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INDIAN

TRAVELOGUE | DOCUMENTARIES

PHOTO ARTS

November 2018

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Dear Readers

In this issue we have highlighted one of the most pressing issues concerning the natural world and one of its subjects. The island of Borneo in south-east Asia is home to one of the last sizeable populations of orangutan. Sadly this island and its vast stretches of tropical rainforest are under severe threat and the orangutan seems to be the worst hit. Illegal logging, large scale mining operations and the ever increasing palm oil plantations have engulfed vast swathes of this wilderness and are showing no signs of slowing down. The demand for palm oil in the international market has multiplied manifolds over the last decade or so. Palm oil apart from widely used for cooking is an essential component for the manufacturing of a number of items which are frequently consumed, such as cookies, margarine, chocolate, detergent, shampoo, and soap among others. This increasing demand has converted thousands of acres of Borneo's rainforest into palm oil plantation rendering thousands of species homeless. The orangutans are reeling under this severe pressure of rapidly vanishing habitat. To further complicate matters for these great apes poaching and the illegal wildlife trade industry have contributed significantly towards the rapidly dwindling population. In the last 16 years the world has lost more than 50% of its orangutan population and at this rate in maybe another fifty odd years there will not be a single wild orangutan left. The time is ripe for all of us to act unless we want to witness the extinction of yet another species.

Regards

Rahul Bera (Editor of Photography & Design)

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 Indian Photo ARTS

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*cover page photograph by
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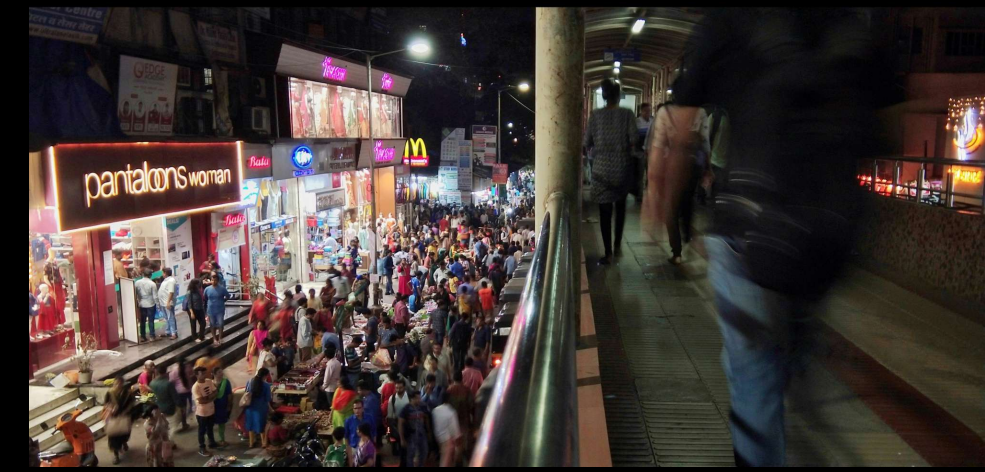
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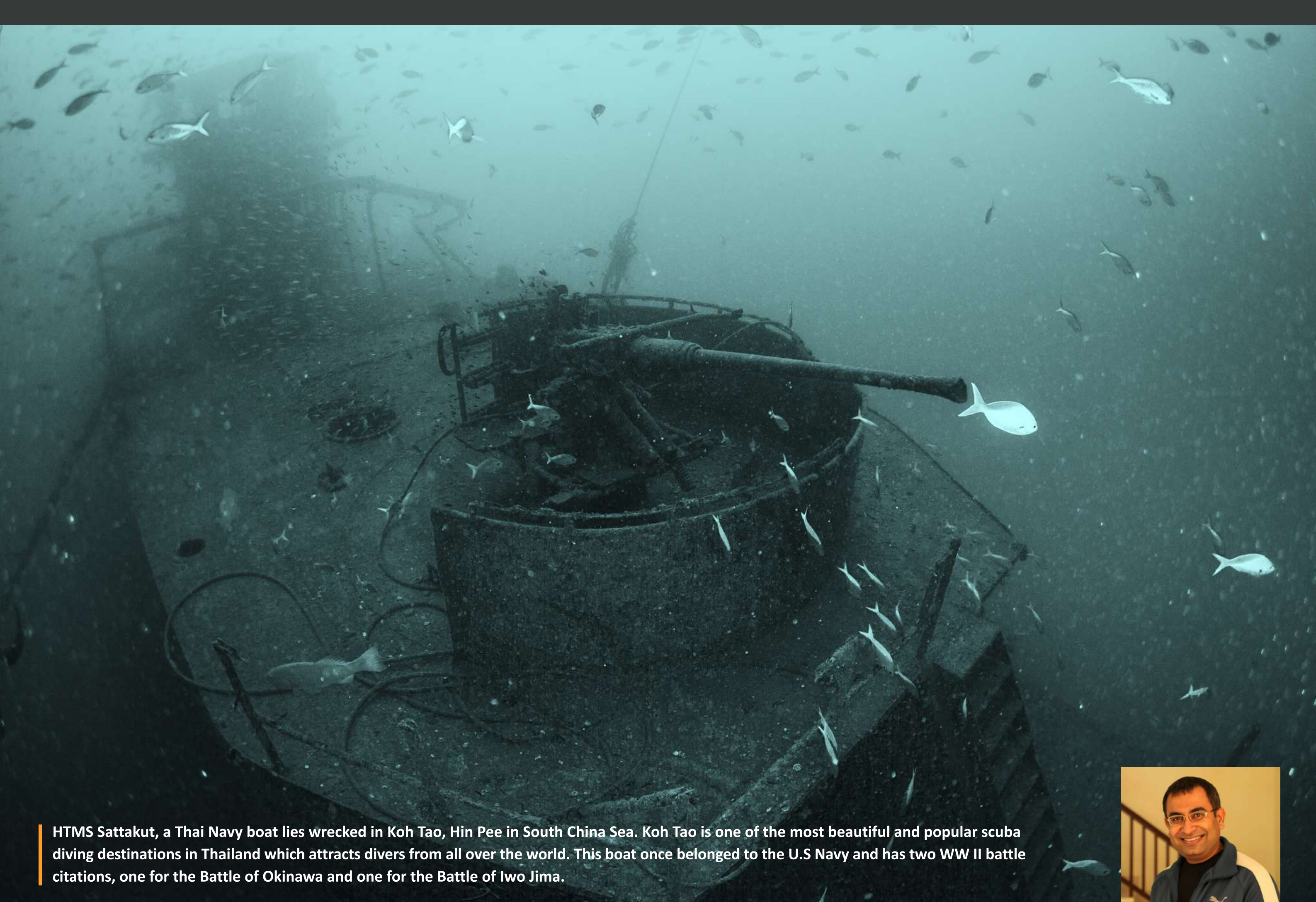
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Reader's Section

Featuring the best entries made by our readers.
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HTMS Sattakut, a Thai Navy boat lies wrecked in Koh Tao, Hin Pee in South China Sea. Koh Tao is one of the most beautiful and popular scuba diving destinations in Thailand which attracts divers from all over the world. This boat once belonged to the U.S Navy and has two WW II battle citations, one for the Battle of Okinawa and one for the Battle of Iwo Jima.



Photograph by Samya Sengupta



शोलेश्वर →

One of the most famous and widely photographed tigresses of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve in India, who is officially identified as T-8, is a mother of two male cubs. This ancient temple which is visited by devotees falls within her territory, a place she often visits. Such scenes perfectly encapsulate the close association, often peaceful, humans have had with tigers and other wild animals in many parts of India.



Photograph by Keyur Nandaniya

The district of Purulia in the state of West Bengal, India is famous for its tradition of “Chhau” dance, during which dancers wearing colourful masks impersonate various mythological characters and perform episodes from Hindu mythologies. A man carries one such dancer on his bicycle amidst a landscape dotted with the tall grasses with woolly white flowers known as “kash”, a familiar sight during autumn.



Photograph by Mandar Shikhar Mandal



Kho kho, one of the most popular and ancient tag sports in India along with kabaddi is still hugely popular and kho kho tournaments such as this one in the outskirts of urban India are still a common occurrence. There is no clear record regarding the origin of this sport but it is widely accepted the sport owes its origin to the state of Maharashtra.



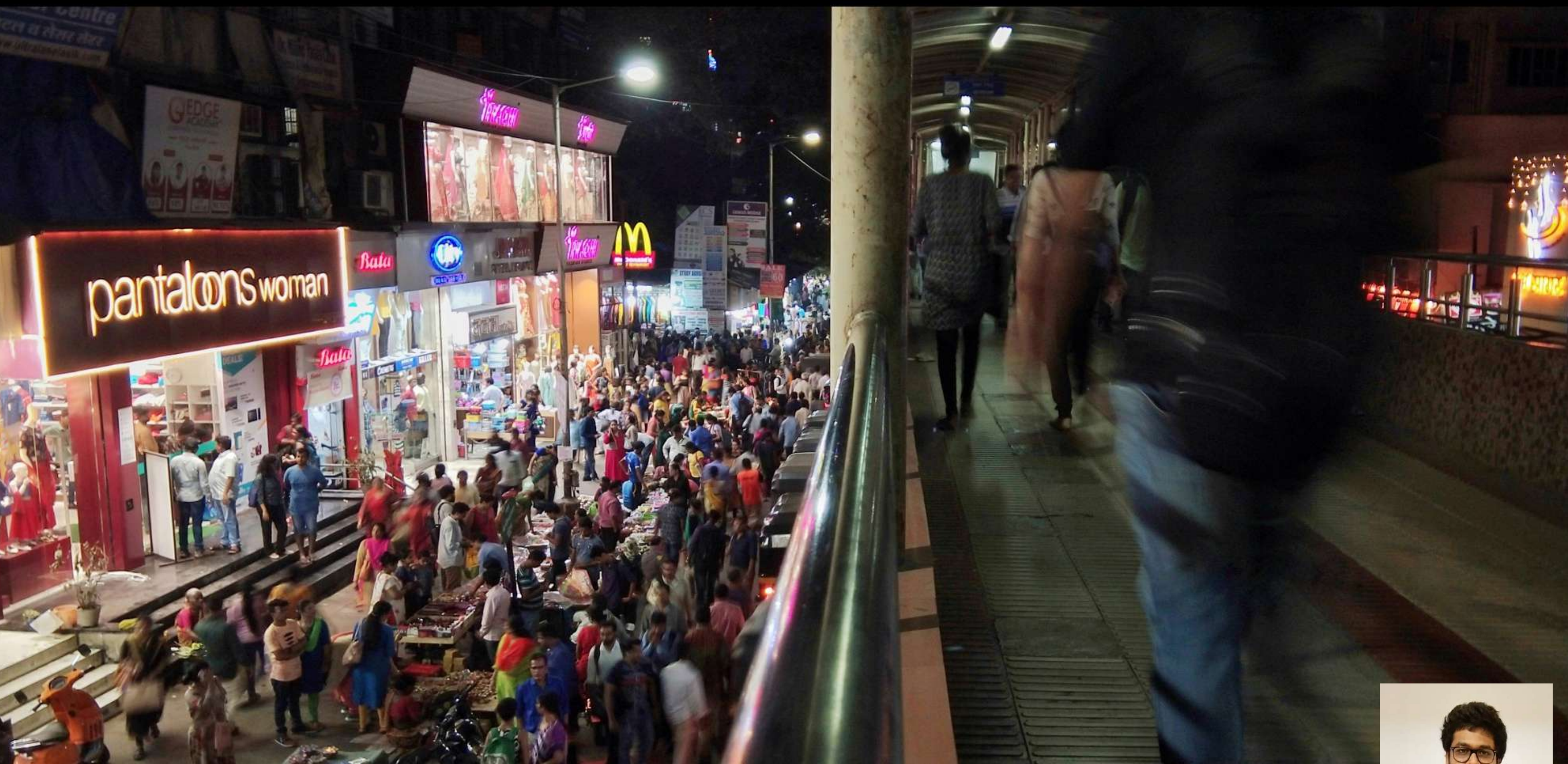
Photograph by Amit Raju Pawar



Butterflies and moths regularly hover around piles of mud, dung or even decaying flesh. This behaviour known as mud-puddling is a common one among butterflies and it is believed they do so to seek out the nutrients including salts and amino acids from such decaying matters. These butterflies were observed doing exactly the same around a pile of dung in the outskirts of Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand, India.



Photograph by Trikansh Sharma



Diwali rush hour as viewed from the SATIS bridge in Thane reveals how life travels at a breakneck pace in our big cities and how we are relentless in pursuit of that life which we fear may elude us with the searing pace at which it travels. The frenzied activities, the hurried pace often leave little room for us to reflect upon anything else in our surroundings.



