheetahs

this part of Africa is home to a significant population of African elephants, Cape buffaloes making it one of the last few remaining places where the big fives of Africa still roam free. However it is the annual migration involving 2 million animals which include wildebeests, zebras across these plains and all the drama which the event brings to the fore with itself, is what elevates Masai Mara to dizzying heights and makes it a coveted item in the book of every traveler or wildlife enthusiast. The annual great migration is a cyclic activity during which close to 1.5 million wildebeests, and close to 500,000 zebras, accompanied by smaller populations of Thomson's gazelles embark on an epic journey beginning from the southernmost tip of Serengeti ecosystem in Tanzania into the Masai Mara Reserve in Kenya, and back. The arrival of herds in southern Serengeti around the months of November/December marks the beginning of this migration which is followed by the blooming of new life in the plains of Ndutu in southern Serengeti. Within days the Serengeti transforms into a nursery of sorts where hundreds of thousands of wildebeest and zebra offspring engage in their wobbly walks in desperate attempts to keep pace with their mothers. As is with the law of nature, for some it might be their last walk, while the more fortunate ones move on to greener pastures.



The animals feed on lush grass in this area for all these weeks effectively finishing all there is to graze on, making it necessary for the animals to move in search of more lucrative feeding grounds. Once the calves are old enough to keep up with the rigors of this herculean task, huge herds begin their journey north, and continue the journey following the lush patches of grass. By mid-April, the early herds find themselves in the central Serengeti area along the Seronera River, an area known for stellar densities of predators including lions, leopards, and cheetahs. As the last big herds begin to arrive in the area, some of the early arrivers move further north with some of the bigger herds diverging into the western corridor of Serengeti. It is here that the migrating animals face

their first big hurdle- the Grumeti River which turns into happy hunting grounds for the mighty crocodiles waiting for the crossing animals. Crocodiles are ambush hunters and wait patiently completely submerged in the murky waters with only the top of their snout where the nostrils are placed and the pair of eyes giving away their presence. The moment the herds wade into these murky waters the feeding frenzy begins. Unfortunately for some members of these herds making their way towards the other banks, the journey suffers an untimely fatal end in the mighty jaws of these hungry crocodiles. A few lucky tourists who manage to perfectly time their visit to the exclusive Grumeti private reserve witness these dramatic crossings of animals with crocs ripping apart



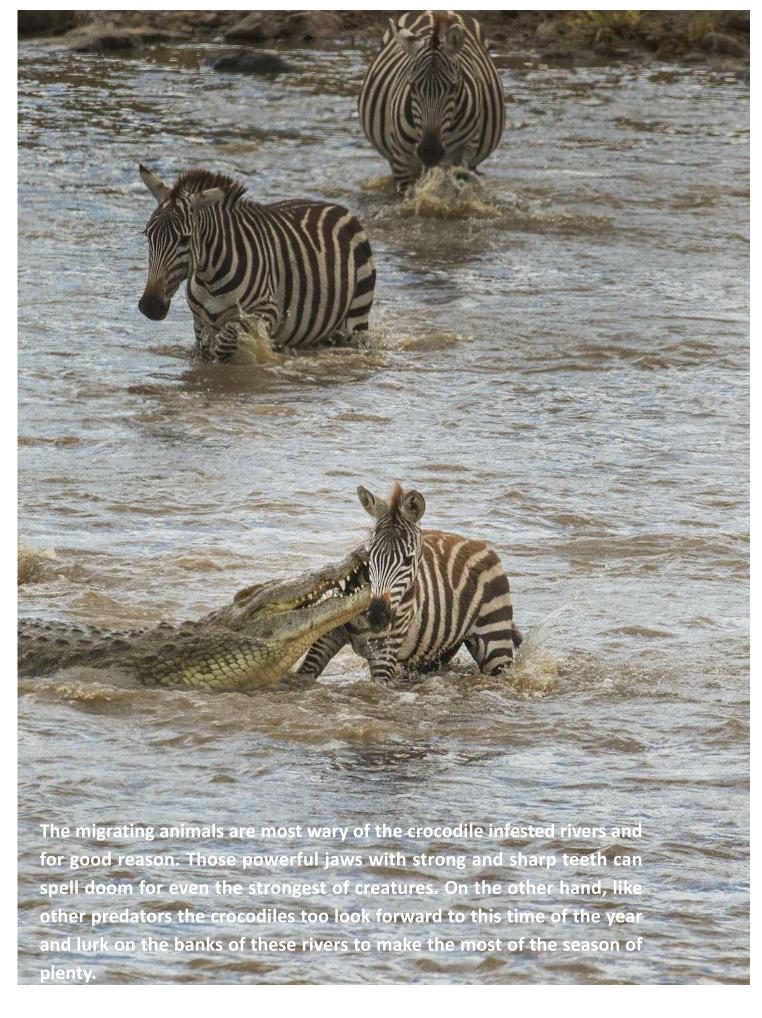
The dust storm kicked up by millions of migrating wildebeest and zebra hooves adds more drama to this already amazing spectacle.



For the wildebeests the dry season brings with itself a multitude of perils, which include the long and arduous migration coupled with the threat of lurking predators looking for an easy meal.



The wildebeests face their biggest challenge during this epic migration when they are faced with the hurdle of crossing the croc infested rivers. Sometimes they wait in anticipation carefully scanning the murky waters before taking the plunge only to turn back and return to the same spot after a few days.



anything they can lay hands on. By late June, the migrating herds of wildebeests and zebras reach the northern most plains of Serengeti and laze on the banks of the Mara River. By this time, the animals are mostly just following the rain, and weather patterns largely determine how soon or late herds cross into Kenya.

The movement of the herds is greatly determined by the pattern of rainfall in that particular season. During some seasons, the early arrivers are known to cross the Mara River and start appearing in Kenya as early as mid-June, while in other years; late rains keep the animals in Tanzania until the end of July. It is here in Masai Mara on the banks of the Mara River this dramatic spectacle reaches its pinnacle. Truly dramatic scenes unfold in which the age old rivalry between the predator and the prey pans out on a massive scale. During the months of July to September, it is not uncommon to see herds crossing into the Mara triangle and back again the same day. The migrating patterns of these herds can be erratic, and often seem to defy logic. The migrating animals are extremely wary of crocodiles as well as lurking predators on the banks of Mara and Talek rivers, and often seen to be withdrawing from what may seem like a guaranteed river crossing only to run back into the plains and return to the crossing points along the river banks after several days. While such perils of migration keep the preys on their toes, this is the season of plenty for the predators. For the lions, leopards and cheetahs the huge herds of migrating animals are nothing less than a moving feast. Such a huge abundance of prey item means there is plenty to go by which eases the tension among the predators. As a result of which extraordinary scenes such as rare and unusual cooperation between top predators like lions and partial scavengers like the hyenas pan out in which prides of lion are known to practically give away partially eaten carcasses to waiting hyenas without putting up much of a fight. For the cheetahs and leopards too this is the season for making merry. The solitary leopards and the fragile cheetahs are no match for their heavyweight cousins the lions, the hyenas too boast of their strength in numbers, as a result of which the leopards and cheetahs have to depend on their guile and cleverly adopted strategies in order to survive in this harsh world of ruthless cut throat competition. However these two to three months paint a different picture. For a few months the cheetahs and the leopards too bring down their preys and hold on to them with relative ease. Towards the end of September, while the last big herds are still arriving into the Mara, some herds already begin their journey back into Tanzania reaching the southern tip of Serengeti by late November. By then, rains would have replenished the plains with plenty of grass to feed on, ending the cycle and thereby raising the curtain for a repeat of the cycle of life.









A Spotted Hyena chases away a vulture from a kill made by a pride of lions early in the morning. During the months of migration when food is aplenty lions or cheetahs don't waste much effort in defending their partially eaten carcasses, which allows the scavengers such as this hyena and the vulture to step in sooner than they had expected.

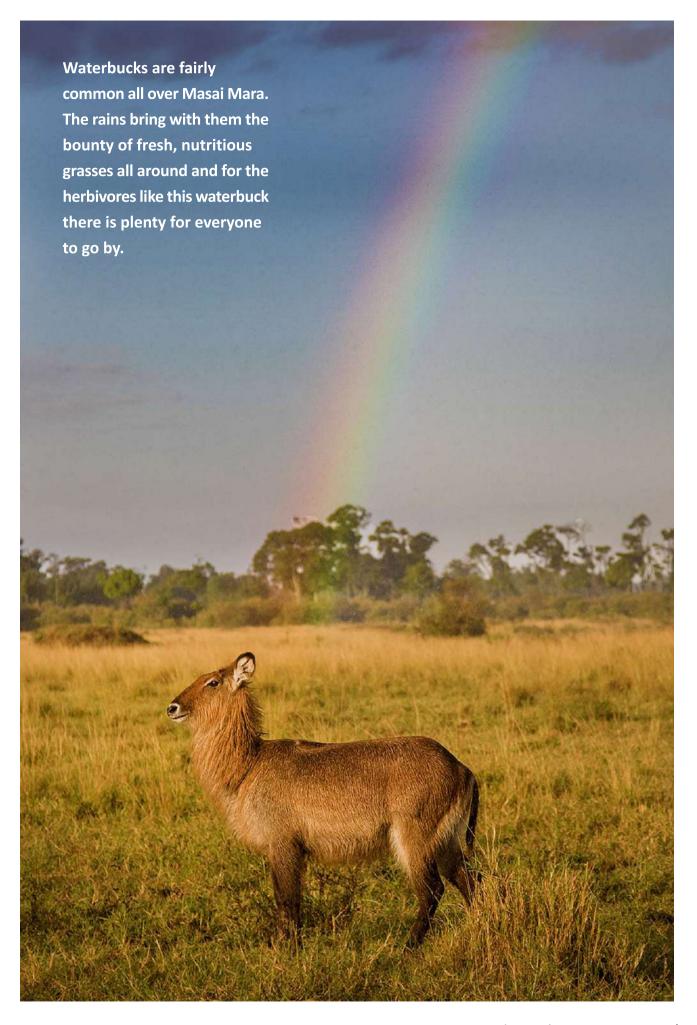


Mating between lions is a short lived, uneasy, not so gentle affair. A female in oestrus will mate with the dominant male hundreds of times over 4-5 days with each mating session lasting for only 10-15 seconds .



Amidst all this unmissable drama, Masai Mara is permanently home to some of the highest densities of lion populations in the world, and for wildlife enthusiasts, there is no better place on this planet to witness these magnificent beasts in their full glory. Elephants and Cape buffalos are the other heavyweight occupants of the Masai Mara real estate. Leopards too are easily found in the Masai Mara national reserve area. while the chances of finding the Rhino are highest in the Mara triangle area. Cheetah, the fastest land animal, and a big cat in its own right, can also be found throughout the Masai Mara. In addition to the famed Big Five of Africa, The Mara is home to countless other species, some of the notable ones being giraffe, impala, warthog, and waterbuck among others. A true natural wonderland the Mara with its entire diverse animal species, its chirpy and colorful winged wonders, and the spectacular sunrises and sunsets is a gem of the natural world and a true delight for any nature lover or wildlife enthusiast. The one other factor which has turned Masai Mara into such an amazing wildlife destination is that it is easy to recommend as a year round destination. While rains come in short spells in November/December and in long spells in April/May, they seldom interfere with game viewing. The fact that many luxury lodges offer tempting discounts in these low seasons (in the relative sense of the word) is just another reason to go there and experience the African bush in all its glory!