Photograph by Jasraj Date

On the Verge

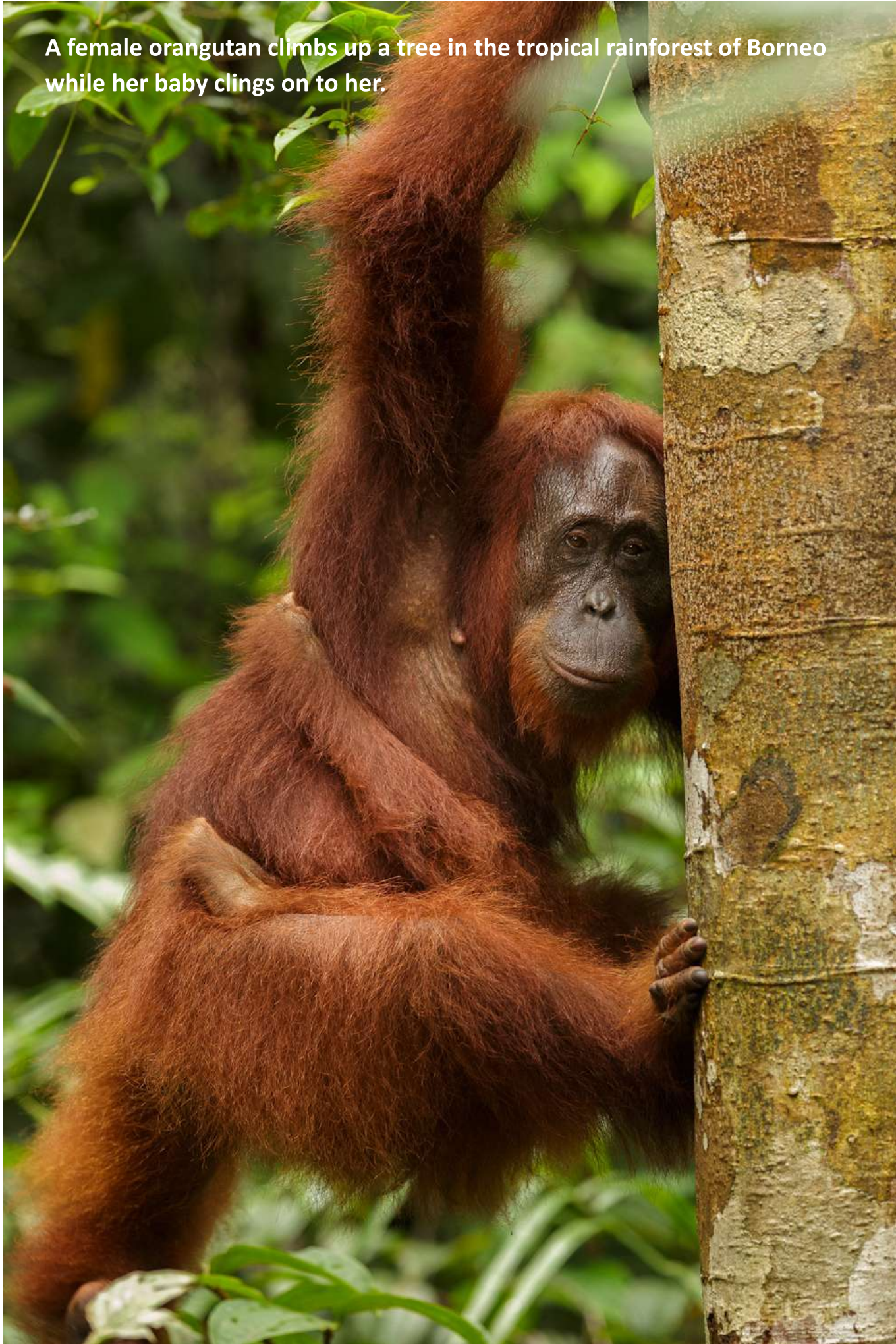
by Nilkamal Malakar

Borneo's Great Apes

Orangutans in the tropical rainforests of Borneo are battling illegal hunting, large scale mining operations and an ever surging demand for palm oil. Rapidly vanishing habitats have brought these primates perilously close to extinction as a very uncertain tomorrow stares at these very human like apes.

The island of Borneo stands out for a number of reasons. The island boasts of a number of distinctive features on many fronts, starting with being the largest island in Asia and the third largest in the whole world. From a political standpoint the island of Borneo enjoys the unique distinction of being divided between three different nations- Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. However it is the incredible biodiversity of this island which has earned it a prominent place of its own on the world map and has lured scientists and naturalists into its pristine green realms for centuries. It is believed Borneo is home to one of the oldest rainforests on the planet. The hot and humid tropical climate which prevails upon this island facilitated the explosion of life that took place on this landmass millions of years ago. In fact conservative estimates suggest the rainforest of Borneo is more than 140 million years old. This vast stretch of ancient rainforest system is home to a number of endemic species and is considered by many as one of the many epicentres of evolution on the face of this planet. The isolated location of Borneo cut off from the rest of the world by water bodies on all sides led to the origin of some unique species and their unique evolution on this landmass. Some of the iconic species which are endemic to this island include the Borneo pygmy elephant, the Sunda clouded leopard which is now considered to be an entirely different species distinct from the mainland

A female orangutan climbs up a tree in the tropical rainforest of Borneo while her baby clings on to her.



clouded leopard and among others the critically endangered Sumatran rhinoceros—the smallest of this species, the fate of which hinges precariously upon a few small populations one of which can be found in Borneo. Yet the Bornean wilderness is possibly best known for being home to the Bornean orangutan one of the three species of orangutan and a native to this island. Orangutans in fact are the only representatives belonging to the genus of great apes found in the continent of Asia.

...the Bornean orangutan too is a heavyweight animal. In fact it is the third heaviest primate after the two species of gorillas. Males are considerably larger and heavier than females and weigh between 70-80 kg while the females are lighter weighing between 30-50 kg.

The moist tropical and sub-tropical forests of Borneo are the perfect homes for these primates. Orangutans spend most of their lifetime among trees; hence Bornean rainforests with their dense canopies have been the preferred choice for home for these animals for many centuries now. Belonging to the family of great apes like their African cousins the two species of gorillas, the Bornean orangutan too is a

heavyweight animal. In fact it is the third heaviest primate after the two species of gorillas. Males are considerably larger and heavier than the females, while male orangutans in the wild on an average weigh between 70-80 kg the females are lighter weighing between 30-50 kg. The greyish skin, often saggy in nature is covered by a coarse coat of long fur which is a mixture of red-brown and orange in appearance. A number of external features separate the males from the females. The most telling of them all is the presence of large and pronounced cheek pads on the faces of the males. These pads are made up of muscle and large amount of fat. Females too possess them but they are much less pronounced and don't appear anywhere as elaborate as the male's due to the lack of fat. In addition to this males display a considerably larger throat sac and much more prominent facial hair. Due to the noticeable difference in weights males do appear larger and bulkier than their female counterparts. The unusually long limbs which stand out and give the Bornean orangutan a distinct appearance and the prehensile hands and feet facilitate the largely arboreal way of life of these primates.

Orangutans are semi-solitary species; the males prefer a solitary way of life while the females sometimes indulge in the company of other females. Males come in contact with the females briefly for the purpose of mating and take no part in the upbringing of their offspring. Usually the



Large flappy cheek pads in mature males such as this one are common among orangutans although many mature males do not possess them. These cheek pads known as flanges are a combination of muscle and fat. Females prefer males with flanges over those without them while choosing their mating partners.

dominant male enjoys the mating rights however it is not uncommon among other males to sneak up on any opportunity that comes their way in the absence of the dominant male. Females with infants are usually non-receptive and tend to steer clear of mature males or turn down their advances. The females are far more tolerant towards sub-adult males who tend to get along fine with the elderly females or adolescent females. It is not uncommon among adolescent females to form their own sisterhood and even travel together in search of food or new home. However it must be noted the social structure is also largely influenced by a number of external factors which include the availability of fruit, the presence or absence of large arboreal predators and even the degree of ease with which they can access their preferred habitats. In the face of increasing predator attacks or depleting food sources or vanishing habitats existing societal structures often give way to new ones which are often built on the premise of strength in numbers. Compared to females adult males are far less tolerant of each other's presence and things flare up particularly in the presence of a sexually receptive female. However they prefer to adopt the violent approach as a last resort. Flanged adult males make good use of their pronounced throat sacs to give off warning calls to deter their potential rivals. Incidentally these laryngeal sacs are put to good use in trying to woo the females as well when the males advertise their

availability to interested females. These calls can travel for more than a distance of one kilometre. If the rivals choose to ignore these warnings combat between two males becomes inevitable. These aggressive encounters may last for a few minutes to over an hour and the ensuing violence often leaves both the parties with serious injuries, scars, missing toes, fingers and eyes or can even bring about an untimely death.

Flanged adult males make good use of their pronounced throat sacs to give off warning calls to deter their rivals. Incidentally these laryngeal sacs are put to good use in trying to woo the females as well when the males advertise their availability to interested females.

The association between an orangutan mother and her baby is a particularly peculiar one in the animal kingdom since no other living being except for human beings shares such longstanding and intense bond with their offspring. A female orangutan usually after a gestation period of 8-9 months gives birth to a single offspring. For the first 2-3 years of its life the baby is entirely dependent on its mother and feeds on the mother's milk. Orangutan mothers are possibly the most diligent

ones in the natural world and spend a great deal of time and energy in bringing up their young ones. For the first few years when the baby is entirely dependent on its mother it clings to the mother's body or to her back almost all the time, even while the mother keeps moving through the canopies in search of new nests or food. As they grow bigger the mother stop carrying them around but keeps a close watch on her baby. A baby orangutan often stays close to the mother honing the necessary skills for survival by observing the mother closely. Such close association may last till the young orangutans are 10-12 years old. Once they reach their adolescence they prefer to hang out with other orangutans of similar age. Yet the strong bond they shared often lasts beyond the age of sexual maturity. Females attain sexual maturity at the age of 15-16, yet it is not uncommon among young females to pay periodic visits to their mothers, another instance of a uniquely strong sense of kinship which is quite rare even among mammals in the natural world. Scientists are of the opinion that such a longstanding association between the mother and her baby is a result of the unforgiving nature of the rainforest eco-system. Life in the treetops is by no means an easy feat to master. The young orangutans probably need a considerable amount of time to learn and perfect some of the unique ways of arboreal life which include picking the right kind of fruits or vegetation for consumption, the use of various tools to

forage for food, detecting a potential predator or any harmful presence and identifying the ideal site for building nests and how to build them. Mastering all of these understandably takes a lot of time and that could possibly be one of the reasons for this long lasting bond which exists between orangutan mothers and their young ones. Upon maturity the males wander off further away from the territories of their mothers while females stay closer to their mothers and their territories may often overlap with the territories of their mothers.

An average day in the life of an orangutan is spent mostly in the tree tops or even higher up in the canopies. Orangutans are diurnal animals and a major portion of their day is spent in foraging for food. Nights are spent in the comfort of their nests. Orangutans have been observed to build nests for themselves every night from branches, twigs and leaves at 20-100 feet above the ground with a view to avoid any predator lurking on the forest floor. It comes as little surprise that human beings have always found stark similarities in an orangutan's way of life with themselves. In fact one such scientific study albeit contentiously claimed orangutans and not chimpanzees are the closest relatives to human beings. It is true human beings and orangutans shared a common ancestor roughly 14 million years ago, in contrast to the shared ancestry between humans and chimpanzees which existed roughly 5-7 million years ago. These numbers



(left) For the first few years of its life an orangutan baby is entirely dependent on its mother and clings to its mother's body or back almost all the time. The mother carries the baby even when she is on the move until her young one becomes too heavy to be carried around. A young orangutan may stay close to its mother till it is 10-12 years old.

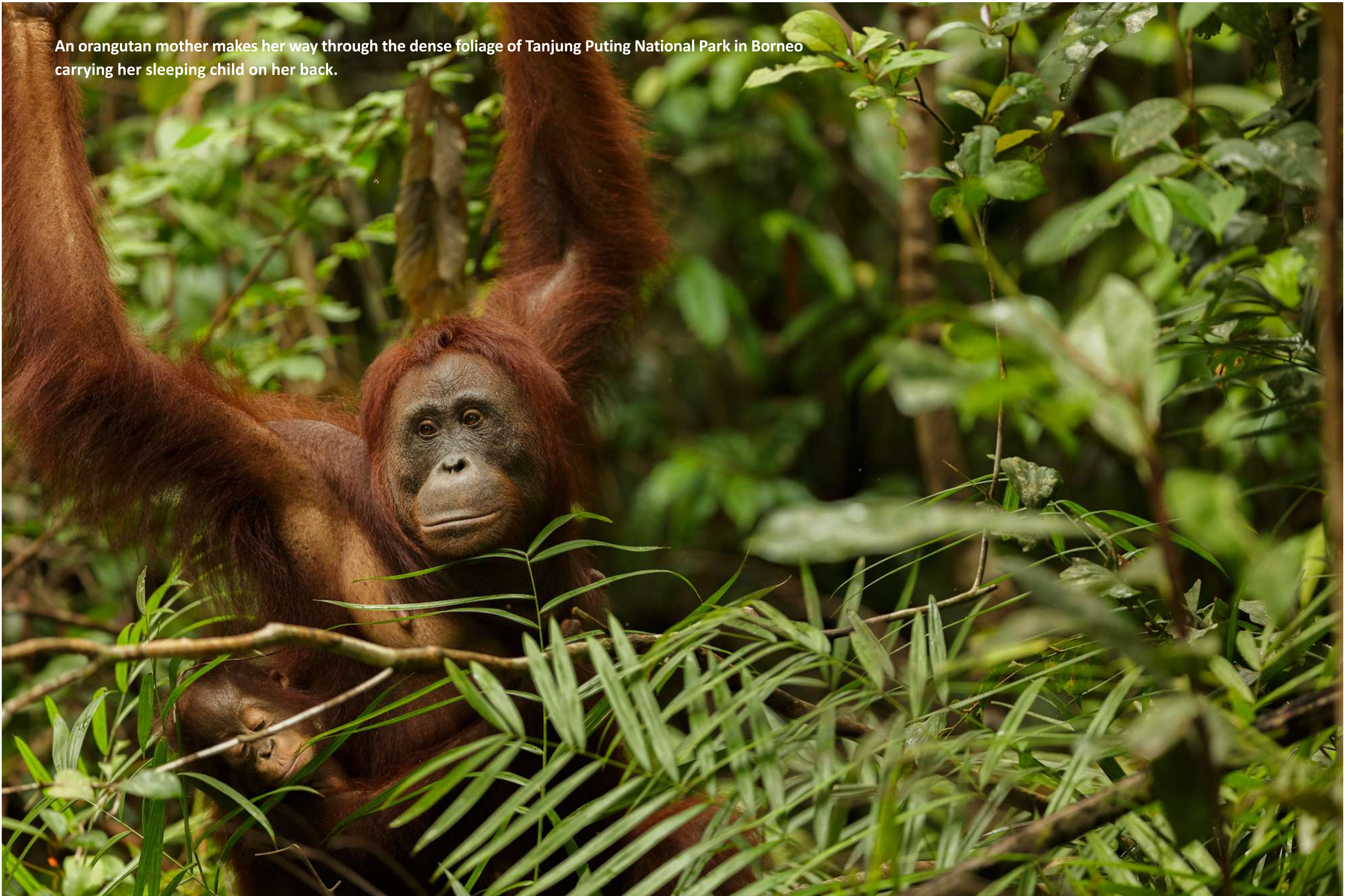
conclusive evidences purely because while it firmly established the fact that there are many similarities between orangutans and humans, many such similarities are also noticed between humans and other great apes such as chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos. A further criticism of this theory was the studies fell short of distinguishing between features that are widely shared and those which are more uniquely shared. Irrespective of these findings there can be no denying orangutans are very human-like apes. Such an understanding has the potential to cement a secure future for this endangered species. From identifying various elements found on the forest floor as tools which would facilitate and ease their task of foraging or building a nest to communicating with human beings through sign languages orangutans display a wide range of complex behaviours which rightfully earn them the tag of being one of the most intelligent primates. In addition to these their wide range of communication skills is a further testimony to this claim. In fact orangutans are the only non-human

certainly make us more relatable to the chimpanzees than the orangutans. However the study highlighted a striking revelation. The study revealed some sequences of an orangutan DNA are a closer match to human DNA than chimpanzees. A separate research, though a rather controversial one preceding the above mentioned one

advocated for the same findings, although this particular school of thought was largely based on physical characteristics rather than genome sequences. According to this study human beings and orangutans share a multitude of similarities in their physical characteristics in comparison to chimpanzees and gorillas. The study

highlighted various similarities such as widest separated mammary glands, longest growing hair, presence of a hairline unlike other primates where hair grows until the top of the eyes, similarly shaped shoulder blades, asymmetry in the right and left hemisphere of the brain among others. However this study failed to provide any

An orangutan mother makes her way through the dense foliage of Tanjung Puting National Park in Borneo carrying her sleeping child on her back.



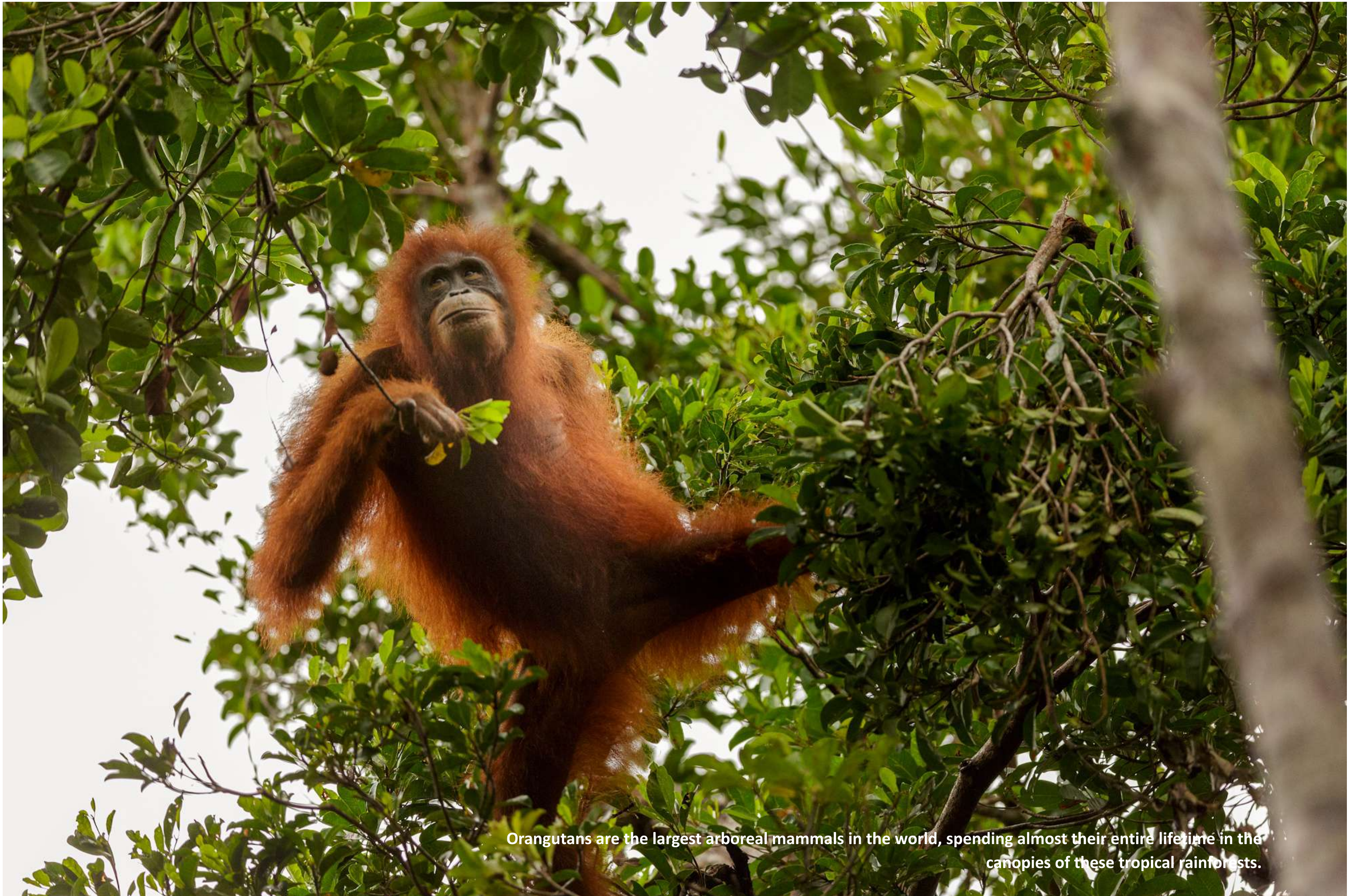


An arboreal way of life demands every individual to be expert climbers and acrobatic, even youngsters master these skills at an early age.

primate capable of displaced reference or simply put the ability to talk about the past. In an experiment two scientists dressed up as tigers or other potential predators tricked seven orangutan mothers into believing that they were under attack. Remarkably the team recorded over 24 such simulations the mothers sounded warning calls to their babies only on 12 occasions, on the other 12 occasions the mothers preferred to maintain silence. In fact on a few occasions the alarm calls were not sounded immediately, instead the mothers chose to wait for a period of time before sounding the alarm. The scientists believed the orangutan's ability to respond to any stimuli is an effective marker for its cognitive abilities and intellectual capacities. The ability to remember events from past and act upon it in this particular case sounding the alarm long after the scientists impersonating a tiger had passed is an incredible ability which the orangutan possesses among non-human primates. In fact this could certainly in the years to come pave the pathway for the further evolution of a new language which will most certainly bear resemblances to human speech. Their human like behaviours received further validation when scientists discovered cultural variations among orangutans in different parts of Borneo and Sumatra. A particular set of behaviour could be noticed among orangutans belonging to one part of the forest while a different set of behaviour not noticeable in the previous

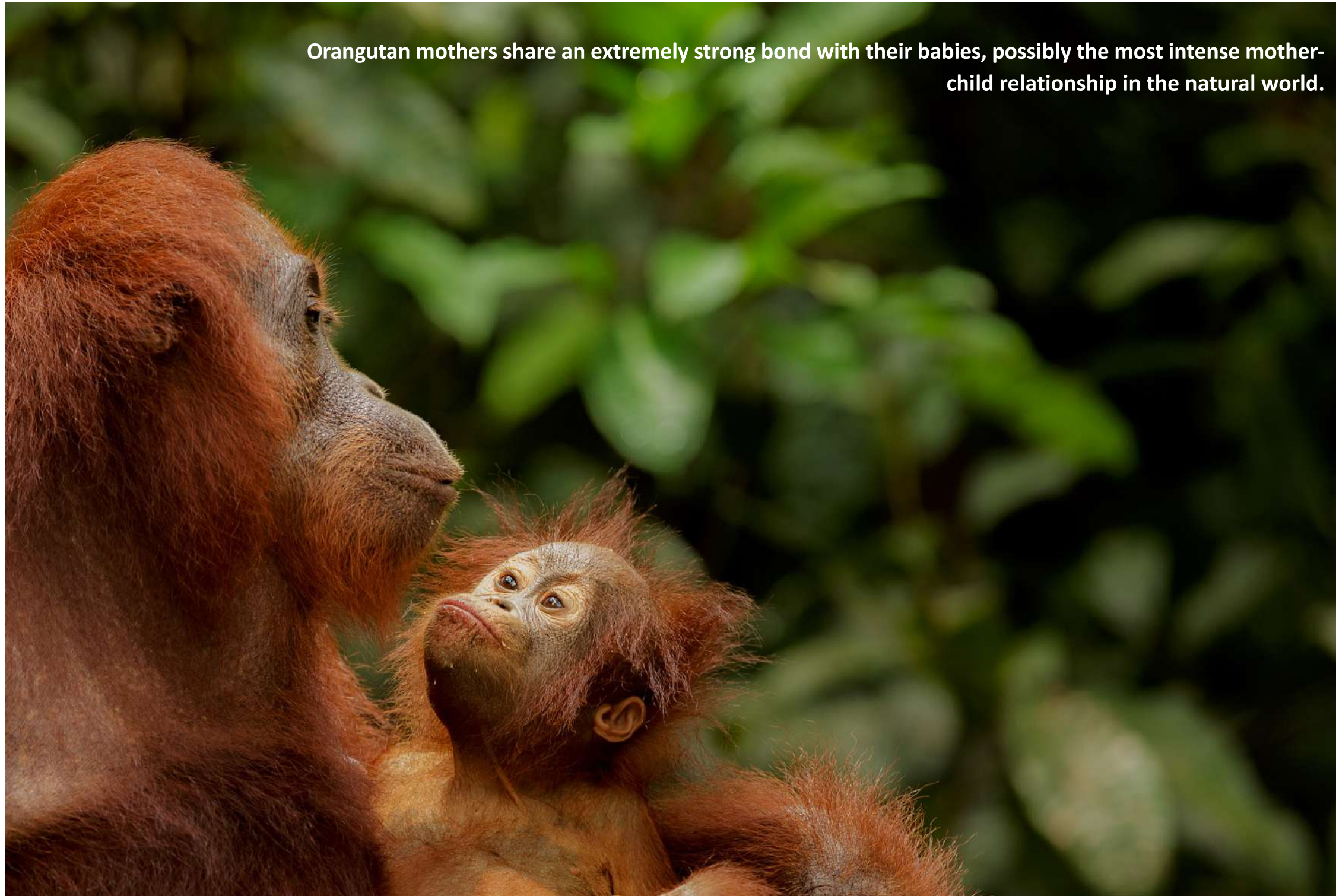
population could be found in other parts, something which deeply resembles human societies belonging to different parts of the world. It was observed a certain population of orangutans in Bornean rainforest would use leaves as napkins to wipe off fruit remnants or saps or juices from their chins or faces while a different set of population in neighbouring Sumatra would put the leaves to good use as gloves while plucking edible fruits from spiny tree branches or even as cushions to sit on them. This clearly hinted at a cultural occurrence something which has been passed on through generations and has varying implications.

In spite of their remarkable intelligence and similarities with human beings these great apes are on the verge of extinction and face some very real threats which have been obliterating their populations at an alarming rate. Orangutans have been living in close association with human beings for centuries. They enjoyed mixed fortunes with the native people of Borneo and Sumatra, while some hunted them for their meat, fur or for decoration while others largely abstained from any such practices. European explorers who landed in Borneo killed these animals extensively or would often capture them and traffic them back to different countries in Europe where these animals would become parts of various circus groups or kept as pets by the rich and wealthy. Until the researches of Birute Galdikas became available in the public domain there was very little



Orangutans are the largest arboreal mammals in the world, spending almost their entire lifetime in the canopies of these tropical rainforests.

Orangutan mothers share an extremely strong bond with their babies, possibly the most intense mother-child relationship in the natural world.



known about wild orangutans and their natural behaviours. Galdikas through her painstaking research which lasted for almost 30 years amassed huge amount of knowledge about orangutans by observing them in the forests of Borneo. An ardent advocate for the conservation and rehabilitation of captured orangutans

Galdikas's efforts have gone a long way in ushering in some significant decisions taken by the authority with a view of safeguarding the future of orangutans which includes the decision taken by the Indonesian government to declare Tanjung Puting a national park in 1982. Despite these efforts and the hard work put in by

conservationists and scientists the future appears bleak for these primates. Since the late 1980s Borneo has seen large scale destruction of its rainforests, falling prey to the booming mining and logging industry. However the damage caused by these two industries cannot possibly add up to match the havoc caused by palm oil.

Palm oil is used extensively for the manufacturing of a plethora of frequently consumed products such as soaps, shampoos, cookies, detergents, toothpastes and many others. To make matters worse oil palm grows only in the humid, tropical climate which Borneo experiences, making it a hot bed for palm oil plantations. Palm oil generates significant revenue for the Indonesian government and accounts for more than 11% of Indonesia's export earnings. A statistic which clearly hints at possible indifference from the authorities when it comes to the fate of these animals as long as palm oil keeps filling the coffers. Generating widespread awareness and strict international laws have successfully brought down the menace of trafficking of baby orangutans to the illegal pet trade unchecked deforestation still remains the biggest threat. Along with the menace of illegal felling of trees, hunting and killing have resulted in a dramatic decline of

Palm oil generates significant revenue for the Indonesian government and accounts for more than 11% of Indonesia's export earnings. A statistic which clearly hints at possible indifference from the authorities when it comes to the fate of these animals...



Orangutans share their domain with the proboscis monkey or the long nosed monkey known for the signature bulbous long noses sported by the males. Females such as this one do possess long noses compared to other monkeys but they are not as pronounced as in males. Like orangutans proboscis monkeys too are largely arboreal.



(left) In addition to the wide range of communication skills orangutans are believed to be the only non-human primate capable of displaced reference or simply put talk about their past. Apart from their signature “long calls” they use a range of sounds to communicate.

hunting and killing together will spell doom for this species in a matter of possibly another 50 years and yet another species will fall prey to our sheer madness and brutality unless fresh and drastic measures are adopted. The situation is turning graver for these animals with every passing day and to address that the entire world should lend hand in a collective effort. Surging demand for palm oil is a severe threat to these animals, and every household across the globe in more ways than one albeit indirectly contributing to the demise of yet another orangutan with each and every passing day. As consumers it becomes our responsibility to be ethical, even in our buying practices and compel the manufacturers to operate by staying within the realms of guidelines and regulations, which would allow the rainforests time to replenish their losses and at least if not anything else slow down the rate of dwindling population. And maybe this is that one window of opportunity which these remarkable and resilient creatures need to stage a comeback and once again crowd the leafy canopies of Borneo’s rainforests and pierce the dense foliage with their iconic long calls.