It is impossible to describe the grandness of Masai Mara in an article; pictures do only half the justice, this incredible theatre of life where some of the most epic dramas of the natural world take center stage round the clock is truly a world in itself. The ocean of golden grass which hides the lurking predators, the crocodile infested rivers which flow through the heart of this landscape, the trees dotting this plain, which are engaged in a never ending struggle to outgrow the reaches of their rather uninvited visitors the giraffes, and the hundreds of thousands of denizens of this amazing natural domain, all form vital cogs of this fragile eco-system. The night air filled with the roars of a lion evokes a sense of fear and admiration at the same time, the first rays of sun flowing through the blades of the tall grasses paint a picture of unmatched beauty, the dust storm kicked up by the hooves of millions of migrating wildebeests and zebras creates and atmosphere of drama, amidst all of which the eternal cycle of life and death plays out in these dotted plain lands of Masai Mara, serving a firm reminder to the paradise it has always been, and further establishing the need to safeguard the future of this majestic wilderness at all cost.







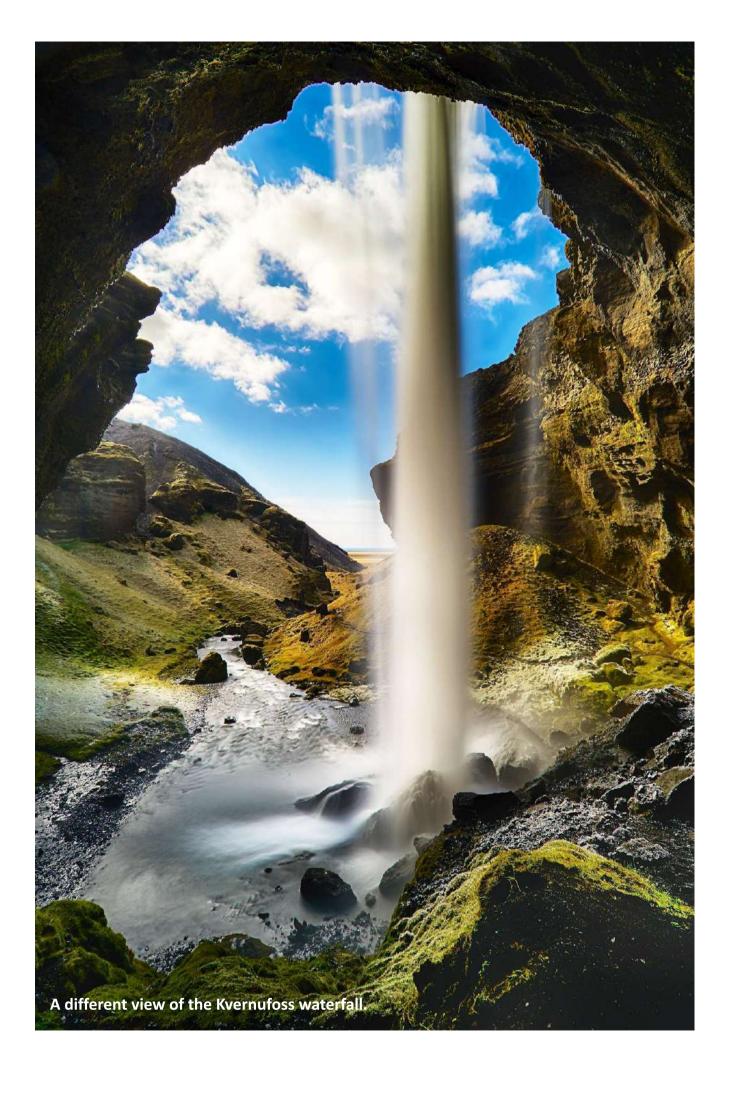


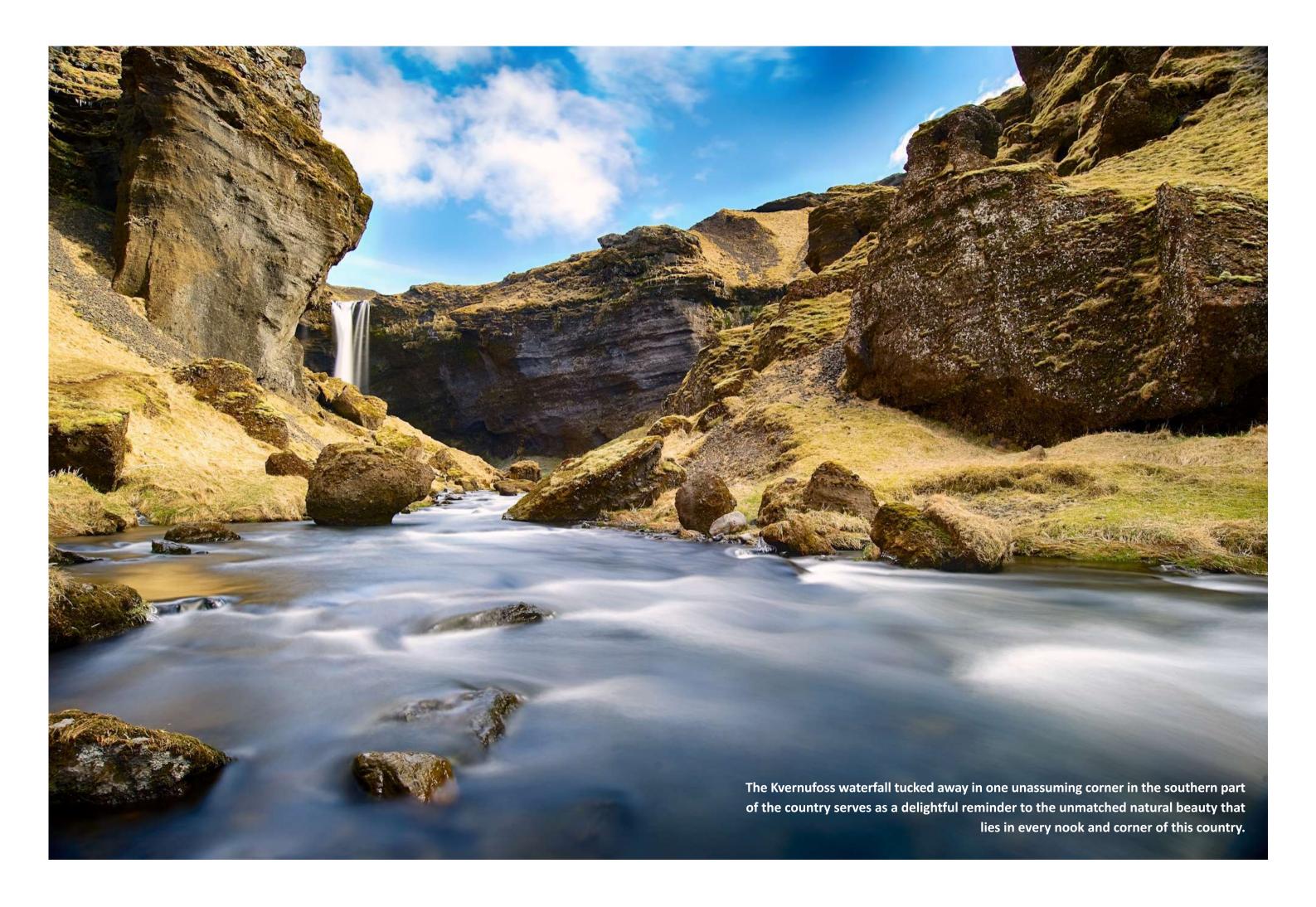
Bhargava Srivari is a management consultant by profession and a wildlife photographer by passion. He began his quest of photographing the world's fauna at a young age of 10, and his love for wildlife and nature has only grown since then. Although his first love is photographing big cats, he has traveled the length and breadth of India as well as parts of East Africa and North America in pursuit of other rare wildlife that is on the brink of extinction, in the hope of creating awareness and love for wildlife among his audience through his images. His considerable experience of the wilderness allows him to introduce people to wildlife destinations something which enabled him to turn into a part-time freelance travel consultant to help people plan their wildlife vacations with the hope of bringing them closer to nature. He believes that the more people fall in love with nature, the better the chances are of preserving it for future generations. His work has been published in national and international magazines and newspapers, and he was recently awarded the distinction of Associate of the Royal Photographic Society (ARPS) by The RPS which is the oldest photography society in the world.

Website- www.bhargavasrivari.com Instagram- https://www.instagram.com/bhargava_srivari/



Bitterly cold winters, separated from other landmasses by the freezing waters of North Atlantic and Arctic oceans, rugged terrains making it difficult for public amenities to sneak past them, these are some of the realities of the thinly populated island nation of Iceland. At a casual first glance these facts do have the potential to deter someone from stepping foot upon this seemingly harsh landmass, although reality has a very different story to tell. Iceland over time has turned into an extremely popular tourist destination. Quiet naturally the question arises what it is about this thinly populated island nation with 330,000 residents that attracts more than a million tourists every year. The answer possibly lies in the secluded existence of this nation. The real charm of this island, which attracts millions from all over the world, lies in its solitude. The barrenness of its landscape devoid of human population, the natural elements in their most unadulterated form offer most an escape from reality, it almost acts as a gateway to an alternate realm where time seems to have stood still. It is difficult to imagine another place where the natural world and its elements have laid claim to the major portion of the landmass and have pushed their human neighbours to small strips of pasture lands or the peripheries along the coastline. Yet what seems barren wasteland, dominated by the stoic presence of cold mountains and glaciers has turned Iceland into one of the most favoured travel destinations in the planet. The ancient lava fields, breath-taking waterfalls plunging into deep craters from great heights, the timeworn ravines covered in thick blanket of mosses, dominate this landmass. Untampered, they exist proudly in their full glory across the major part of Iceland. The early tourists to Iceland fell in love with its breath-taking natural beauty; the romance since then never stopped brewing and today has the world's fascination riveted to these amazing landscapes. Some of the unique features of these landscapes have certainly played a big part in capturing people's imagination. One of the most distinctive features being the glaciers which occupy a significant portion of Iceland's landmass. Apart from that this arctic desert is dotted with numerous geysers, hot springs and volcanoes which combine together to form a landmass both unique in feature as well as appearance. Considered to be one of the youngest landmasses on this planet Iceland is no stranger to frequent volcanic and geothermal activities and is home to some of the most active volcanoes in the world. Since the arrival of the first batch of travellers from different parts of the world, the reputation of this beautiful landmass has increased manifolds, these landscapes which at times seem to have been conjured up by the remarkable fantasies have been enthralling millions of visitors since then. This is an ode to some of these ethereally beautiful landscapes on one of the most unique landmasses on this planet.