150,000 or more individuals in the forests of Borneo in the last 16 years. Scientists believe Borneo is currently home to 70,000-100,000 orangutans, which means Borneo has lost more than 50% of its orangutan population within a span of 16 years. In the wake of such sorry state of affairs some regions of Bornean rainforest

are reporting encouraging news. A WWF-led survey in Borneo’s Sebangau National Park showed that its orangutan population of 6,000–9,000, likely the largest in the world, has remained stable while orangutan numbers increased in Suka Jaya Makmur, a forest concession area in Borneo. A creature so similar to human beings

ironically faces the greatest of threats from us. Our sheer disregard for nature and its elements, our arrogance and absolute insensitivity towards our very own history of evolution have pushed one of the more sophisticated being in the natural world to the brink of extinction. The rapid rate of deforestation, unchecked and illegal



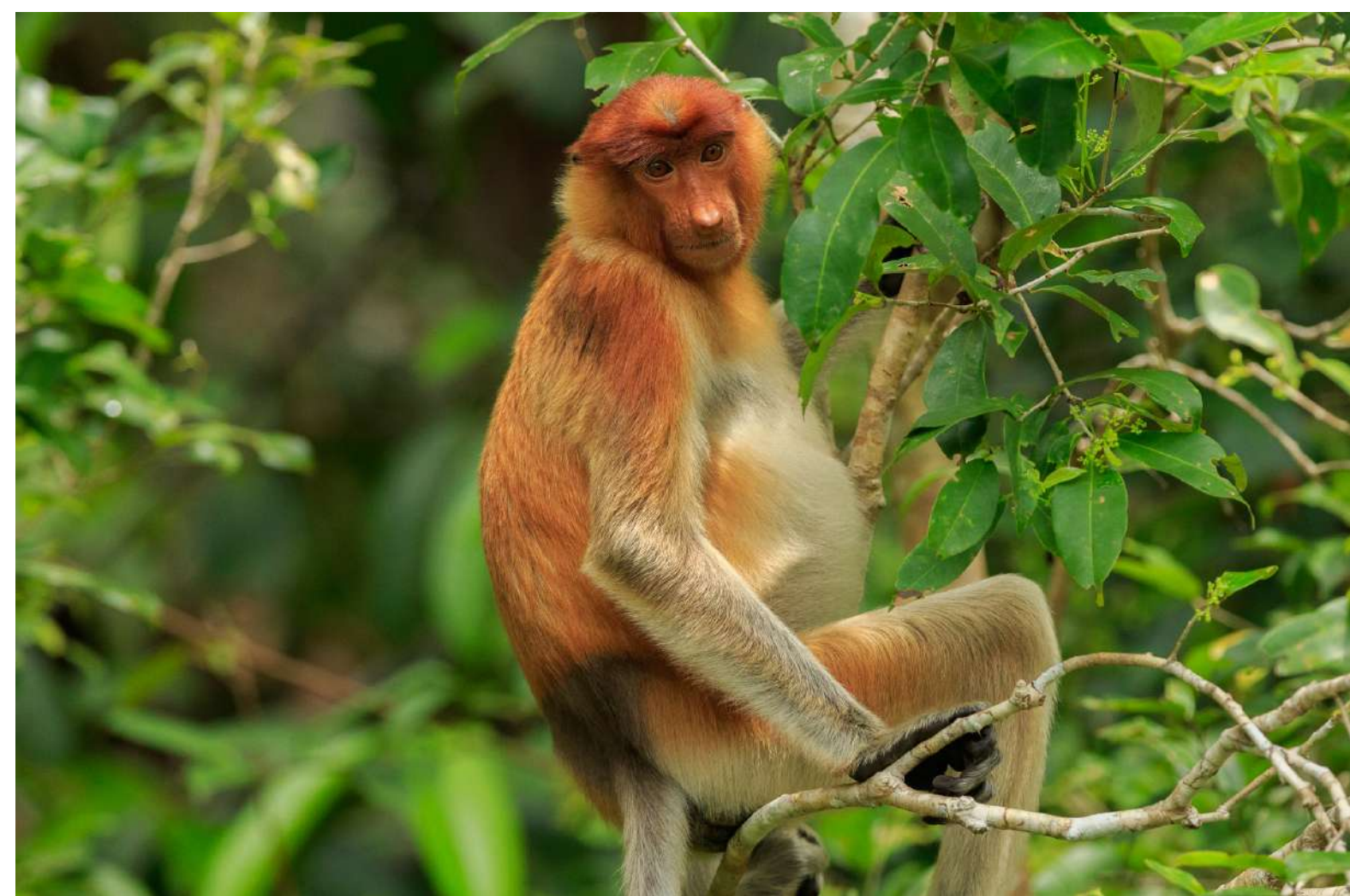
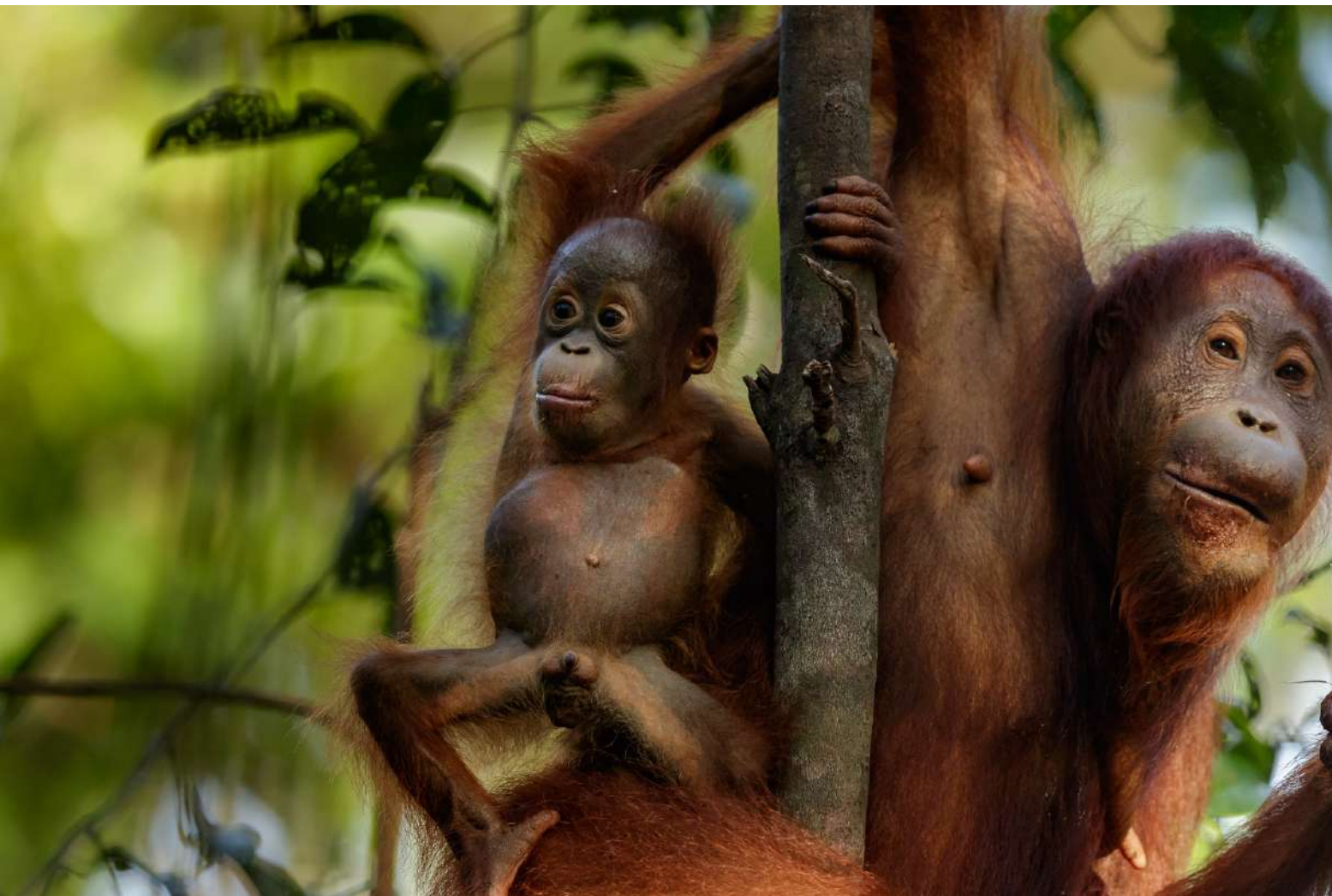
About the Photographer

Nilkamal Malakar's love for the natural world and its subjects dates back a long time. His undying love for the wild world has prompted him to make arduous journeys to some of the unique wildlife destinations across the planet. He has been exploring the wilderness since the year 2000 all with the singular purpose of observing and documenting the amazing diversity that exists in the wild realms of our planet. His travels have taken him to various parts of India. In fact in his quest to document a never ending bucket list of species he has travelled far and wide from the tropical forests of Southeast Asia to the protected forests of the United States. He aspires to document life in the wild to its fullest and showcase its unparalleled beauty.



(top) A young orangutan munches on forest delicacies as he hangs on to a overhanging branch.
(below) A female with her young one carefully scans the surroundings to detect any threat.

(below) An endangered proboscis monkey in the rainforest canopies of Borneo. These tropical and sub-tropical forests are home to a number of endemic species like this one.



Culture

the Mudskippers of Chikal Kalo

by Dipen G Shah

IN THE SLUSHY GROUNDS OF A TEMPLE COMPLEX AN
ANCIENT TRADITION QUIETLY LIVES ON IN ONE SMALL
TOWN IN GOA.

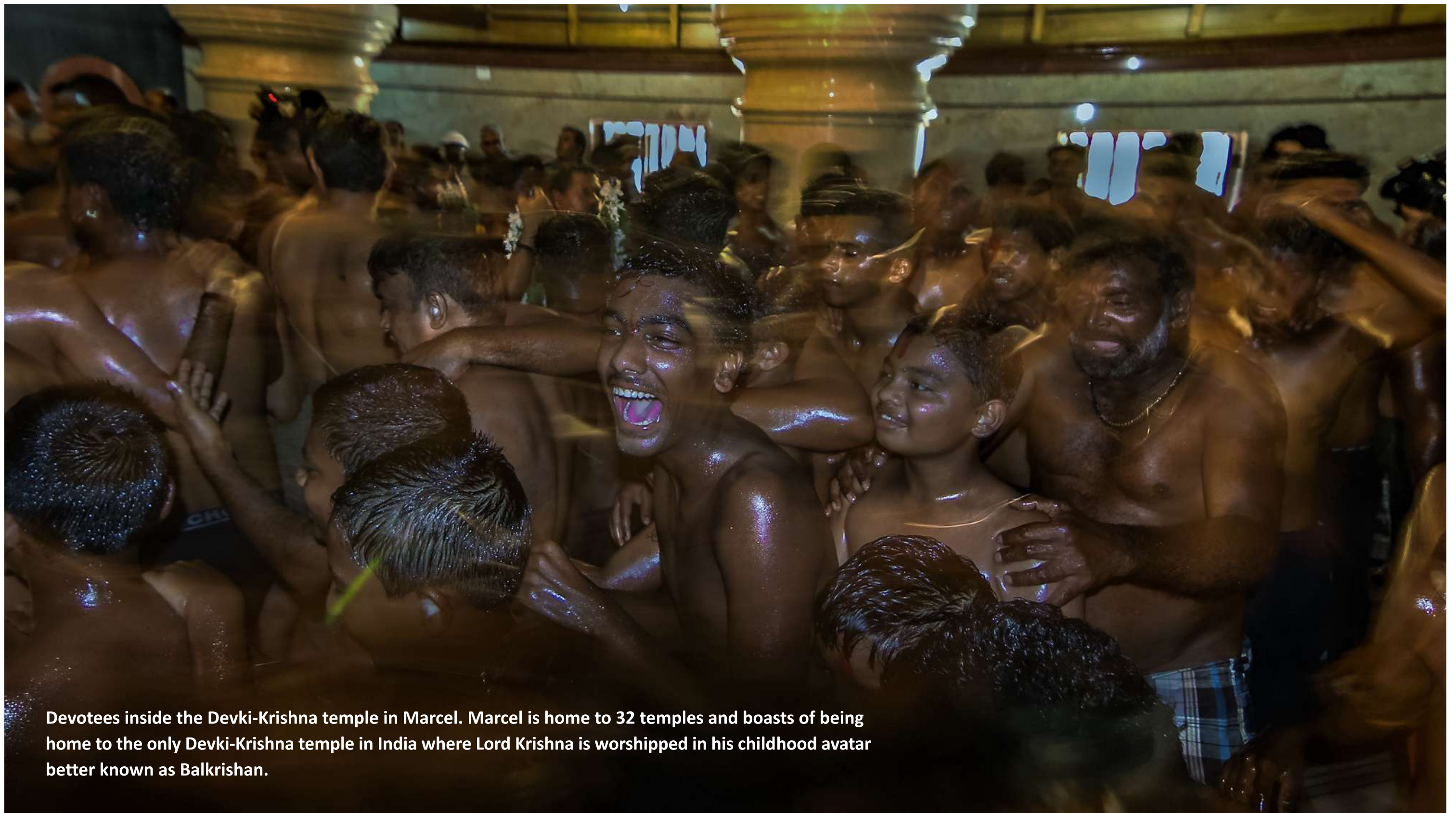
It took Goa longer than the rest of India to shake off its colonial rule. In 1961 Goa became India's 25th state when Indian armed forces annexed Goa meeting little resistance during a military operation carried out on the 18th and 19th of December, thereby ending a period of Portuguese rule in Goa which had lasted for a little over 450 years. Slower than the rest of the Indian states to taste freedom, Goa was not the one to be left behind in terms of prominence. The smallest state in the country in terms of geographical area Goa made the most of its favourable location along the coast of the Arabian Sea and soon transformed itself into a tourism hotspot not only in India but in the tourism world map. Although the Portuguese relinquished their authority of Goa the vibe and the way of life in Goa remained very much European. It would be unfair to blame the state for holding a grudge against its unidimensional portrayal as a favourite hippy trail laden with pristine beaches and a quiet leisurely way of life punctuated with colourful musical sessions and never ending parties on the sandy floors of the beaches. In fact for decades this has remained the popular perception of Goa not only among foreign nationals who throng these beaches with the hope of experiencing a little bit of the West during their travels across India, but even among Indians especially the youths Goa has carved a niche for being the country's very own party destination. Yet there is so much more to this state than its sandy

beaches, the rich assortments of cocktails and a vibrant nightlife. Beyond the beaches which are hotbeds for various leisurely activities which cater to the demands of a wide spectrum lies a lesser explored Goa rich in its traditions, heritage and a way of life far removed from the glitz and glamour which adorn its shores. Carefully tucked away from the clamour of the sandy beaches in the lap of the lush green landscapes of the state lies hidden ancient temples, a vibrant eco-system teeming with spectacular wildlife, farmlands that since centuries have been churning out rich produces of spices which in fact lured the European traders to land on the shores of Goa and a plethora of festivities. While the beaches remain busy throughout the year catering to more cosmopolitan demands the Goan countryside offers more than glimpses into those aspects of Goa which are firmly grounded in the ancient soil of this state.