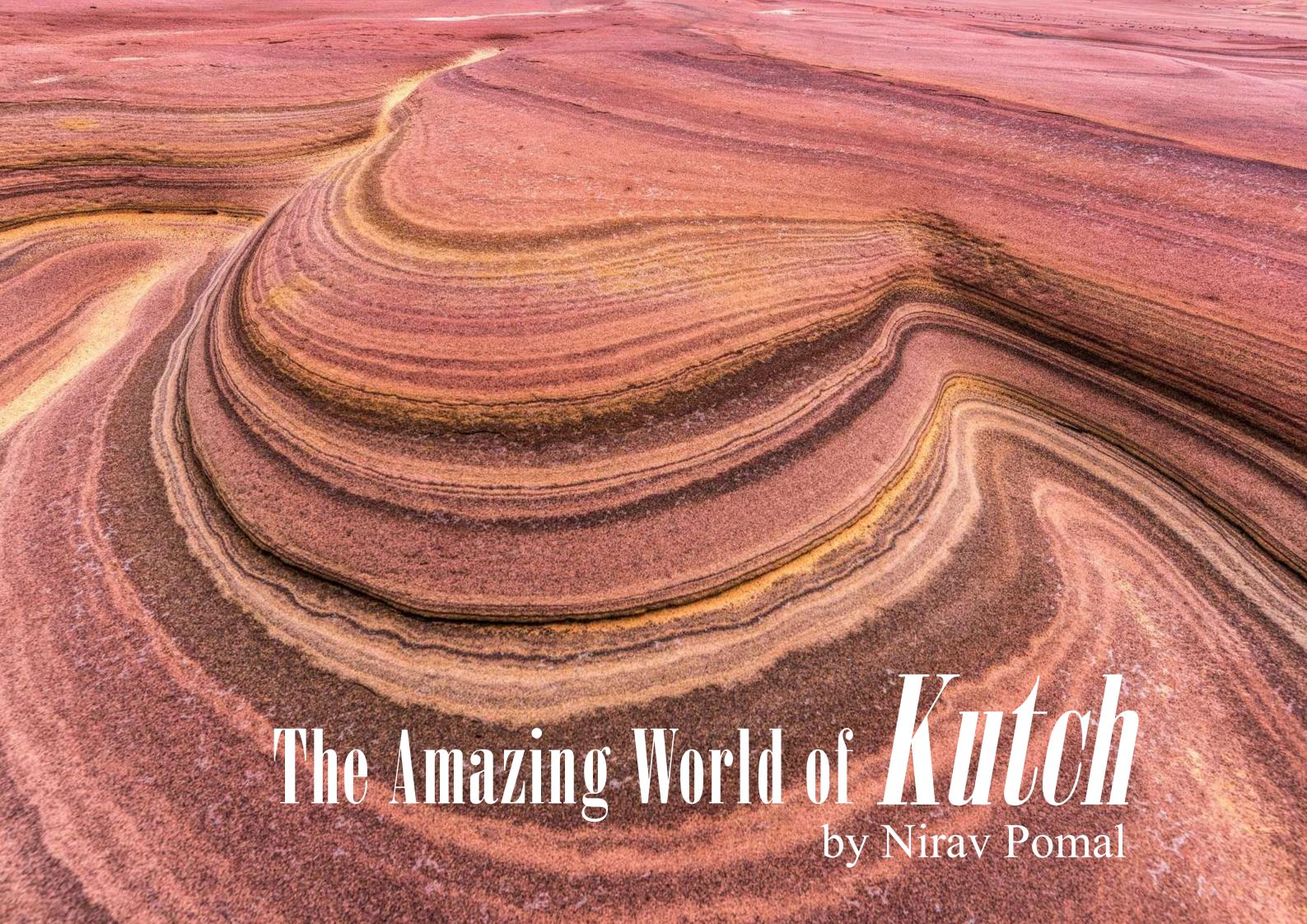
About the Photographer

Anusheel Verma defines himself as a tireless seeker of knowledge and occasional purveyor of wisdom on technology and coincidentally, a software architect. His initial inquisitiveness towards photography grew out of a fascination with the intricate mechanical device. It all started as an interesting experiment turning unseen scientific principles into art. He always visualized a photograph to be like a jigsaw puzzle game, where one has to discover the various pieces that fit together to create something visually unique and mesmerizing. He started exploring blogs and magazines on exposure, composition and different elements of photography and at the same time kept on shooting with his cameras to further enhance his skills. He considers himself fortunate since his work takes him to different countries and provides him with an opportunity to be a part of some unbelievable places and locations. He has attended some interesting photo walks in USA, UK, Europe and India. Over the years he has been researching on various styles of photography and has attempted a little on Street, Astro, Wildlife, Macro although Landscapes and Cityscapes still remain to be his favourite genres of photography.

In his words-"photography is taking me on a journey and I hope to capture those moments with my perspective."

"You don't take a photograph, you make it." - Ansel Adams

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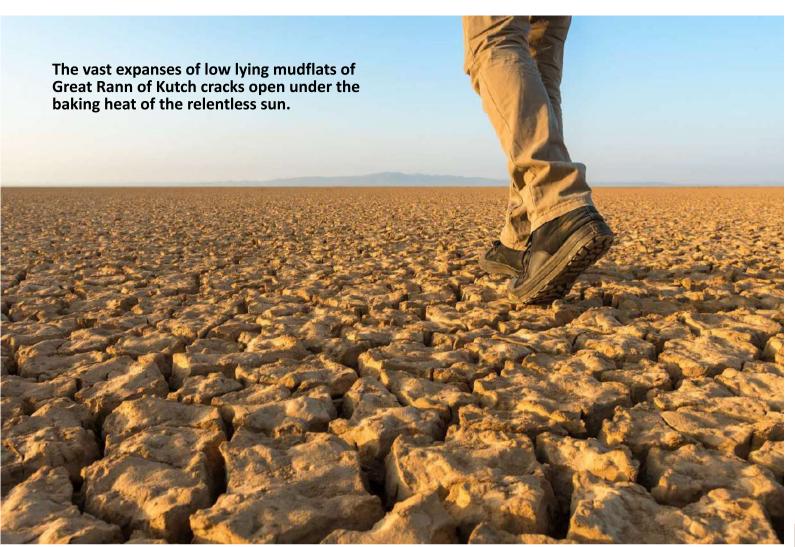
The Thar Desert in the western Indian state of Rajasthan is known globally for its colossal sand dunes and its colourful native human settlements. This vast landscape dominates a better part of Rajasthan particularly along the eastern border between India and Pakistan. This vast ocean of shifting sand dunes and billions of sand grains however doesn't restrict itself to the state of Rajasthan alone and makes its way further south into the Kutch district in the neighbouring state of Gujarat. Here it takes up a whole new identity and is better known as the Rann of Kutch. The desert besides taking up a new name metamorphoses into something unique, into something extraordinary. The Rann of Kutch although located in the Thar Desert bio-geographical region possesses certain features which are unique to it, features which make this region stand out in its own right instead of remaining under the shadows of the much celebrated Thar Desert. The Rann of Kutch also known as the Rann happens to be the world's largest salt desert spreading over an area of more than 30,000 square kilometres which includes the Great Rann of Kutch, the Little Rann of Kutch and the Banni grasslands. This vast expanse of seasonal salt marshes stretches into the Sindh province of India's neighbour Pakistan. The marshy terrain in most parts of the Rann can be attributed to

its geographic location which is nestled between the Gulf of Kutch and the mouth of the Indus River in southern Pakistan. The Luni River originating in Rajasthan flows through the northeast corner of the Rann. The presence of these rivers along with their tributaries which eventually merge into the waters of the Arabian Sea in the Gulf of Kutch have led to the presence of numerous creeks which form a mesh of waterways across the heart of the Rann. These creeks, embracing the Arabian Sea, are the key to the marshy terrain of the Rann. During monsoon, as the rivers and the creeks swell with water, almost the entire landmass of the Rann stays submerged in water. The heavy downpour during the three odd months of monsoon from July to September engulfs most parts of the low lying mudflats of the Rann. As the monsoon retreats leaving the beaming sun in the clear blue skies to its full glory, these vast expanses bake under the scorching sun. By December the last drop of rain water perishes into the bone dry atmosphere looming over this landscape exposing its hardened saline crust which assumes the iconic glistening white appearance. This huge landscape in ancient times was a part of the Arabian Sea. Over centuries subject to a series of geological changes it metamorphosed into a lake and ultimately into a desert. However its ancient association with the sea stays firmly engraved in the heart of the Rann in the form of its rich salt content which is primarily responsible for its signature whitish or off whitish appearance. It hardly comes as a surprise when the Rann of Kutch is often referred to as the White Desert. This vast flat expanse of white, stretches beyond the horizon, it is an uninterrupted scenario devoid of absolutely anything resembling a big empty space which has rejected everything in its wake except for embracing the tranquillity which looms large in the horizon.

In all fairness the white low lying mudflats, in spite of their surreal, almost otherworldly appearance, provide only a partial account of the Rann of Kutch. There is a whole lot more to this landmass, a land which bears signatures of changing times, times so ancient that there are possibly no records of them except for the remnants they left behind during the course of their travels. While the White Desert of the Rann has assumed iconic status with time, some of the other topographical aspects of Kutch hold in their hearts anecdotes from the bygone eras which are no less fascinating. The entire district of Kutch can be categorized into four main zones on the basis of their geology and topography, the coastal fringe which lies towards the southern end of the region, the Banni

grasslands characterised by their mud flats, marshes and slat pans, the Kutch mainland which is dotted by rocky hills and plateaus and the two Ranns, the Great Rann in the north and the Little Rann towards the east comprising of vast barren saline flatlands. The hills and other rocky formations in Kutch bear testimonies from the Jurassic age. These rocks are as old as time itself. The Mesozoic rocks of Kutch have intrigued geologists from all over the world primarily because engraved in them lie stories from ancient times. The exceptionally rich fossil records found in these rocks provide significant clues in decoding what the planet we call our home today had looked like in the Jurassic era, long before we inherited this landmass. These Mesozoic rock formations date back from the middle Jurassic to the late Cretaceous period and extend all the way up to the Deccan Traps in the west central India and up to the saline marshes of the Rann of Kutch to the north. These parts of Kutch in ancient times were home to ranges of active volcanoes. Sands of time have tamed the fire in their bellies although the remnants from their fiery past remain scattered all over. There was a time when these volcanoes used to breathe fire and unleash streams of lava upon these landscapes. Our tumultuous planet during those early times was no stranger to such activities all over it. As the history of our





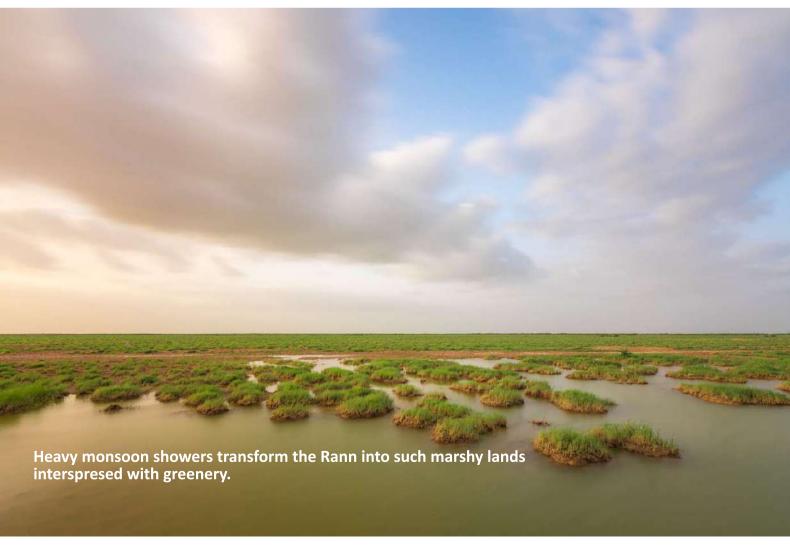
planet marched towards a more stable and mature future such activities slowed down and nature was successful in taming some of its rather rowdy elements. The once active volcanoes in these parts of Kutch too were made to fall in line although not before they left a permanent and profound impact in shaping the landscape of this region along with other parts of central India. The igneous rock formations resulting out of the cooling and solidification of magma or lava erupting from the cores of these volcanoes bear testimony to that. However today these rock formations are not a reminder to the brewing discontent

in the hearts of the volcanoes, instead their beautiful patterns and colours reiterate the profound beauty that lies hidden in every natural cycle of destruction and rebirth. The southern fringes of Kutch border the Gulf of Kutch a narrow inlet of the Arabian Sea into the mainland of India. Coastal Kutch is remarkably different from other parts of the district, asserting the diversity found in the topography of the region in its own unique and beautiful way. It is rare and unique, almost impossible to comprehend a landmass predominantly known for its huge expanses of barren flat desert that nestles in one corner of it vast

stretches of mangrove eco-system second only in area after the mighty Sunderbans in India. The Kutch coast is relatively flat and is dominated by a regular cycle of high and low tides on a daily basis forming an intricate network of creeks, estuaries and mud flats. The Kutch coast is marine wildlife haven which is home to rare marine species, seaweeds and coral reefs. In fact Gulf of Kutch is the only other coastal region in India which is home to live corals, the other one being Gulf of Mannar in the Indian Ocean. In an attempt to safeguard the future of countless near threatened and vulnerable marine species and with a view to preserve this fragile eco-system, parts

of Gulf of Kutch were declared a Sanctuary and Marine national park in the year 1982. Since then the coasts of Kutch have been a favourite spot for many species of wader birds, crabs, and many other forms of marine life.

Along the southern peripheries of Rann of Kutch lies the Banni Grasslands Reserve in the district of Kutch, the largest natural grassland in the whole of India. Banni grassland is an arid grassland eco-system punctuated by several low lying marshes. The landscape of this region is heavily dominated by low –growing shrubs and bushes, which by virtue of being salt tolerant have flourished and thrived in this









These incredibly beautiful rock formations are found near Nakhatrana village in Kutch. The Laiyari riverbed stays dry during most part of the year barring the 3-4 months of monsoon. The dry riverbed exposes these beautiful shapes and patterns scattered all over it. Besides 3-4 months of monsoon, this river remains dry. Most of these rock formations are millions of years old even dating back to the Jurassic age.





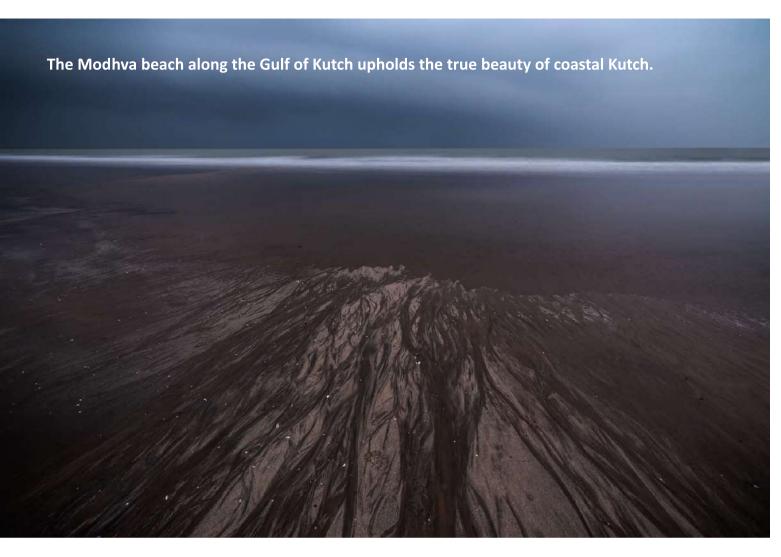
community of people living here who primarily depend on fishing activities to earn their livelihoods.

region is not dense and remains scattered across the entire region. These grasslands are favoured grazing grounds for some of India's iconic herbivores, such as the nilgai, chinkara and blackbuck among others. The grass cover of Banni found in India. The Banni grasslands still remain one of the last major strongholds of the threatened Indian wolves. The desert foxes with their signature large ears happen to be another extremely elusive species which spend most of their lifetime in the underground burrows they dig for themselves along the Banni plains. The tall grasses of Banni act as the perfect cover for the golden jackal as well. Previously the last Indian wild ass population other than in Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir was confined only to the nearby Little Rann of Kutch. With a view of preserving these beautiful animals certain measures were adopted as a result of which their population has been on a steady rise since 1976. The presence of these animals in the Great Rann of Kutch as well as the Banni grasslands is a testimony to their increasing numbers. Banni grasslands also have a rich diversity of avifauna, reptiles and invertebrates. Spells of heavy shower during a productive monsoon fill up the into fresh water lakes which serve as winter retreats for thousands of migratory birds. The resident flocks of flamingos also make the most of these water reservoirs during the rest of the year.









The Banni Grassland Reserve with its diverse wildlife population and a history of migratory pastoralism which is still practiced by some of the resident tribes in this region is an amazing landscape which adds yet another feather to the already illustrious cap of Kutch.

Over time Gujarat has turned itself into one of the most popular tourist destinations in India and needless to say Kutch has played a significant hand in earning Gujarat this glorious reputation. There can be no denying there are plenty of other beautiful places with their unique natural history spread across the state yet the white sands

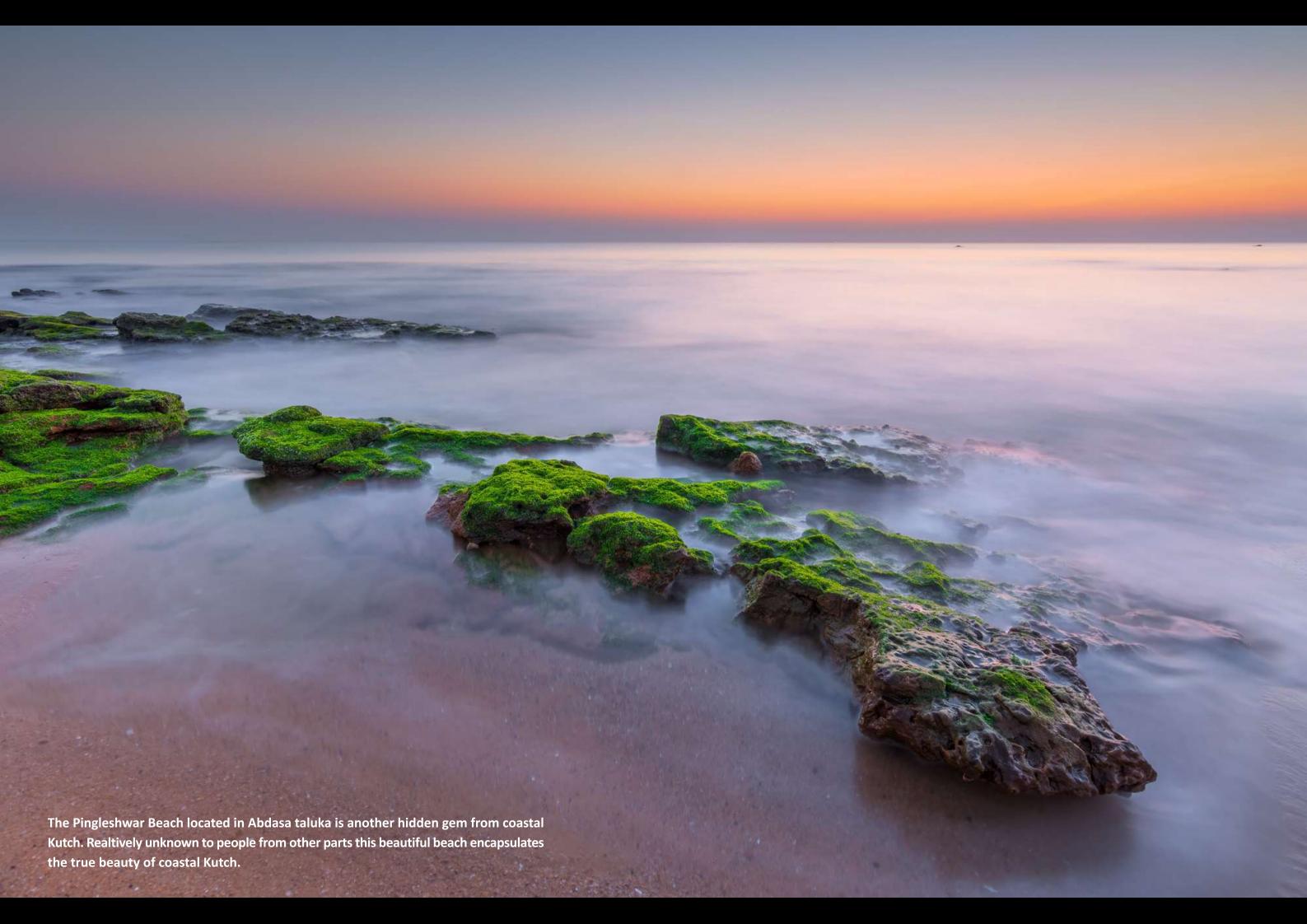
of the Runn glistening under the soft moonlight on a full moon night is that one imagery which probably has had the strongest impact. The Rann Utsav, a carnival of music, dance and celebration of the local culture is organised every year for three months on the white sands of the Rann. Over the years this festival has grown in stature and today attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world. The Banni grasslands and coastal Kutch can be places of delight for any naturalist or wildlife enthusiast. The beautiful patterns of rock formations in the Kutch peninsula too draw thousands of

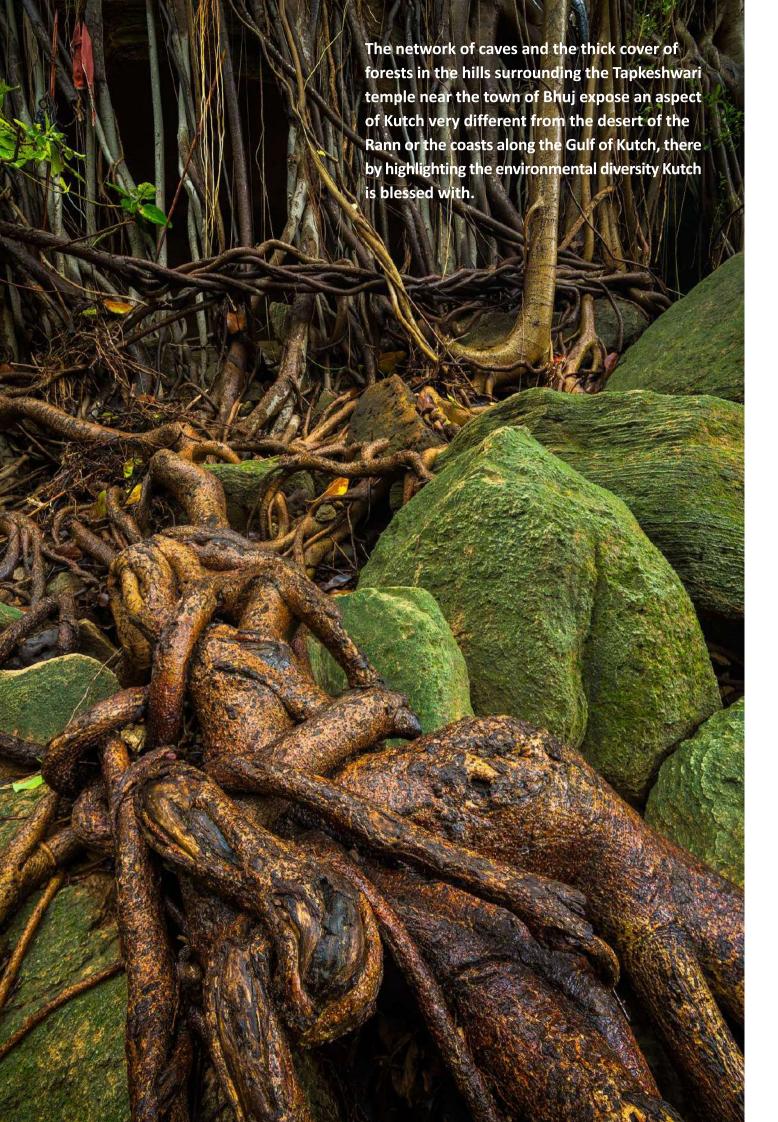


tourists every year. It becomes evident the role Kutch has played in turning Gujarat into the favoured tourism destination that it is today. The white sands of the Runn, the colourful patterns engraved in the ancient rocks in the peninsular Kutch whose lands have been painted in myriad colours by the solidified lava from the once active volcanoes, the mangroves along the coastal Kutch which are home to brilliant creatures from the natural world, the rich cultural and biological diversities found in the grasslands of Banni, the miraculous land of Kutch has a lot to offer.