During the heavy downpour in the months of June-July, when seasonal rains lash out all over Goa, one such tiny hamlet in the Goan countryside celebrates one of the much lesser known traditions of Goa. The constant downpour quiet literally paves the way for the traditional ritual- Chikal Kalo in Marcel a small town located in the Ponda taluka barely 17 km away from Panaji the administrative capital of the state. The festival of Chikal Kalo in its rawest form can be best described as mud play among the people of this town. The incessant downpour ensures there is no



Chikal Kalo provides the young kids with the license to frolick in the muddy ground to their hearts' content.



Devotees inside the Devki-Krishna temple in Marcel. Marcel is home to 32 temples and boasts of being home to the only Devki-Krishna temple in India where Lord Krishna is worshipped in his childhood avatar better known as Balkrishan.

dearth of mud and slushy grounds all around the town which itself is located in the lap of nature in close proximity to the Western Ghats. Although it may appear at one first glance this festival is all about splashing mud against each other or rolling on muddy fields without a care in the

world, there is a deep religious significance associated with this old festival, which provides a deeper meaning to those taking part in these rituals. And all of it can be traced back to the religious significance of the town of Marcel which is home to temples of more than 15 Hindu deities. In

fact the small town of Marcel is home to 32 temples and boasts of the only Devki-Krishna temple in India. In this temple Lord Krishna is revered in his childlike avatar better known as Balkrishan which roughly translates into “child Krishna”. The idol of Devki inside the temple can

be seen holding a young Krishna, her son in her lap. The rituals and festivities surrounding Chikal Kalo are aimed at celebrating the endearing and carefree days of a child Krishna while growing up. Krishna during his childhood days is depicted in the Hindu mythologies as a



Chikal Kalo provides an opportunity to everyone to re-visit their childhood days. This festival is aimed at recreating the carefree fun-filled childhood days of a young Lord Krishna.

very restless child, well known in his neighbourhood for his naughty antics. Chikal Kalo in a nutshell is a celebration of those fun filled days of growing up in the life of Lord Krishna.

A wide array of games and celebrations are performed during Chikal Kalo but it all begins with the highlight of these

celebrations- the mud bath. It is hard to ascertain the origin of these festivities, in fact there is no clear record of how this festival became such an integral part of Marcel's life. Local accounts which mostly are word of mouth, suggest these festivities have been going on for far more than 150 years. Each year these festivities begin

on the 12th day of the month of Ashadh as per the traditional Hindu calendar which roughly coincides with the 2nd or 3rd week of July. The slushy ground adjoining the Devki-Krishna temple in the town is the hotbed for all such activities. A 24 hour long ceremony inside the temple which commences at around 11 a.m. the

previous day leads up to these festivities on the 12th day. During this ceremony which is marked by a number of sermons and religious recitations an earthen lamp is kept burning in front of the idol of Devki. Following these rituals on the 12th day at around 11 in the morning people start gathering in the muddy ground overlooking the temple. Most of the men and kids gathered around are bare bodied with their bodies soaked in oil. Oil is applied to prevent any infection from rolling in the mud and it also serves the purpose of a lubricant. As the gathering of villagers grows in strength the festivities, the fun and games begin. The crowd picks up handfuls of mud and slosh and splatter each other with them. Within minutes the entire gathering is covered in a thick veil of mud and slosh and everyone is covered from head to toe in the sticky brown muddy mixture. Men of all ages including young children indulge in a variety of games and outdoor activities which once used to be some of the favourite activities of Lord Krishna during his fun filled childhood days. Some of the popular games which are played during the festival of Chikal Kalo are some of the traditional games such as tug of war, kabaddi. The others include the game of Chakra where young men lie down on the muddy grounds putting their feet together to form the shape of a wheel. At the signal of the person overlooking the proceedings of this game the young men start rotating in unison resembling a wheel in motion on the



The blind man's game is one of the more popular games played during Chikal Kalo. Participants are blindfolded and they are supposed to get hold of the one who leads the others on by playing a cymbal.

A young man makes the most of these slushy grounds by sliding on them. The simple ways of this festival in more ways than one act as reminders to everyone's carefree childhood days.



muddy field. In another game a blindfolded man has to successfully get hold of a man playing a cymbal while others lead him on, cheer him or even mislead him. In one particular game the participants stand in columns facing each other and form a

tunnel, the others have to run through this tunnel without getting caught. Often the villagers indulge in an exhibition of mock wrestling where having fun precedes the dire need for winning any given bout. All along during this the fun and games are

accompanied by the rhythmic beats of cymbals, drums and various other traditional instruments which are played out by the people gathered around. In fact such musical performances form an integral part of Chikal Kalo festivities.

The festivities end with the widely popular game of breaking the dahi handi or a yogurt or curd filled earthen pot which is widely celebrated on the occasion of Jannashtami all over India, a festival which marks the birth of Lord Krishna. However in Ponda



The game of Dahi-Handi where young boys form a human pyramid which reaches out to a suspended earthen pot containing curd or yogurt. The person at the top is entrusted with the task of breaking the pot open.

this ritual is observed during the festivities of Chikal Kalo. During this ritual a large group of young men or even boys climb on top of one another and form a human pyramid with the aim of breaking an earthen pot filled with dahi or yogurt suspended from the age old peepul tree in the temple premises. The breaking of the dahi handi signifies the end of the muddy proceedings and the few hour long fun filled affairs on the slushy field adjoining the temple. Following this the participants venture to the nearby dhobi ghaat for a much needed dip in the water to cleanse themselves of the thick coating of mud and slush which is followed by the afternoon lunch which is served by the households to the participants. A small group of revellers enter the temple to conclude the afternoon prayers which officially marks the end of the festival for one more year.

Like most other festivities across India and the globe the food served during Chikal Kalo deserves a special mention. It all begins with the snacks which are distributed before the fun and games in the mud begin. The participants before venturing out into the muddy grounds gather around the peepul tree where a group of villagers wait for the participants with various homemade snacks. These are traditional Indian snacks comprising of the sweetmeat jalebis, laddoos, pooran poli-soft flat bread filled with stuffing of lentils or Bengal gram. These snacks are thrown in the air and the gathered crowd

vies to get a hold of their favourite snacks flying all around. The villagers go around distributing these food items to everyone present at the temple complex, there is no commercial motive behind this, no separate food stalls are set up, it can be seen as one large family gathering where everyone is welcomed with an offering of these popular snacks which only highlights the feeling of warmth and oneness which form the bulwark of these festivities.

Festivities involving frolicking in mud are not uncommon across the globe. From the mud Olympics of Hamburg in Germany to the Boryeong Mud Festival in South Korea there is something liberating about splashing and rolling around in mud which has captivated the imagination of millions across the globe. In spite of all these popular muddy festival of Chikal Kalo stands out in its own right for the strong link which it shares with one of the elements of nature in the form of earth. In these modern times Chikal Kalo celebrates the strong roots of our ancient past, the solid platform upon which our modern society firmly stands proud and tall today. Nobody can confirm with absolute certainty since when this festival became such a defining part of this little town's way of life and it certainly appears no one is least bothered about it. For the people taking part in these muddy affairs Chikal Kalo offers them that much needed respite during which all socio-economic divides are bridged and each and every person is connected by a common thread. The mud



The festivities include a wide range of games all of which are played out on the muddy ground adjoining the temple.



Mud festivals are relatively common all over the world, from the United States to Germany to South Korea. Yet the mud festivities of Chikal Kalo stand out in their own rights due to their strong link with an element of nature - the mud and the strong religious connotation. For those taking part in this festival the religious aspect of this festival is no less significant than the fun and games.



in a way veils all our imperfections, the multitudes of social identities which burden us every day and only widens the artificial gaps which otherwise separate us from one another. The sticky brownish exteriors created by mud and slush in an instant wash away the status quo which creates this rift among different segments of the society and creates a uniform identity for one and all, one which is strongly linked to nature and serves as a reminder that irrespective of our position in the society we all eventually belong to the

same earth, the same soil which nurtures us, nourishes us. This beautiful tradition has passed on from generations to the next in the small town of Ponda, it has instilled a sense of kinship, oneness among the residents in this small town of Goa. For the young children this is a day when they don't have to worry about their parents frowning upon them for getting themselves dirty in the mud, for the elders this is an occasion during which they witness the baton of their age old tradition being passed on to their next generation and for the

adults this day provides them with the opportunity to relive the fun filled carefree days of their childhood. Perhaps herein lies the greatest significance of Chikal Kalo, a festival which albeit small in scale certainly doesn't lack the heart and courage to bring everyone under the same roof all with the singular agenda of establishing a bond stronger than ever, which is also possibly why this ancient festival in the face of rapid urbanisation still manages to effortlessly find a way into the heart of so many while being deeply rooted to our

once traditional faces.



While this is great opportunity for children to make the most of this fun-filled occasion the adults and elders too refuse to be left far behind.



The festivities surrounding this ancient festival of Chikal Kalo in the small town of Marcel in Goa uphold a very different aspect of the state of Goa far removed from the glitz and glamour of its beaches and bustling nightlife. There is no authentic record on how old this festival is or how it started out in the small town of Marcel. According to some these festivities are more than 150 years old while some are of the opinion the festivities could be more than 300 years old. However those taking part in the celebrations have little time to worry about the history, for them it is the time to wash away all their societal and cultural differences in the slushy muddy ground in the temple complex and embrace each other as equals.



About the Photographer

Dipen G Shah is from Mumbai and describes himself as a hobbyist photographer using a Canon camera and Sigma lens combination. He is primarily inclined towards wildlife and sports photography and nurtures a keen interest for Indian festivals and portraiture. He has been pursuing his passion for the past 4 years. He invests a lot of time in observing his surroundings before clicking through the lenses of his camera. He prefers to form a clear idea regarding the frame which he wants to compose in his mind before pressing the shutter button of his camera. During the course of his travels to various places he feels blessed to have met so many talented and warm individuals who have inspired him and he wishes to spread the warmth and happiness through his endeavours as well.

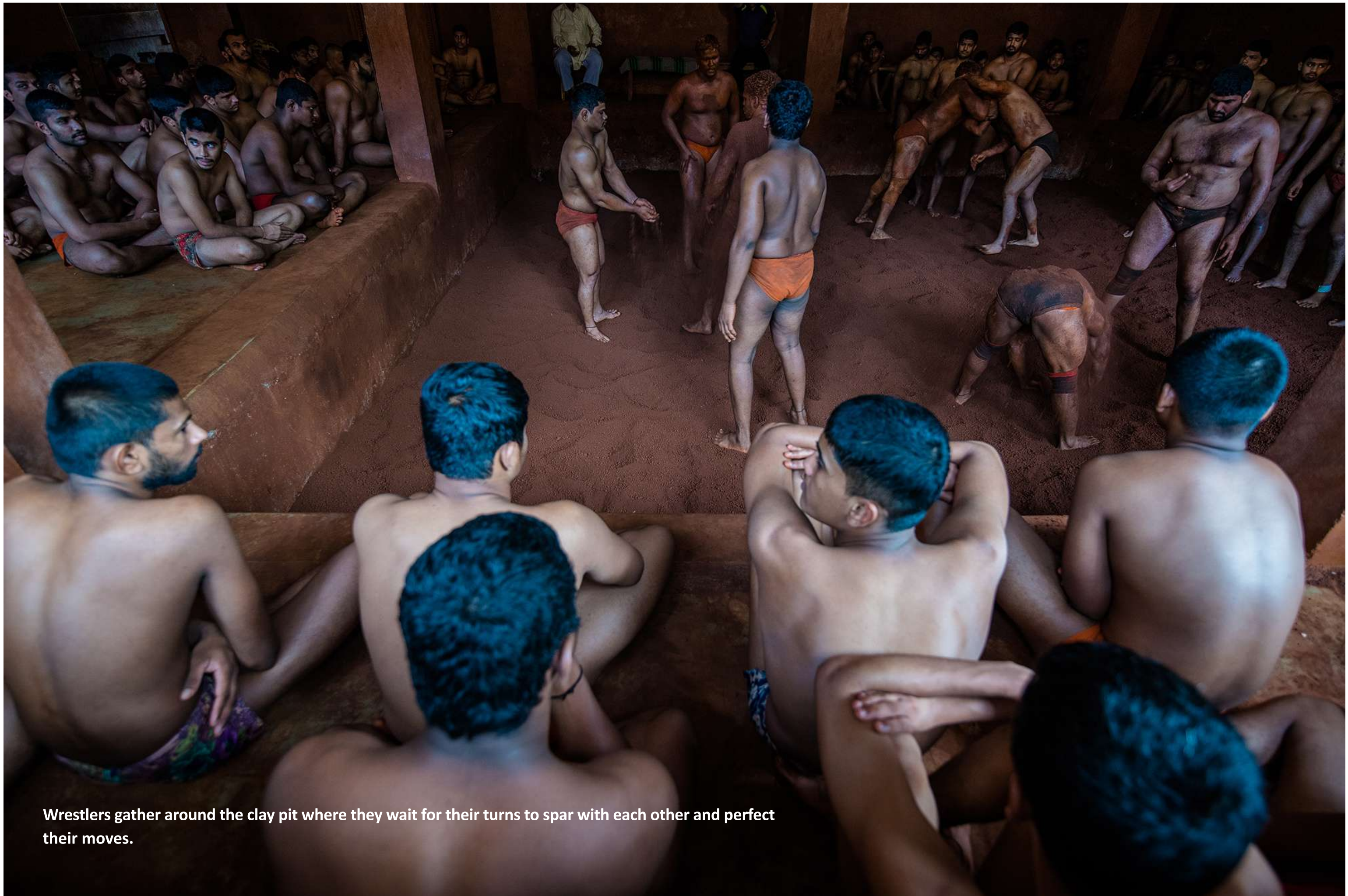
allure of the **RED**
CLAY

by Shreenivas Yenni

In the red clay pits of the Taleems lies the beating heart of India's ancient wrestling tradition. A look into the lives of some of the Taleems in the city of Kolhapur in Maharashtra uncovers the sturdy platform upon which India's growing reputation of becoming a wrestling powerhouse can take concrete shape.



A young wrestler at the New Motibaag Taleem in the city of Kolhapur in Maharashtra.



Wrestlers gather around the clay pit where they wait for their turns to spar with each other and perfect their moves.

It is an afternoon like any other and much of Kolhapur city slips into a leisurely mode, a much needed respite after the hustle and bustle of morning. However for some these afternoons are not spent in siestas instead it is time to attend to some unfinished business from the morning. A muscular figure appears, silhouetted by the muted

sunlight flooding the spacious hall of an unassuming one storeyed building in a regular neighbourhood, he can be seen splashing water over a well-manicured patch of red soil and mud. The figure is bare bodied with a strip of red cloth worn as loincloth. Soon similarly dressed individuals start appearing all having one thing in common- a well built and well sculpted physique. Taking turns they tend to the muddy patch sprinkling water all over the loose red soil and systematically adjusting the top soil with their feet or hands while others start warming up by performing exercises such as push ups or squats. Gradually more and more join the warm up sessions and the heavier dumbbells, barbells are brought out. Thus the New Motibaag Taleem (colloquially the wrestling training centres are known as "Taleems" in Kolhapur) of Kolhapur springs to life for the afternoon training session of some 70 odd wrestlers belonging to various age groups.

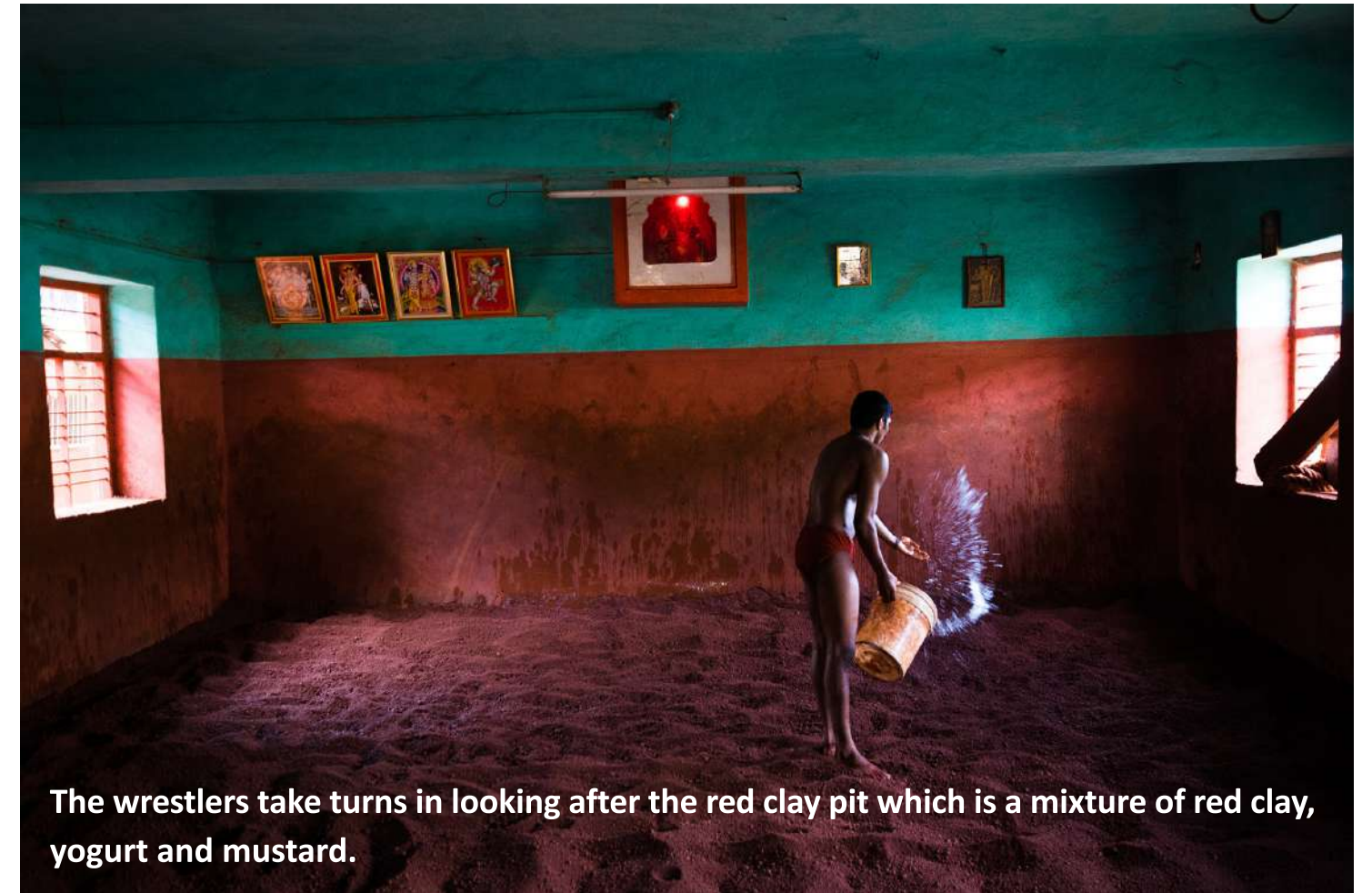
Kolhapur's tryst with the traditional Indian form of wrestling or "Kushti" as it is popularly known dates back to the early years of the 20th century. The sport received generous patronage during the

reign of Chattrapati Shanu Maharaj and in the early part of the 20th century flourished in different parts of Maharashtra particularly in the city of Kolhapur. During his rule a number of Akharas or wrestling training centres sprung up across the city of Kolhapur. An ardent patron of this sport, during his rule Chattrapati Shanu Maharaj would organize wrestling tournaments on a regular basis all over Kolhapur city and invited wrestlers from different parts of the country. Being blessed with royal patronage these tournaments had a lot to offer to the winner, as a result of which there was tremendous enthusiasm among the participants who would often travel hundreds of kilometres to take part in this tournament. As a result of which Kolhapur soon made a name for itself for being the wrestling hub in India and since then has proudly carried that legacy forward. The sport kept on enjoying further patronage from Kolhapur's royalty when Shahaji II the Maharaja of Kolhapur helped a young Khashaba Dadashaheb Jadhav only 22 years old hailing from the Satara district of Maharashtra earn a place in the Indian contingent which went on to participate in the London Olympics of 1948 courtesy

the generous sponsorship of Shahji II. Although his maiden trip to the Olympic Games failed to produce the desired results the much needed experience which he gained from this outing stood him in good stead. The continued patronage which he received coupled with his hard work and the valuable experience of 1948 helped him earn a much coveted Bronze medal in the following Helsinki Olympics in 1952. In fact Khashaba Dadashaheb Jadhav became the first ever Indian to win an individual medal at the Olympic Games. This was a momentous occasion not only in the history of Indian sporting activities but also in the legacy of Kolhapur, one which firmly established Kolhapur's ever growing reputation as being one of the noted wrestling hotbeds in the country. In the surprisingly modest taleems of Kolhapur which jostle for space cramped between residential quarters in nondescript neighbourhoods of Kolhapur the sport which at one point of time was on the verge of breathing its last is undergoing a resurgence of sorts. This is evident from the bunch of young kids gathered in the courtyard of these taleems performing different forms of exercises or wrestling moves mimicking their more experienced and older counterparts while dressed in the traditional red loincloth or "langots". The art of wrestling and its exponents, the "pehelwans" as they are known in India somehow failed to find favour among the Indian diaspora as the country entered into the first phase of modernisation starting

from the early 1990s. The glitzy tomorrow towards which the modern India has since raced towards couldn't quite make room for a sport like traditional wrestling which lacked the glamour or the potential of luring the audience which cricket or to a large extent football managed to achieve. As a result of which wrestling in Kolhapur and all over the country with its traditional ways slowly but steadily kept falling behind the aspirations of the modern India. Yet there is something in the red earth of the taleems, the traditional ways of training and an indescribable connect to the roots which kept the beating heart of Indian traditional wrestling alive in these humble establishments. This is largely due to the fact that wrestling or pehelwani in Kolhapur transcends the boundary of sport and is largely ingrained in the fabric of this society as a way of life which is laced with an undying prestige in the society. For the young and aspiring pehelwans in the taleems of Kolhapur the daily training sessions mean much more than fine tuning their wrestling skills and moves. For them it is a way of life which inculcates in them a strict sense of discipline, high moral values and ethical living, all of which are aimed at turning them into decent human beings, a quality which has always been appreciated and respected by this society. In spite of the tremendous odds stacked against them families still aspire to make pehelwans out of these youngsters someday. Most of these youngsters come from the agrarian community of Kolhapur

The wrestlers training and living in the taleems belong to different age groups and mostly come from the rural agrarian section of the society.



The wrestlers take turns in looking after the red clay pit which is a mixture of red clay, yogurt and mustard.

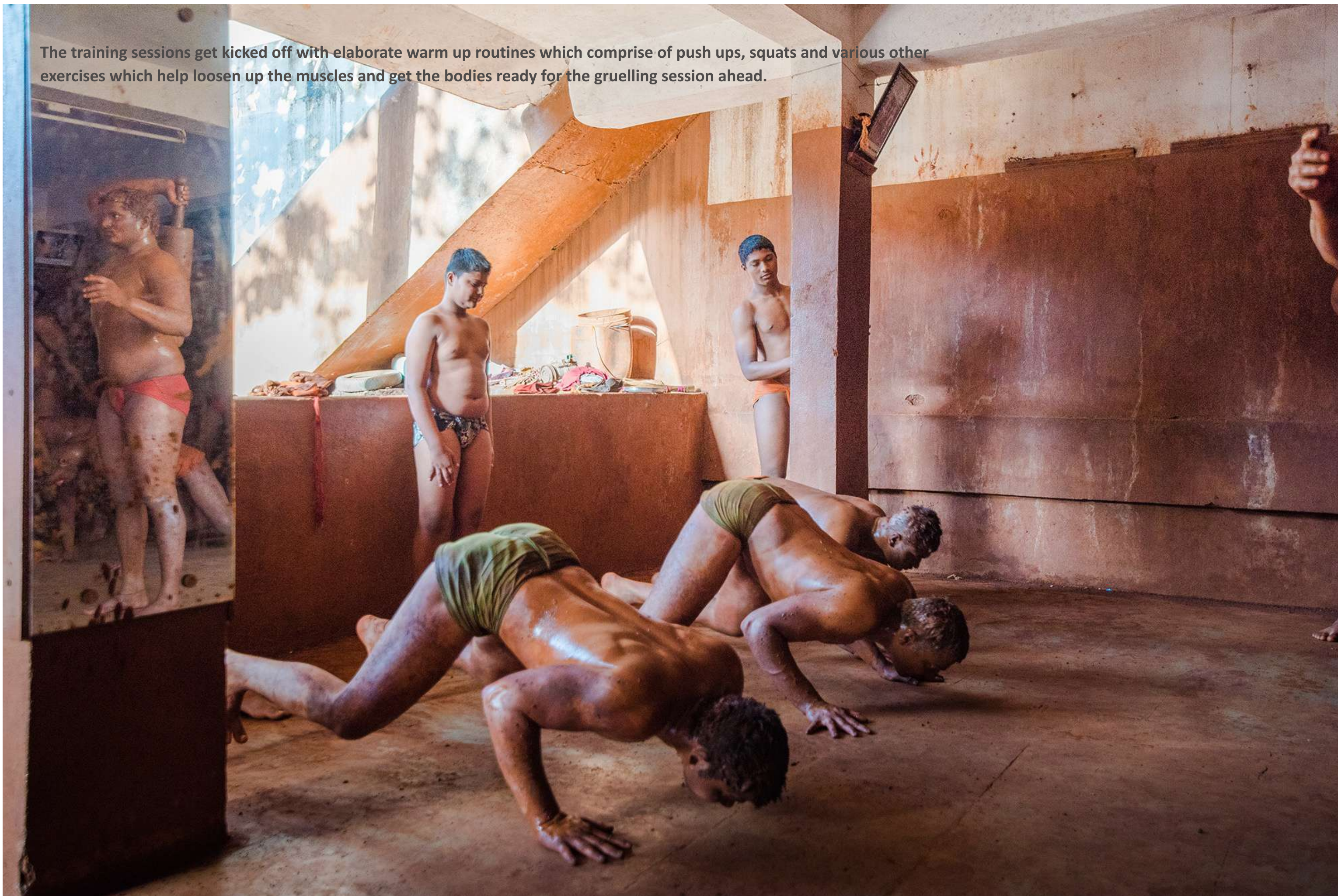
with the dream of becoming a pehelwan one day and elevating the status of their families in the society. Some of them queue up at the doors of the taleems to carry their family legacy forward as many families in Kolhapur boast of a long tradition of pehelwani dating back to the once prosperous days this sport enjoyed during the rules of the Maharajas. As the sport fell into tough times with the abolition of monarchy in India the families sending their children to the taleems too had to endure the tough times. The trainers or “gurujis” as they are known as charge a nominal fee for imparting their expertise to the aspiring wrestlers however the expenses of maintaining such a way of

life particularly in terms of diet is not small by any means. Yet the families out of their love and admiration for this sport and particularly the way of life endured these tough times and did whatever they could to support their kids in pursuit of their dreams of becoming a pehelwan. Having endured a rather lean phase in its history the sport finally experienced a shift in its fortunes courtesy the herculean efforts of one man- Sushil Kumar. Much like his predecessor K.D Jhadhav, this young wrestler from Haryana another state known for its love of wrestling or “dangal” as it is colloquially known over there almost single-handedly put this ancient sport back on India’s sporting map. The sport