This ancient landmass tucked in one far western corner of India is truly a geographical and natural wonderland holding in its heart anecdotes from a time long gone.









The Photographer Speaks

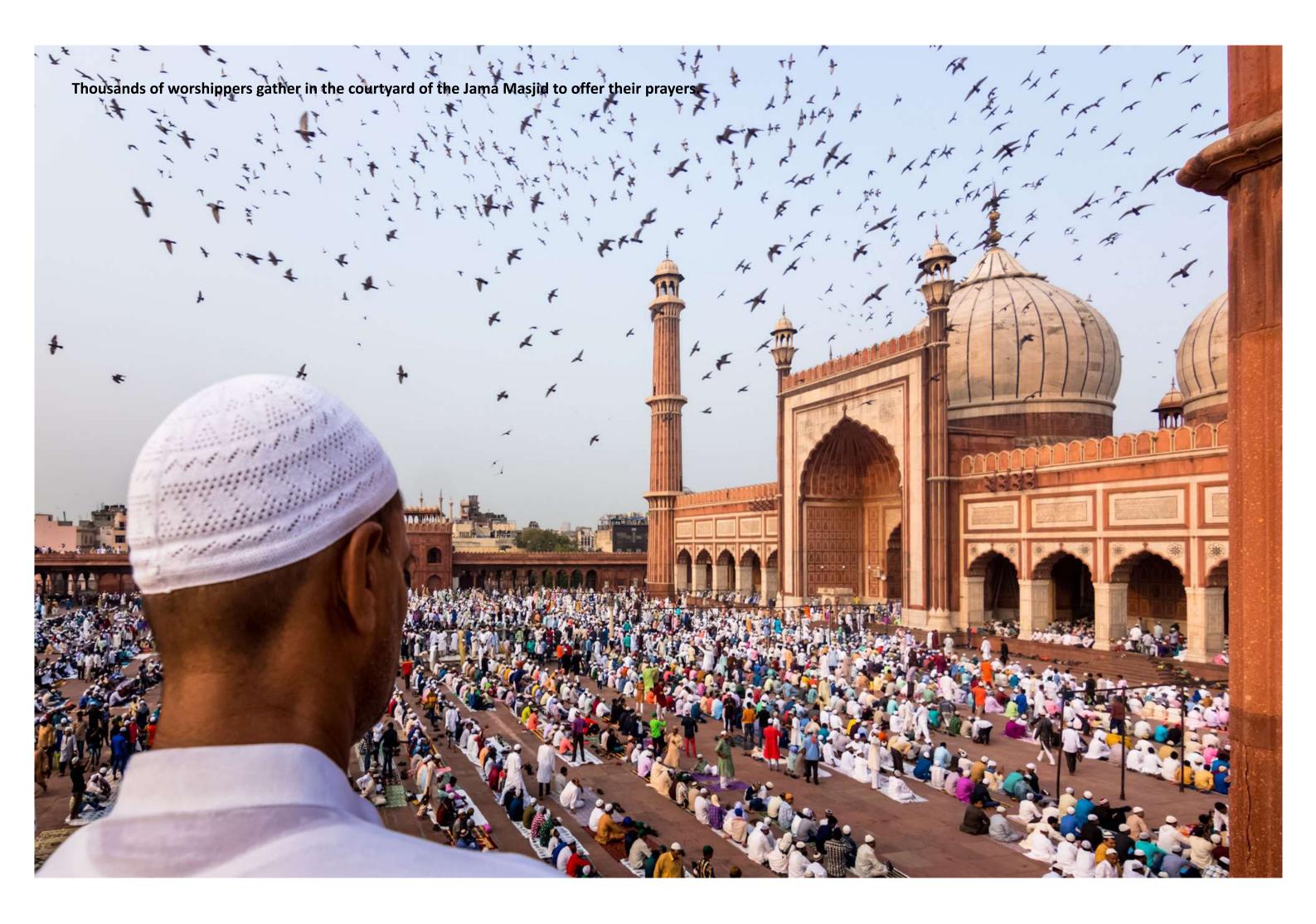
I am a businessman by profession and a nature photographer by passion. Landscape, seascape and wildlife are my primary interests. My love affair with photography dates back to a very young age. From an early age I used to be fascinated by nature. While exploring the nature in and around my native town, I felt that instead of just enjoying the beauty of nature I should start capturing those beautiful scenes and moments. That was the moment my photographic journey started. I feel lucky to be born in Kutch as it has immense natural beauty to be explored and photographed, from the amazing white Rann to the beautiful beaches, high hill ranges to wonderful throne forest, birds and other wildlife. Photography has helped me to understand and respect nature even better. Today photography has become a never ending love for me. I wish my photographs help people especially the upcoming generation to understand the importance of nature; it needs love, respect & conservation.

Photography links:

https://www.facebook.com/niravpomal84

https://www.instagram.com/niravpomal/





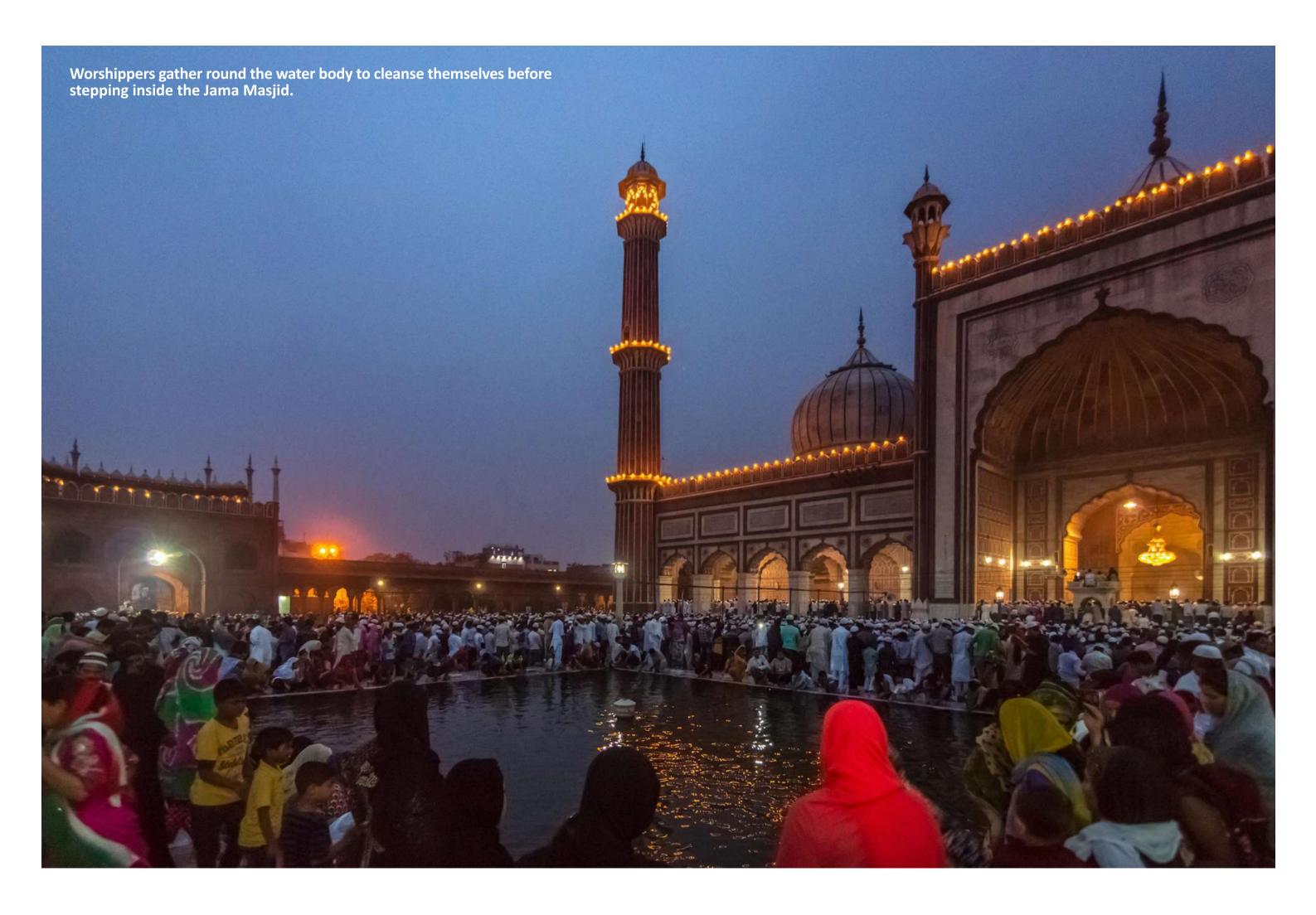
Any city's liaison with a particular era in its history is best reflected in the architecture of the city. The sands of time bring about with them a plethora of changes which affect even the most delicate fabrics of the city's being, yet somehow the architectural wonders of the bygone eras have remained unaffected. Delhi, the capital city of India is no exception to this. The city of Delhi was the epicentre of the Mughal Empire, whose dominance in India was established with Emperor Babar's victory over Ibrahim Lodi the last ruler of the Delhi Sultanate in the historic battle of Panipath. For approximately the next three centuries the Mughal Empire reigned supreme over almost all of India. Their countless conquests, years of reign, legends of iconic Mughal Emperors such as Akbar, Shah Jahan's undying love for his beloved wife Mumtaz have intrigued countless historians who spent hours obsessing over these remarkable feats from this illustrious period in the history of India. Their toils provide us with detailed accounts of the Mughal Empires, its achievements, its might, its glory and its eventual demise. These anecdotes without an iota of doubt bring us closer to the days of this mighty Empire which once ruled across the length and breadth of this mighty landmass. While these chronicles play significant roles in connecting the dots, it is the architectural

wonders from this bygone era which truly act as gateways into this lost era. These ancient representatives from this ancient time have carefully preserved in their nooks and corners tales of love, deceit, prosperity and decline from a time when the world around them looked a lot different. Empires fell around them only to be replaced by new ones, centuries went by, the sands of time took a toll on their walls, yet they withstood the numerous challenges time threw at them. Like in some of the other major cities in India these architectural marvels have been a part of Delhi's life since the time it used to be the hub of Mughal Empire's administrative activities. The Delhi of today is a far cry from its primitive self back in the 16th century. The Delhi of today is an ultra-modern city, well known all over the world and visited by millions of people on different purposes through the year yet the roots of this great city remain firmly engraved in the rocks and stones and concretes of these ancient structures. The precedents of superlative Mughal architecture are spread all across the city of Delhi, some of them deeply intertwined with the existence of this city. The iconic Red Fort, the towering Qutub Minar, Humayun's tomb and the Jama Masjid are among the few of these ancient marvels. Among all of them, the minarets of Jama Masjid stand out for a very special reason. Jama Masjid, the largest mosque in India and one of the largest in the Asia Pacific region in a way encapsulates the true secular fabric of the country. Situated in the heart of Delhi, Jama Masjid serves as a reminder how different faiths, religion, culture have largely co-existed in an atmosphere of harmony in this ancient land since hundreds of years.