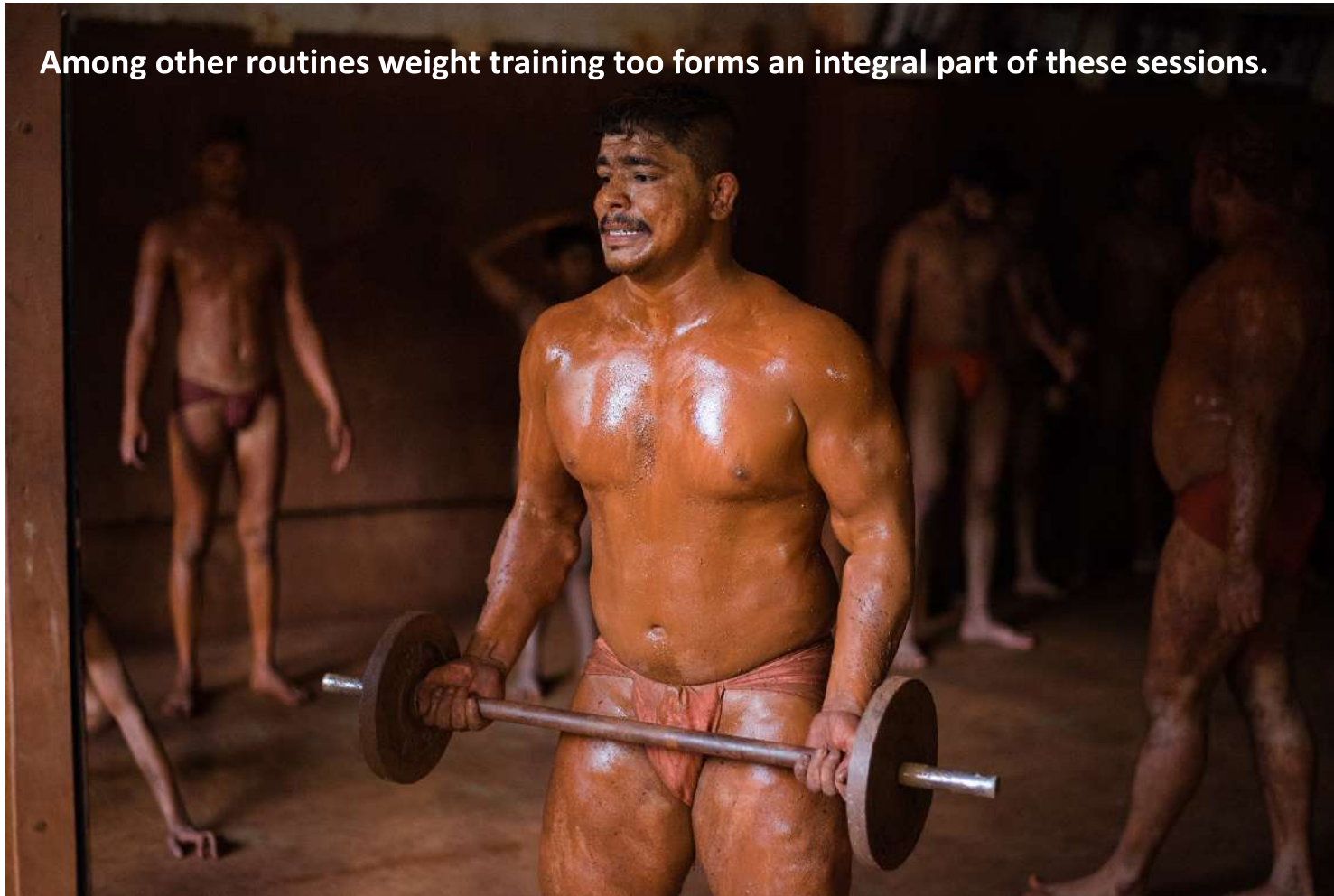
witnessed a renewed interest after Sushil Kumar won a bronze medal in wrestling in his category at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. This provided a much needed impetus for the tradition of wrestling particularly in places like Kolhapur where this age old tradition was under the threat of fading into obscurity. The momentum which was generated through one man’s achievement snowballed into a renewed and large scale interest in the sport which was further established through the remarkable achievements of Indian wrestlers at the following 2012 London Olympics. Yet again Sushil Kumar was at the forefront leading this revival, this time he managed to better his achievements at

the Beijing Olympics by securing a silver medal thus becoming the only Indian to win two individual medals at the Olympic Games. This time keeping him company was another wrestler from Haryana- Yogeshwar Dutt who secured a bronze medal in his category at the 2012 London Olympics. These successes were further complimented by the avalanche of success brought about by Indian wrestlers in various categories at various international meets and competitions such as the Commonwealth Games. In this context it would be grossly unfair to forget the contributions made by Geeta Phogat. Geeta Phogat hailing from Haryana a state which has earned the reputation of churning out

The training sessions get kicked off with elaborate warm up routines which comprise of push ups, squats and various other exercises which help loosen up the muscles and get the bodies ready for the gruelling session ahead.



Among other routines weight training too forms an integral part of these sessions.



part in wrestling prompted one of the leading actors of the Hindi film industry to make the movie titled “Dangal” based on the life and journey of the Phogat sisters. The movie was a massive box-office success and has earned a place among the top grossing movies made in India which again is a reflection of the changing tides as far as the future of this sport is concerned in India. These glaring successes and global recognitions since 2008 have indeed brought about a huge shift in the fortunes of wrestling all over the country. Wrestling tournaments even the local ones are garnering more and more attention even from the medium scale corporate houses, a phenomenon which was previously

restricted to some of the popular sports such as cricket, football or on the odd occasion hockey. With the involvement of the sponsors the prize money has increased manifold. The international recognitions and exposures have prompted the lawmakers and the politicians to take note of any aspiring wrestler with the potential to win accolades for the country. This has further opened up the lucrative opportunity to land a government job or even a coaching job at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) or with the Wrestling Federation of India.

It can be argued the akharas or the taleems like the ones spread across Kolhapur have diligently nurtured the love for this sport

one successful wrestler after another became the first Indian wrestler to win a gold medal when she won the gold in her category at the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in Delhi. Among the various accolades which came her way in the following years the notable ones include a coveted bronze medal at the 2012 World Wrestling Championship and silver at the 2013 edition of Commonwealth Wrestling Championship. Geeta Phogat’s legacy was carried forward by her younger sister Babita Kumari Phogat when she won gold medals at both the 2014 and 2018 editions of the Commonwealth Games. In fact having started out with her elder sister she was never going to be the one to be overshadowed by the achievements of her

elder sister which she had already proved by winning the silver medal in the 2010 Commonwealth Games and a bronze medal again at the 2012 World Wrestling Championships during a time period when Geeta Phogat was at the peak of her prowess. The tremendous success achieved by the Phogat sisters will always continue to serve as the watershed moment in women’s wrestling in India. Their success broke age old stereotypes and blasted the door open for thousands of aspiring young girls to enter the red muddy pit of wrestling which still firmly remains a hugely male dominated sporting discipline. In fact the remarkable nature of their success where they shattered all previous notions and stereotypes surrounding women taking



The “langots” or the loin cloths worn by the wrestlers are hung for drying along the photo frames displaying photographs of some of the illustrious former wrestlers.



Hundreds of hours spent in these red clay pits eventually determine the outcome of fights which are regularly organised across various small towns and outskirts all over the country.



Two young wrestlers are engaged in an intense training sessions which are crucial for perfecting such complex manoeuvre.

and looked after it with parental care are not the ideal set ups for churning out future medallists at various meets and fights at the international level. To be fair there is much substance to this argument. The methods of the taleems are honest, sincere, brimming with passion yet they are not in sync with the modern upgradations the

sport has gone through all over the world. The muddy pits on which the wrestlers practice and perfect their moves have been replaced by synthetic mats all over the world. The techniques have been further perfected and fine-tuned with the intervention of technology and modern strategies. The advanced training methods

which aim at producing the perfect athletes sadly do not feature in the daily life of the taleems. In other words the taleems lead a much more traditional existence devoid of any tryst with the advancements taking place in the sport. Yet the archaic taleems are here to stay, their archaic existence is crucially required for the survival and

prosperity of this sport which is enjoying a new high in the history of sporting achievements of India. And all of this boils down to the mighty heart of these ram shackled joints, the earthy nature of these muddy pits for behind the technicalities of the modern training methods the taleems form the bulwark of wrestling in India. For any sport to gain precedence in a country's sporting history it is absolutely imperative to form a strong and healthy sporting culture, the taleems with their humble origins have managed to do that for decades. The sense of discipline which they ingrain among the young wrestlers, the sense of camaraderie among the pehelwans, the spirit of sportsmanship, kinship, ethical practices lay down the solid groundwork upon which dreams of an Olympic medal can be woven. One look into the daily life of any taleem in Kolhapur and it becomes abundantly clear why these values are so dear to any pehelwan. Early morning before rest of Kolhapur springs to life, the taleems team with wrestlers some as young as 8. Most of them come from villagers afar proudly carrying their family legacies forward. Some of them are the fifth generation wrestlers in their family. In these taleems there are no support system at place, these guys get everything done by themselves from preparing the pit which is made of a mixture of dirt, yogurt, clarified butter and turmeric powder to preparing their own meals. The accommodations at these taleems are humble and are devoid of any



Various scenes from an average day in one of the many taleems spread across Kolhapur. The taleems are close knit societies where the sense of kinship and brotherhood prevail strong. The wrestlers belonging to different age groups live together, train together and perform the daily chores including preparing food all by themselves. Their lifestyle is frugal devoid of any luxury with access to very little modes of entertainment. In a situation like this these individuals some of whom are as young as eight, develop a strong sense of brotherhood with each other.



For most of these wrestlers, kushti is not only a sport, for them it is a way of life which teaches them discipline, instills in them ethical values and elevates them to a position of higher status in the society something which many value over an Olympic medal.

luxury item. From cooking their own meals to washing their own clothes a wrestler even the young ones are supposed to take care of themselves. The meals are as heavy as the wrestlers jostling in the pits. The daily diet of an adult wrestler is roughly made up of 200 almonds, five to ten eggs, a dozen or more bananas, half a kilogram of mutton, a large assortment of green vegetables, half a pound of clarified butter or ghee and several litres of milk. All of this is bought on a daily basis and the meals are freshly prepared on gas stoves. At night, the roughly 80 wrestlers huddle up in dozens in the dormitory rooms with layers of woven mats supporting their giant frames upon stone floors which are hard and cold. After a long and hard day of brutal training sessions which involve gruesome routines of sparring, calisthenics, gymnastics, weight training the only modes of entertainment they have at their disposal are the very few precious smartphones belonging to some of the elder wrestlers on which popular Hindi songs are played out on a low volume. These precious few minutes before the strict routine compels them to retire for the day are used in indulging in friendly banter as the wrestlers apply traditional ayurvedic oils mixed with turmeric powder known for its soothing abilities to tend to the bruises and the wounds suffered during their daily quest to perfect the art of wrestling. Against the backdrop of the success achieved by Indian wrestlers at various international events the government has set about

encouraging the taleems including the ones at Kolhapur to employ more modern techniques in a bid to further improve the nation's existing record at these events. The Shahupuri taleem benefitted from such endeavours as with the help of the funds received from the government the taleem installed a synthetic mat on the second floor of the facility which now allows the wrestlers to train themselves using the more modern techniques. This is certainly a huge step forward and one which if implemented successfully could result in the perfect amalgamation of tradition and modernity which would make these taleems even more relevant before the wrestlers set out for some of the state of the art facilities operated by the SAI or the Wrestling Federation of India. However for the time being for those practicing at these taleems their allegiance towards clay wrestling remains unquestionable. The mat holds the prospect of international success, but most men at the taleems prefer kushti because opponents move more slowly in the red clay pit. Also the local tournaments which are still popular among thousands from far away villages are exclusively played out on clay pits. For most of these pehelwans the glory and prestige earned in the midst of their village folks, friends and family members amount more than the beaming flashlights on the podium of the Olympic Games. Their dreams are centred around a better future with the promise of a government job with the police or railways which reserve slots

for wrestlers if they keep on performing well and the prestige that comes with being a wrestler in their social lives.

The red earth of taleems still enamours thousands across small towns and cities in India with rich tradition of traditional wrestling or kushti. For most it is not a means of earning a place in the Indian Olympic contingent or the lure of a government job, for them it is a way of staying connected to their traditional past, a past which earned their forefathers so much glory and a position of prestige in the society. Those who line up in the courtyard of these taleems and follow the gruelling routine staying in these establishments away from home only aspire to bring happiness to their family members who toil relentlessly to support this rather expensive affair. With the blessings of Hanuman the revered deity in the taleems and the well wishes of their family members they only aspire to carry forward this century old tradition and along the way lap up all the accolades which come their way.



About the Photographer

Shreenivas Yenni hails from the town of Gangavathi in Karnataka. He is an engineer by profession and is currently working as Junior Engineer at the Karnataka Power Transmission Sector. His passion for photography compels him to make frequent travels in search of interesting topics or beautiful places to photograph. Most of his photographs are based on street life, portraits, landscapes and the beauty in nature which he encounters during his travels. He wishes to keep travelling with a view of achieving his long cherished dream which is to document different cultures, rituals, heritage and traditions across India.

More of his work is available at:
<https://www.facebook.com/shreenivas.a.yenni>
https://www.instagram.com/shreenivas_yenni
<https://www.flickr.com/people/136553948@N07/>

Life around Hilsa by Faruq Hossain

People



The Hilsa is staging a resounding comeback across Bangladesh, which certainly augurs well for millions of food lovers not only across Bangladesh but across the border for neighbouring West Bengal and also promises to usher in a fresh spell of economic boom for millions of lives dependent on Hilsa fishing.

It is often said that the cuisine of a particular country goes a long way in decoding and even governing the myriad aspects of the day to day life of its people. The Bengali community, on either side of the international border between Bangladesh and India has been known for its deep rooted affinity for fish. It is hard to imagine any Bengali household which is not familiar with the wide array of fish based cuisines and some of the rather unique ways of preparation. During the then British rule in India, present day Bangladesh was a part of India. Following India's independence in 1947 Bangladesh continued to be a part of present day Pakistan and came to be known as East Pakistan, the eastern provincial wing of Pakistan. It was only after decades of bullet ridden and blood strewn long struggle Bangladesh finally succeeded in liberating itself from the clutches of Pakistan and form its very own identity as Bangladesh, an independent nation on the 26th of March 1971. Freed from the clutches of Pakistan, the people of Bangladesh proudly embraced their very own identity as Bengalis, one for which many had to sacrifice their everything, millions laid down their lives in quest for their very own and beloved identity. In today's Bangladesh this pride of being a Bengali is palpable everywhere, from Bengali being their official language to the mirror image like similarity in every aspect of their culture including cuisine with their neighbour West Bengal, the largely Bengali

dominated state in the country of India. And nothing binds these two communities on either side of the fences closely than their mutual admiration for their favourite food item- fish. This strong affinity can be traced back to the riverine nature of both the regions, particularly along the plains. The large and intricate network of rivers, their tributaries and estuaries not only meant a rich haul of protein on their plates but also a viable and widespread scope of livelihoods for millions of people. In fact a little more than 80 percent of Bangladesh's total protein consumption is made up of fish. By dint of being a part of the world's largest river delta system- the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta this huge bounty is brought to the Bangladeshi households by the waters of Brahmaputra, Meghna, Padma and hundreds of other large and small rivers which criss-cross the landmass of Bangladesh. These rivers and their waters teem with rich bounty of fish throughout the year although the few months of monsoon kick start a period of frenzy among the fish loving Bengalis of Bangladesh as well as in West Bengal for one particular harvest which over time has metamorphosed into nothing less than royalty in Bengali cuisine. With the onset of monsoon the waters start teeming with huge spawns of Hilsa, known as Ilish in Bengali. This particular species has a wide range of habitat ranging from marine, freshwater to the brackish waters as well. Hilsa closely related to herring comprises almost 15% of the total fish production in

Hilsa closely related to herring comprises almost 15% of the total fish production in Bangladesh and accounts for more than 1% of Bangladesh's GDP.