This iconic structure is located in Chandni Chowk a busy bustling neighbourhood in the heart of Delhi. The tomb of the mosque along with its minarets tower above its neighbours and stands tall in this business locality. One of the greatest examples of the excellence of Mughal architecture, this iconic building was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, who commissioned the project in 1644. More than 5,000 workers toiled hard for almost 12 years to carve this masterpiece out of chunks of red stone and marble, which was inaugurated by the Imam of Bukhara, present day Uzbekistan. The cost of building the Jama Masjid was estimated to be a whopping 1 million rupees during the period of Sha Jahan's rule. The massive proportions of this monument can be imagined from the huge number of 25,000 worshippers which it can accommodate in its courtyard at a given point of time. At the centre of this courtyard is present a water tank. This is an ablution tank where worshippers are

expected to cleanse themselves before stepping inside the mosque. Thousands of worshippers wash their hands and feet before entering the mosque on a daily basis. The mosque is flanked by two minarets which are 40 meters high, constructed out of alternating vertical strips of red sandstone and white marble. A series of 130 steps lead to the top of the individual minarets. The individual minarets are five storeyed structures. Each of these floors house a protruding balcony which overlooks the premises of the entire mosque. The adjoining edifices are filled with calligraphy. The first three storeys of the minarets are made of red sandstone, the fourth of marble and the fifth of sandstone. Three giant arched entrances open their doors for the worshippers to enter the sacred premises the mosque. A flight of 39 sandstone steps lead to the northern gate while the southern side has 33 steps. 35 steps lead to the eastern gateway, which also happens to be the largest and was used by the emperors during the Mughal era. The entire mosque rests firmly on the foundation of a giant sandstone porch 30 feet high and spread across 1200 square meter. The mosque faces west towards the Holy city of Mecca. Three sides of the mosque are covered by open arched colonnades, featuring a lofty tower-like archway in the centre.



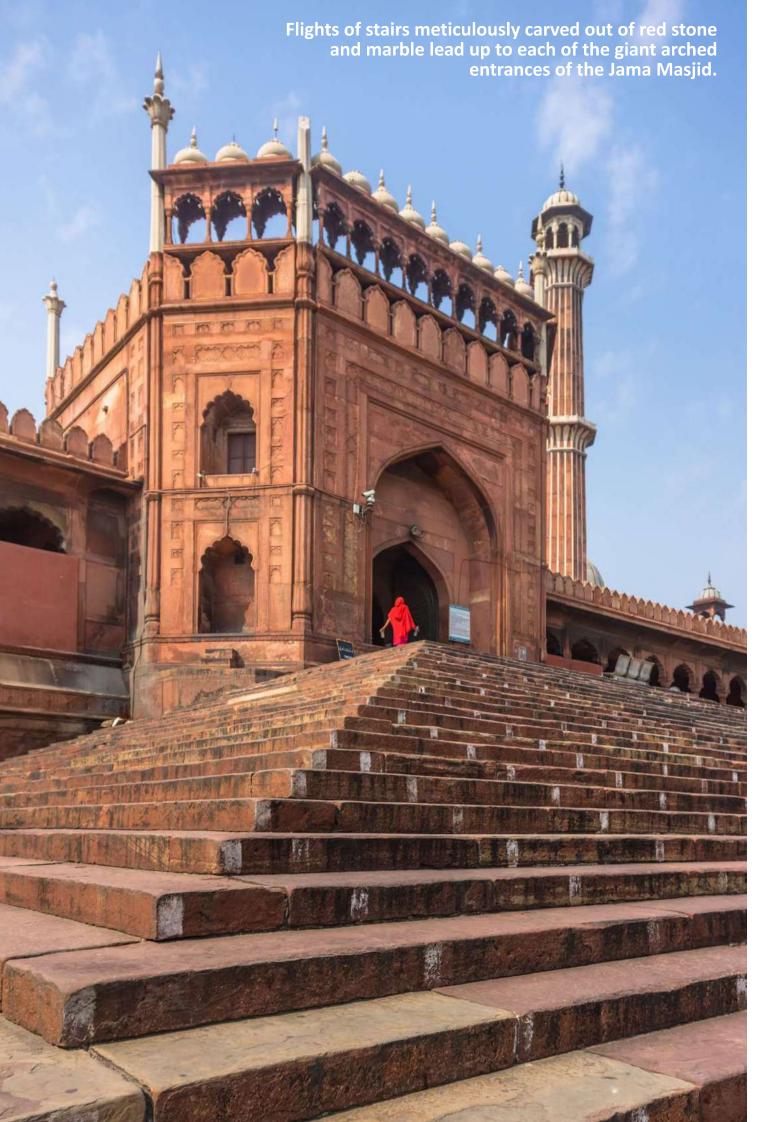


Three marble domes bearing alternate stripes of black and white marble on them grace the roof of the mosque. The domes are further decorated with gold carvings and intricate designs in gold carved on their surfaces. The mosque is almost 80 metres long and 27 metres wide. The main prayer hall housed within the mosque measures 61 metre in length and 27.5 metre in breadth and is adorned with high cusped arches and marble domes. Seven arched entrances open up into the main prayer hall. Detailed inscriptions in black marble depicting the history of the mosque and offering insights into the life and reign of Shah Jahan are inscribed on tablets of white marble which grace these arched entrances. The inside walls of the mosque are primarily built of red sandstone and are covered with marbles up to waist-level height for decorative purposes. Although built during the Mughal era by a Mughal Emperor, the mosque incorporates other architectural patterns prevalent in India during that time, which is evident from the sculptures in the Jain and Hindu architectural pattern which adorn the huge courtyard resting on 260 columns on the western side of the mosque. The rocky slabs of the mosque, the arches, the columns, the walls, the domes all bear on them detailed inscriptions, decorations, floral motifs carved on them by the skilled hands of thousands of workers who left

indelible impressions of their superlative skills on every nook and corner of this grand structure.

The journey of this holy shrine has not been a smooth one since its inception in the 16th century. Even a much revered monument as this couldn't escape from the clutches of human hatred and tyranny. The mosque was faced with an uncertain future during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Having crushed the revolt successfully the British decided to garrison their soldiers inside the mosque and use it as one of their barracks thereby meddling with the sanctity of the mosque. With a view to crush the spirit of the people and prevent such uprisings in the future the British even decided to demolish the entire structure although keeping in mind the backlash such an act would generate they decided against doing so. In much more recent times the mosque was subjected to two heinous terror attacks. The first one took place on 6th June 2006 when two explosions rocked the courtyard of the mosque. The twin blasts which were separated by few minutes and meters took place right before the time of Azaan or evening prayer and left thirteen people seriously injured. These low intensity crude explosives as described by the Delhi Police lacked the potential to cause much severe damages however such an act of terror inside one of the holiest shrines in the

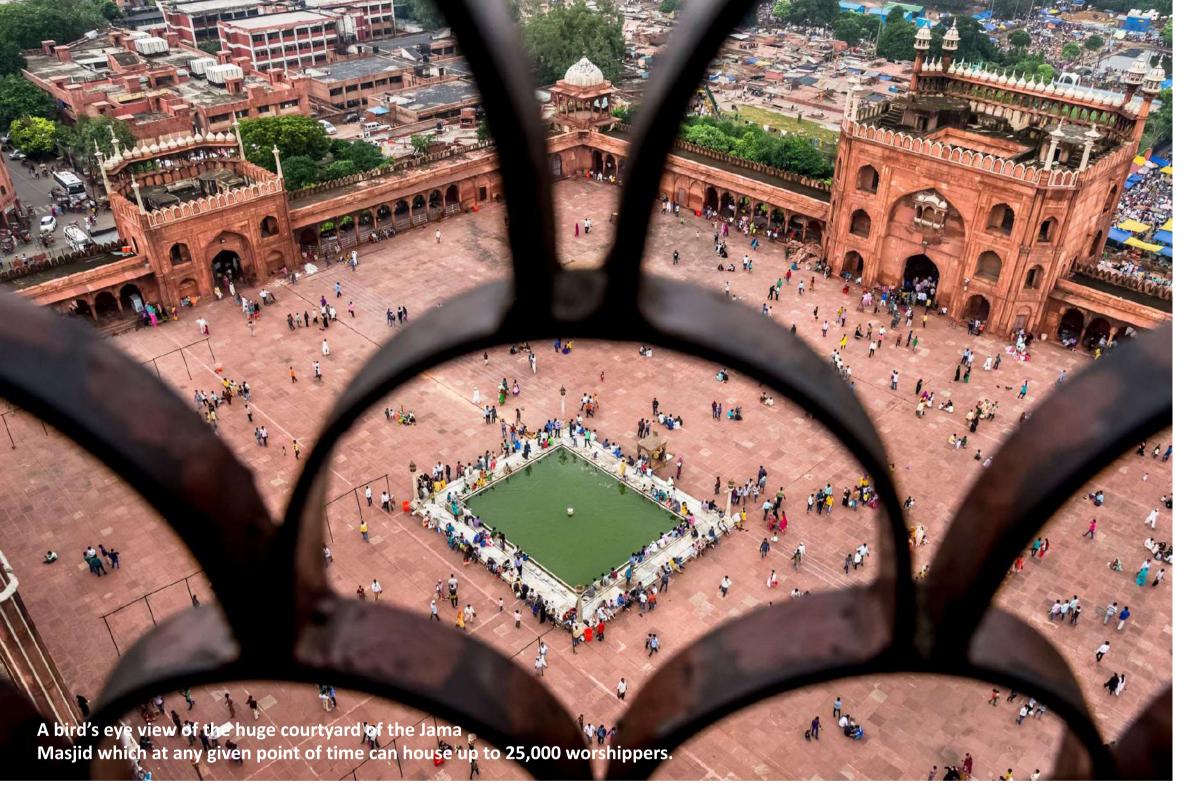




Irrespective of one's faith, the calm and serene atmosphere during the prayer hours is bound to bring peace and calm to the most troubled soul.

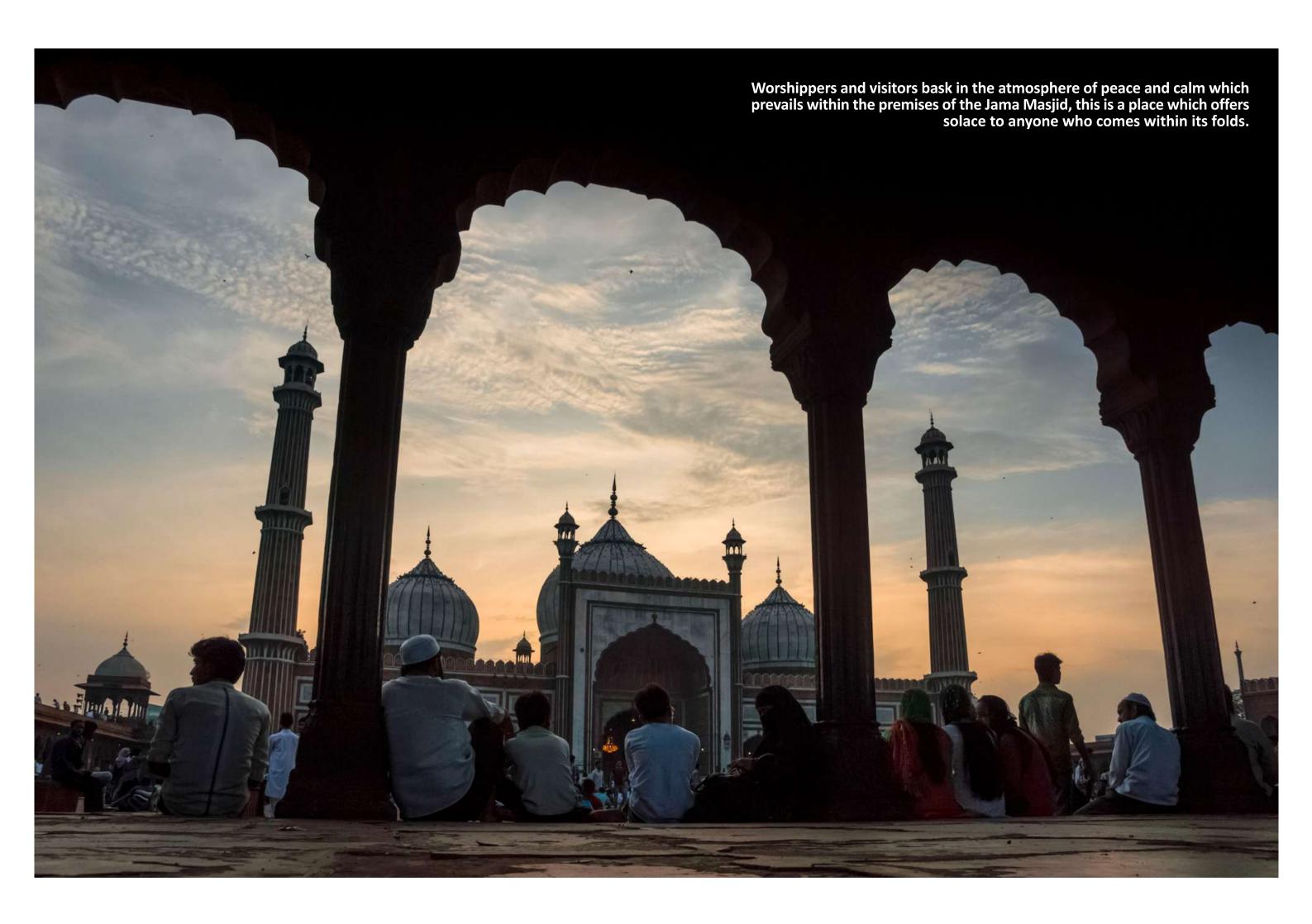




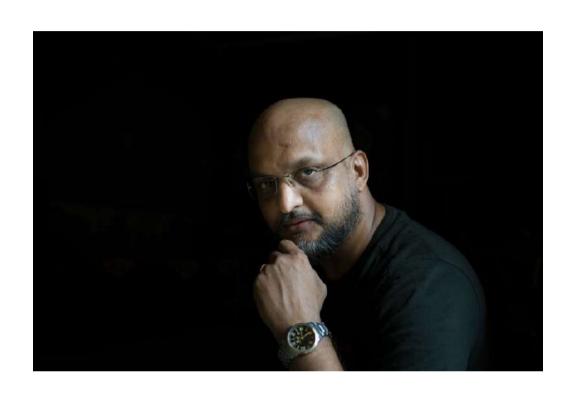


country shook the entire nation. The second and possibly more heinous of the two attacks on the premises of the Jama Masjid took place on 19th September 2010. In a brazen display of hatred and violence two motorcycle borne gunmen opened fire on a tourist bus stationed near gate number 3 of the Jama Masjid injuring two Taiwanese nationals. The incident triggered widespread panic among the worshippers and tourists alike who were present inside the mosque. As people were trying to come to terms with what had transpired, about three hours later barely 150 meters from the spot of the terror attack a parked car went up in flames, which was suspected to be caused by a low intensity explosion. It goes without saying both the acts of terror had the potential to cause much more damage and could have resulted even in the loss of hundreds of lives. Since these attacks security has been beefed up in and around the premises of the mosque with a view to prevent such incidents in future.

This great structure over the course of centuries of existence has overcome a lot of adversities, dealt with tumultuous periods in its history only to emerge stronger. This architectural wonder transcends the boundaries between generations and stands tall in the heart of Delhi as a refuge, offering solace to those who come within its folds. The huge conglomeration of worshippers who gather in the courtyard on Fridays to offer their prayers is a sight to behold. It is amazing how a monument carved out of stone and marbles and concrete become a symbol of hope, a sanctuary for the troubled and a beacon of India's secular fabric. These individual elements woven together in a brilliant tapestry does true justice to the title Masjid-i Jahân-Numâ or the World-Reflecting Mosque bestowed upon this magnificent structure. The Jama Masjid is a place where ancient history unfolds itself in the rocks and stones, a place which opens its heart and soul to the ones in trouble, a place which has for centuries has successfully warded off forces of evil, only to stand tall even in times when dark clouds loom large over the horizon and promises to spread the fervour of love and hope in days even centuries to come.







About the Photographer

A self-taught passionate photographer, especially in capturing candid street moments, architectural life and of travel stories domain, Mr. Navin Vatsa is a combination of versatile personalities. He has his Master's Degree in Computer Applications and taught computers to graduate and post graduate students for over 9 years. He also served in Jagannath University, Jaipur as Joint Registrar for 7 years, and now from last 3 years he has devoted his full time to his in-born Art, Photography. So with the experience of teaching, administration and art, he has the ability to visualize and implement the creative ideas in photography to complete his compositions which tell some unique stories. Photography is like meditation for him. He loves to compose in colors and monochrome both. The monochrome versions of his photographs have the power to spread colors in the mind of his viewers. He has been awarded and recognized by various International and National organizations of repute such as National Geographic, UNESCO, Sony World, Sony India, Inspiro India, Asian Photography & imaging magazine (Nov 2016, Dec 2016 with complete portfolio, February 2017 issues), Creative Image Magazine, Heritage youth Foundation Delhi, Camarena Academy (Best photographer of the year 2016 and awarded by Sir Raghu Rai for the same). One of his photographs was published by Sony India in its "Annual Calendar 2016".

Recently in April-May 2017 in "SONY World Photography Award" one of his photographs in "Travel" category got commended by the juries and was placed within the top 50 entries out of 105,692 submissions from 182 countries and exhibited at the prestigious Somerset House in London from 21st April to 7th May, 2017.Ê

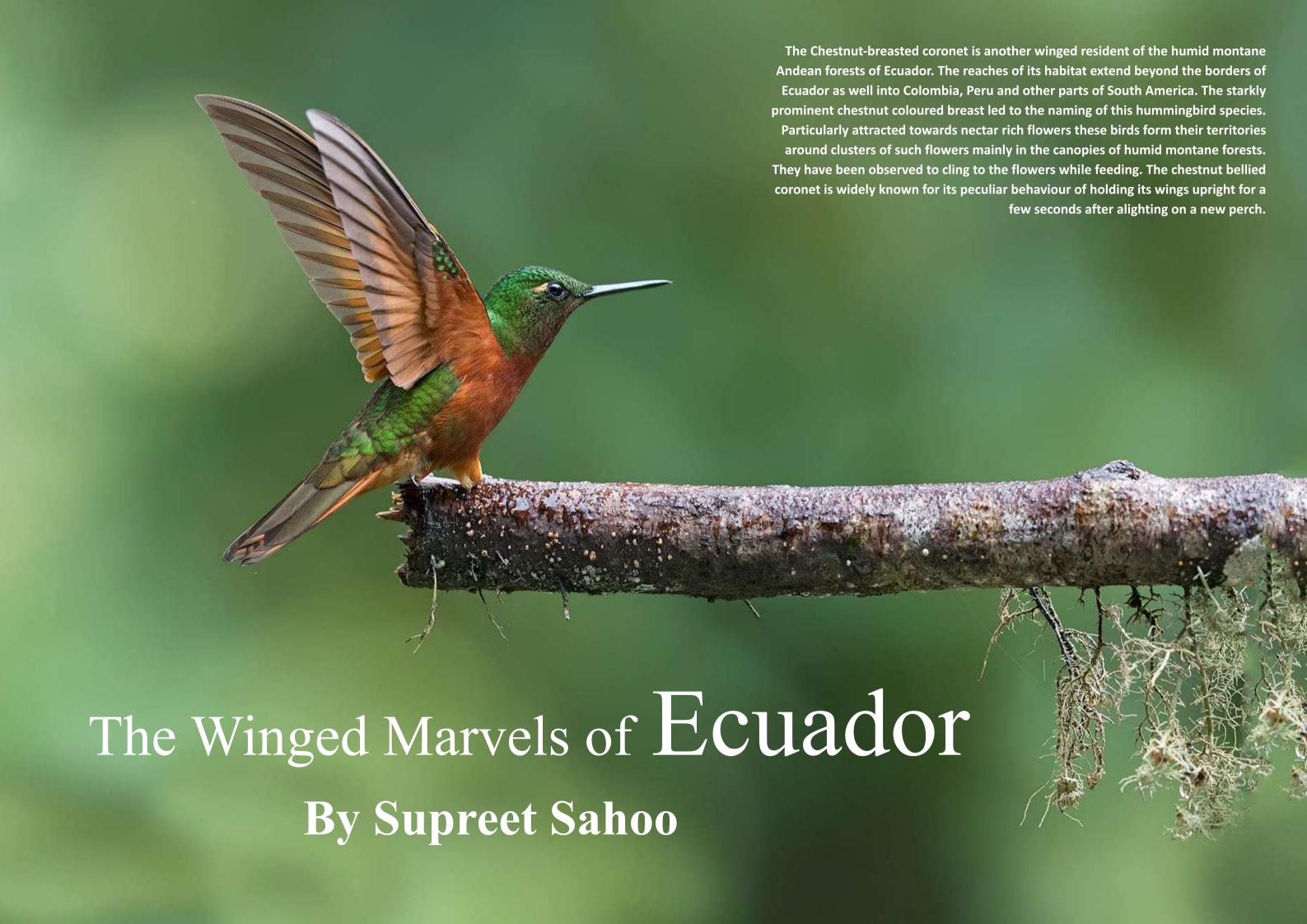
He is one of the mentors and admins of one of the largest Facebook Photography groups, Camarena Academy.

His Art work can also be accessed through:

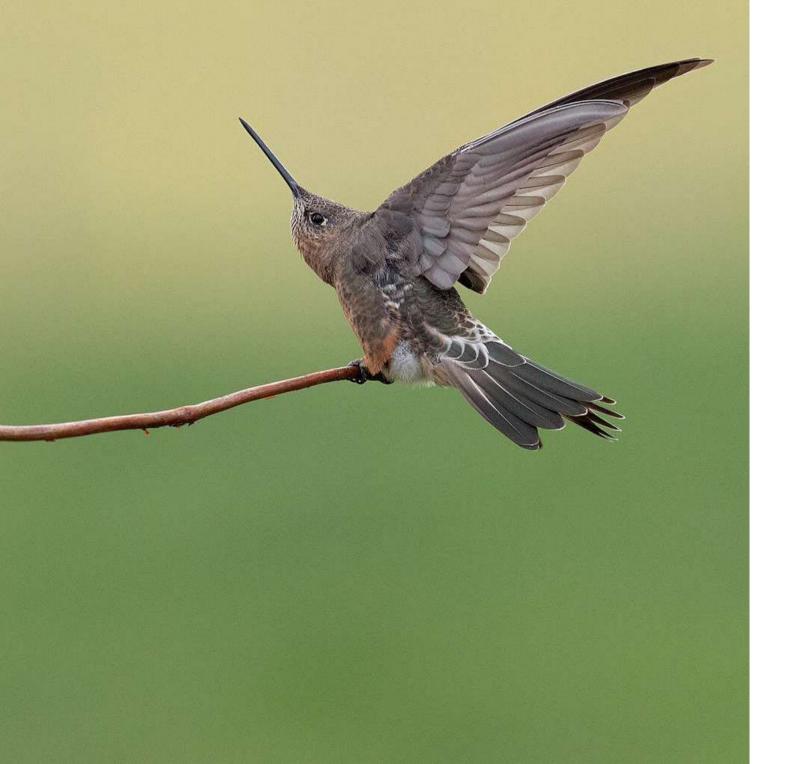
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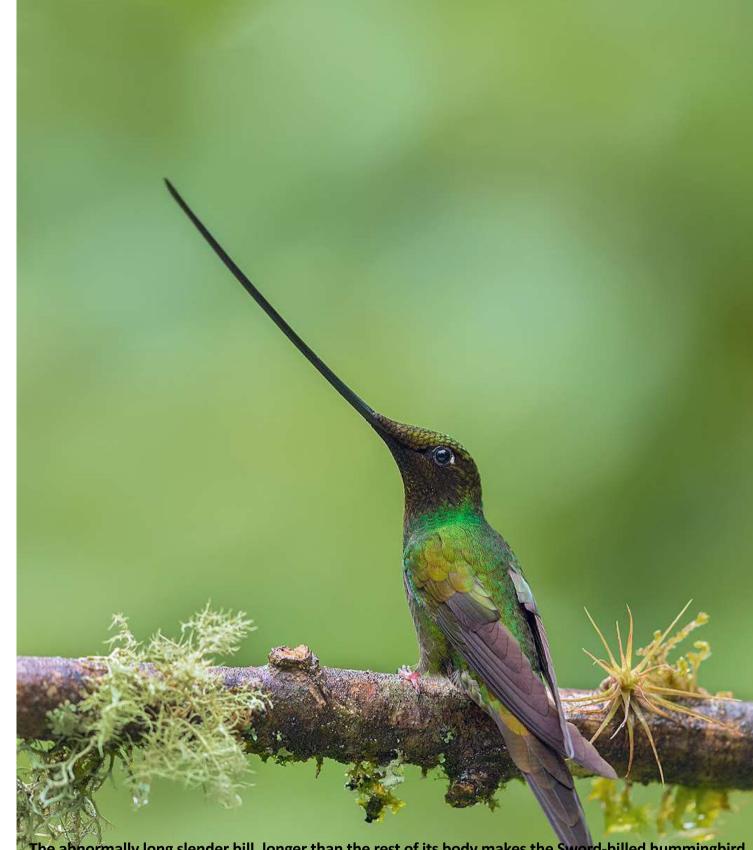
http://yourshot.nationalgeographic.com/profile/1294847/

Facebook account: www.facebook.com/navin.vatsa/
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/navinvatsa/

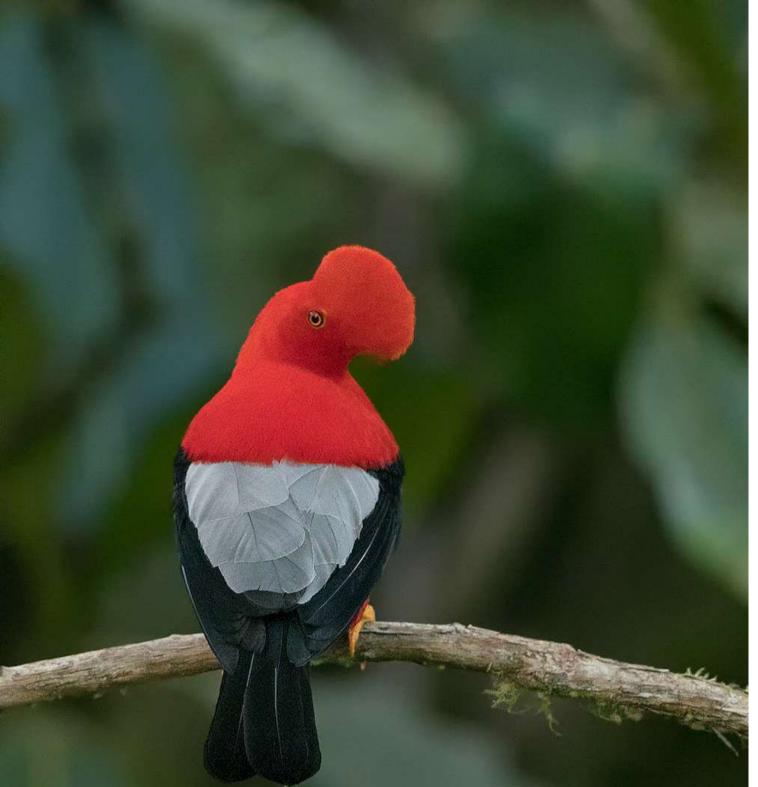


The Giant hummingbird is truly a giant in the miniscule world of hummingbirds. As the name suggests this is by far the largest species of hummingbird. The giant hummingbird can grow up to be as big as a swallow or a swift which is massive when compared to the other species of hummingbirds. This species is fairly common and is one of the most widespread species of hummingbirds in the Andes. The species had to compromise its flight speed for its size, resulting in wingbeats which are notably slower than other species of hummingbirds. However despite being slower in flight than other hummingbirds, these giants of the hummingbird world are extremely agile and acrobatic flyers and have been known to be capable of sustained hovering flights during which they even perform courting rituals. Like others of its species the giant hummingbird too is extremely territorial and aggressively defends its feeding grounds from any intruder. The giant hummingbird prefers a nectar rich diet which they often supplement by the intake of insects rich in proteins.





The abnormally long slender bill, longer than the rest of its body makes the Sword-billed hummingbird stand out. This is the only species of bird in the planet to possess a bill longer than the length of its body. This long bill which enables these birds to dig deep into certain flowers with long corollas where the source of nectar is hidden deep inside them also comes at a price. The Sword-billed hummingbird needs to ensure it keeps its head and bill in an upright position while perching in order to prevent itself from toppling over under the weight of the bill. These birds are found in the wet montane forests of Ecuador at high elevation between 1700 to 3300 meters. It can also be found in similar habitats across Peru, Colombia and Venezuela. The males of this species are known to be extremely territorial and engage in aggressive displays to chase away other birds or even large insects which trespass on to its feeding grounds. During the breeding season, the male performs aerial displays to attract females. The female is solely responsible for nesting duties and bringing up the young chicks.



The Andean Cock of the rock is an unusually beautiful looking bird. These large passerine birds belong to the contiga family and are natives to the upper misty reaches of the Andean forests. These birds are found in the higher elevations of Ecuador although it is probably best known as the national bird of Peru. The male Andean cock-of-the-rock has a bright red-orange head with a prominent disc like crest. The neck, breast and shoulder are all covered in the same bright red plumage. The brownish orange female doesn't display such a prominent crest as the male although it does possess one. Their diet is mainly comprised of fruits and berries of different kinds although on the odd occasion they supplement their diet with servings of insects. During breeding season the Andean cock-of-the-rock males are known to form leks. A lek denotes a gathering of birds during breeding season with the purpose of performing courtship rituals. The mating call of the male resembles the squeals of a pig. They also bob up and down, bow, and hop around to display their bright plumage. The females alone undertake the responsibilities of parenting and are known to build nests of mud under rocky crevices or openings along the slopes of mountains.



Spread widely across Ecuador and other parts of Central and South America the male Vermillion flycatcher is a brilliantly coloured bird. The females lack the bright plumage exhibited by the male and usually display a peach-coloured belly with a dark grey upper side. The male assumes an even more beautiful appearance when it puffs up its feathers either while perching or in mid-air to grab the attention of a nearby female. The vermillion flycatcher usually spends most of its time perched over low lying branches scanning the surroundings for a potential meal. It mainly feeds on insects and often makes quick short periodic flights to nab an insect in the air and returns back to its perch.











The Photographer Speaks

Photography to me is a way to translate what I see and make of the natural world. As an 8-year-old, I was gifted my first camera by my dad which was a simple camera roll Yashica with a fixed lens. Fast forward 25 years the way I perceive the world is still the same. The planet has a lot to see and conserve which is why I decided to move away from the traditional photography practices back home in India and evolve to what I truly aspire to be. Spending time in the rainforests of South America has been the most revolutionary experience of my life so far. When you walk inside a forest knowing that everything around you is full of life it changes your perception towards life. In the last 2 years, I have tried to do what a lot of photographers have not. Unfortunately, bird photography as a process has both evolved and regressed at the same time in the last decade but through my work, I try to inspire people to preserve what they see and respect every living thing around us. My mission in the next 5 years is to cover more locations in the Amazon and South America. If you would like to be part of the mission let me know.

"In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught." (Baba Dioum, 1968)

Instagram -

https://www.instagram.com/supreet.sahoo/

His other ventures

"My love for the natural world and its species draws me to the wild world on the flimsiest of pretexts. Having embarked upon many such trips over the years I have been blessed with the opportunities to peep into the lives of some of the most exotic species and garner invaluable knowledge about various aspects of their lives. Being a naturalist first, nothing gives me more pleasure than sharing these experiences with others and exposing them to these amazing chronicles from the natural world. Keeping this in mind I organise photo tours not just as a photo mentor but more as a species expert that one would like to see and photograph during these trips. While organising such trips my primary concern is to make these trips cost effective so that it can cater to the need of a much larger section of photography and wildlife enthusiasts. My aim is to bridge the gap between the birders and photographers from India (and other Asian countries) while being cognizant of the expenses and other needs of Indian photographers.

Most of my trips which I undertake are concentrated in and around the forests in Central and South American locations with Costa Rica and Ecuador being two of my most favoured locations. However for some time now I have been focussed on expanding the horizons with Central Brazil, Peru, Mexico and Colombia soon to be added to my portfolio."

Click here to subscribe to my newsletter:

https://www.supreetsahoo.com/contact

Supreet Sahoo apart from his skills behind the camera is well known as a naturalist and a tour operator to the forests of Central and South America. His vast experience of these forests and his intricate knowledge of the species which inhabit these wildernesses prove to be instrumental in not just getting the perfect shot but also in an acute understanding of the forest and the entire eco-system.

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Congratulations to those who got featured in the READER'S Section



Debojyoti Lahiri



Dipayan Bose



Debadri Mondal



Soubik Debnath