Bangladesh and accounts for more than 1% of Bangladesh's GDP. Widely revered on both sides of the border for its flavour and oil rich flesh Hilsa has earned a permanent place among the hearts of Bengalis on either side of the border.

Although Hilsa is primarily a tropical saltwater fish it thrives in rivers and estuaries. This fish is found in the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and of course in the Bay of Bengal. The coveted Hilsa is also a fast swimming fish, so it can quickly cover kilometers and swim up the rivers draining into the Bay of Bengal possibly to spawn during the breeding seasons. Hilsa is mostly available during February-March and in the monsoon season from August to October, as it is a seasonal fish. Once caught the Hilsa turns into a very delicate catch and needs a lot of looking after to prevent it from rotting. The flesh is soft and is susceptible to rotting as a result of which lot of effort goes into properly freezing the huge stashes of Hilsas and quickly transporting them to the designated markets. During the rainy season, it is considered to be the most wanted delicacy, meant to stoke the taste buds of the Bengali palate. In Bangladesh the Padma-Meghna-Jamuna delta during the months of monsoon returns rich haul of this coveted food item and because of its exclusivity

only during the months of monsoon at times command huge amount of prices compared to most of the other fish. Quiet understandably this silver harvest from the depths of the waters brings smiles to the faces of Bengalis.

The men behind the scenes who toil relentlessly to bring this delicacy to the plates of millions are the hardworking fishermen community of Bangladesh. In fact a significantly large percentage of Bangladesh's population is dependent on various forms of fishing to earn their livelihoods. In fact it is not hard to find villages in rural parts of Bangladesh where the entire population is dependent on various fishing related activities which may range from fishing, to boat making or even the traditional ways of knitting fishing nets. It is amazing how these people still rely on traditional methods of fishing still far removed from the effects of modernization all over the world, yet their methods almost never fail to produce the desired results. Although Cultivation of crops does play a role in earning their livelihoods in certain parts, fishing makes up for the vast majority of their income. The inland waters are calm and easier to tame as a result of which non-motorised boats and traditional boats get the job done effectively. However when it comes to



A typical busy day at one of the fishing ghats in Bangladesh where fishermen dump their catches before they are sorted and sent to various marketplaces across the country



A scene from one of the fishing ghats where the fishermen sort their catches.

taming the rough seas and huge waves the fishermen have to rely upon motorised boats and the sturdy nylon nets to haul the riches from the depths. In fact the nylon nets and the motorised boats are just about the only pieces of modernised equipment used by the fishermen. Usually while

venturing into the seas the fishermen travel in large groups in several motorised boats at once. The number of these boats may range between a few dozen depending on the time of the year. This frenzy is particularly noticeable during the Hilsa season when huge shoals of these fish

come to spawn along the mouth of the rivers leading up to the Bay of Bengal. Often the larger fishing equipment such as the motorised boats, the massive nylon nets are owned by someone else who lease out these equipment on contractual basis. In return the fishermen are obliged to share

their spoils with the owners or share a certain percentage of the profits earned. It would be incorrect to assume fishing always guarantee a steady and consistent income for these people. Income from fishing varies largely based on the type of catch, the time of the year and even on the fishing grounds. For instance during the few months of monsoon the lure of a rich haul of Hilsa is a tempting one, partly due to the abundance of this fish and also due to the high prices these catches fetch in the thousands of local fish markets across Bangladesh. On the other hand the bounty harvested from various fisheries spread across the country are available all throughout the year and hence are never really in extreme demand. As a result of this these catches ensure a steady income. When it comes to selling their catch small scale fishermen usually prefer spot trading where all the payments get settled in cash. In case of larger hauls the fishermen sell their bounties to intermediary traders or middle men who typically are warehouse owners. Often the warehouse owners would stack up these huge stashes for selling them over the next few days after settling the payments to the fishermen. As a result of this the prices of fish are largely regulated by the middlemen who often tend to bag the lion's share of the profit. Such intermediaries are able to exploit the fishermen and manipulate the prices of the fish by dint of owning the selling grounds or the "adats" as they are known as locally. In absence of designated places



Fishing industry in Bangladesh generates employment for millions across the country which also includes the ones who are involved in the business of manufacturing the traditional fishing nets which are still widely used by a significant percentage of the fishing community of Bangladesh.

The biggest threat to their livelihood lies in a far bigger menace which slowly but steadily is turning their job into a hazardous one. In the wake of global warming and the perils associated with it Bangladesh is considered one among the 12 highest climate risk countries in the world. Bangladesh on a regular basis, possibly more than any other country in the world due to its position in the low lying Ganges-Brahmaputra delta faces the wrath of nature in the form of floods, droughts, rising sealevels, storms and cyclones and increasing salinity in its topography....

to ply their trades the fishermen are left with no other choice but sell off their hauls to these intermediaries at a price much lesser compared to the market rates which the buyers shell out for their choice of fish.

However it is not the absence of a fair pricing mechanism which threatens the

fishermen communities of Bangladesh. The biggest threat to their livelihood lies in a far bigger menace, which slowly but steadily is turning their job into a hazardous one. In the wake of global warming and the perils associated with it Bangladesh is considered one among the 12 highest climate risk countries in the whole world.

Bangladesh on a regular basis, possibly more than any other country in the world due to its position in the low lying Ganges-Brahmaputra delta, faces the wrath of nature in the form of floods, droughts, rising sea levels, storms and cyclones and increasing salinity in its topography, all of which can be directly attributed to global

warming and climate change. It goes without saying such devastating impacts greatly threaten the livelihoods of the hardworking fishermen of Bangladesh. It not only severely hinders their day to day movements into the turbulent waters of the sea, often such events even impact the movements of the shoals of fish. At sea,



Large fishing nets such as this one requires the effort of several men to get them on board the fishing boats.

Fishermen load a massive net on their boat before setting sail for their next fishing trip.



The hulls of fishing boats such as this one carry rich harvests from the deep waters of the sea and rivers.



the waters are getting rougher and the frequency of brutal tropical cyclones is increasing. On land, the rain patterns are getting erratic; day and night temperatures fluctuate dramatically which adversely affect the breeding season, even the growth of the fish. While at sea the rough sea waters and the rising tides are posing some of the stiffest challenges to even the most skilled boatmen the country has. For hundreds of years the traditional fishing boats proved to be strong enough to tame the waters of Bay of Bengal. However that no longer seems to be the case now. Without any pattern or warning the sea seems to be changing its nature these days, the waves are getting taller, the waters rougher, which often mean gambling with their own lives as they set out for fishing in their traditional boats which no longer prove to be sturdy enough to hold out against the strong lashing tides. The same problem plagues them while fishing in the many rivers of Bangladesh as well. The unpredictable increase in tropical cyclones every year in their full fury unleashes unmitigated disasters all over the country and often the fishermen in their boats in the middle of the rivers are at the forefront of this wrath of nature. Most of these fishermen, even if they manage to escape with their lives, suffer some serious losses, sometimes which are so grave that they are left with no other choice but seek for alternate modes of livelihoods. Often their nets are damaged beyond repairs, boats capsize and sink to the depths and with

the meagre income to support them it goes without saying these hardworking people almost never enjoy the luxury of investing in a newer set of equipment. Faced with such trying circumstances the fishermen are now forced to upgrade their boats and other equipment. The traditional boats particularly those venturing out in the sea are heavily reinforced with steel bars, the traditional nets are now being replaced by sturdy nylon ones, all of which exact a tremendous amount of price which the fishing folks often have to pay for by loaning money at heavy rates of interest from various third parties which eventually pave the way for further exploitation of these hardworking people at the hands of middlemen.

Amidst all of this, Bangladesh's love for fish shows no sign of slowing down. The demand for Hilsa during monsoon, the abundant supply of dried fish and shrimps and other fish round the year keep on increasing. Hundreds of fishing boats with their hulls full of rich hauls of Hilsa during the months of monsoon in a way uphold the love for fish which this nation harbours. The various preparations of Hilsa such as deep fry, gravy cooked in mustard or even steamed are relished by Bengalis all over Bangladesh. During these few months Hilsa turns into that one binding thread which glues the nation together. In fact the fanatic crave for Hilsa reaches such proportions during the monsoon months that the government of Bangladesh eventually had to intervene with a view

A fisherman stacks up a giant pile of Hilsa, such scenes are common during the Hilsa rich months of monsoon.





Compared to other commonly available fish, Hilsa is a rather delicate one. The soft and tender flesh of this fish begins to rot soon after it is dead and brought out of water. As a result of which the huge stockpiles of Hilsa require careful attention particularly during the months of monsoon when they are available in plenty. They need to be transported to the nearby markets within the least possible time. In the meanwhile the fishermen keep a close eye on their stocks and are on the constant lookout for any signs of rotting. Ice is used profusely to ward off any scope of rotting of the flesh. A fisherman can be seen here covering a huge pile of Hilsa with ice to keep the flesh tender and fresh.

of safeguarding the future of this species and allow the availability of Hilsa in seasons to come. This ban on fishing juvenile and female Hilsas during the breeding months of September and October was first introduced by the government of Bangladesh in the year 2011. In order to replenish the income of those who were worst hit by this ban the

government along with several other environmental agencies and bodies have been encouraging the villagers to take up alternate modes of livelihoods such as farming other species such as tilapia or carp or even cultivation of various seasonal vegetables in the cultivable lands in their villages with help from the government. This sustainable model which encourages

farming of vegetables and a wide variety of other seasonal crops along with farming fish in community ponds and fisheries has greatly brought down the dependency of people particularly in the remote villages on fishing and thereby on fishing juvenile or pregnant Hilsas. In fact more and more people are coming into the folds of this model which even include people who

were actively involved in fishing juvenile Hilsa during the breeding season albeit illegally. This ban which went into effect in 2011 has since then contributed significantly in increasing the Hilsa output in the country. However the government is unwilling to take any chances as is evident from the 22 day ban which the government imposes on Hilsa fishing every



In the monsoon months and the early part of the year during the months of February-March, Bangladesh produces hundreds of tonnes of Hilsa. This particular fish apart from finding a special place in the food-loving hearts of the people of Bangladesh is also a major source of income and livelihood for millions of people across Bangladesh.



In addition to these bans the government also came up with the plan of setting up of Hilsa Sanctuaries across the country with a view of preventing the overfishing of Hilsa.

year for the past few years during the month of October which coincides with the breeding time for this species. This year this ban was introduced from October 7th and continue till October 28th. During this period the government has also introduced schemes rewarding the fishing communities or households affected due to the ban with sacks of rice or many other

supplies to compensate for the losses which they incur. There are further plans which are being implemented in collaboration with other concerned agencies which will further galvanise the present compensation schemes. Part of which also includes investing some of the funds which the government generates in the form of exporting Hilsa which is estimated in the

region of upwards of US\$ 600 million or more in tax revenue. The concerned authorities are of the opinion that the funds can be much better used as a wholesome approach aimed at developing the overall standard of life of these communities along with rewarding with various microcredit schemes. However there can be no denying that a lot still remains to be done in order

to make these compensation schemes effective ones with a lot more desired transparency. In addition to these bans the government also came up with the plan of setting up of Hilsa Sanctuaries across the country with a view of preventing the overfishing of Hilsa. As of 2018 the government has declared many designated stretches along several prominent rivers

Such huge stockpiles of Hilsa require regular looking after in order to keep the flesh from rotting. The ice-makers too largely benefit from supplying huge quantities of ice to the fishermen and the traders.



as Hilsa Sanctuaries in Bangladesh. A designated 83 kilometres long stretch along the Meghna River becoming the latest among them to join this list. This particular stretch was declared a sanctuary in 2018. The previously designated stretches were along Meghna River, Tentulia River, Padma River and Andharmanik River. These stretches range from between 20 to 100 kilometres along these rivers. In order to conserve this species the government has imposed bans on fishing of Hilsa in these designated sanctuaries as well with the first ban imposed in March-April in all the sanctuaries except for the one in Andharmanik River. The sanctuary in Andharmanik River as per government guidelines experiences this ban from November to January.

Words will eventually run out in an attempt to describe Bangladesh's and the Bengali's obsession with Hilsa. The exported Hilsa breed from Bangladesh, which is popularly known as "Padma'r Ilish" in Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal at times outweighs the popularity and the status enjoyed by the Hilsa found in rivers of neighbouring West Bengal, particularly in the Rupnarayan River. Countless families divided by a whimsical border drawn by the British in the middle of the 19th century still argue endlessly about which side of the border produces better Ilish. Padma one of the major rivers of Bangladesh has found many mentions in the works of Bengali poets, authors including those of the iconic poet Rabindranath Tagore. A

common notion which over time has made its way into Bengali folklore suggests when the rain clouds gather over the banks of Padma River, the season of "Ilish" is here, a strong sentiment still harboured by millions of Bengalis on either side of the international border and all over the world. The craving for this fish still remains undiminished, an insatiable lust for the tender flesh, the preparations which are often synonymous with the strong odour of mustard in a heartbeat can wipe off all the socio-economic differences and seems to bring down at least over plates of steaming rice served with "Ilish" the iron fenced borders separating the two Bengals. Hilsa has found its way to Bengali households on the occasion of almost every major celebration ranging from social gathering to religious occasions. In Bangladesh, Hilsa is no longer just a food, it is nothing short of a national craze, the mere mention of which revives beautiful memories from the past, the prospect of which featuring in the lunch or dinner menu infuses a sense of happiness among millions, a food item which is deeply intertwined in the culture of the country. And in this regard Bangladesh hasn't failed in safeguarding this treasure which lurks beneath the watery depths of the country. In fact Bangladesh is the only country where the Hilsa population has gone up. Everywhere else, the fish that lives in the sea and in estuaries but goes upriver to spawn is in decline, thanks to overfishing and a sharp deterioration in both the quality

and the quantity of the water coming down the rivers that the fish have been using for centuries. Careful implementation of the methods mentioned above and the timely bans imposed by the authorities have gone a long way in ensuring this silvery treasure which the waters have to offer is well protected. By the look of things, it does appear Bangladesh is most sincere in protecting what they consider to be the king of all fish. Popularly referred to as the "Silver Fish" by many for the sheen of its scales in Bangladesh, Hilsa is truly worth its weight in gold. And it appears that Bangladesh's love affair with Hilsa will rage on for many more centuries to come, inducting many more future generations to the unparalleled taste of this fish, for Hilsa is no longer just a food item, it forms an integral part of the identity of this proud nation, an identity which was forged in the fires of long drawn battles and struggles and Hilsa in the popular culture of Bangladesh further reinforces that proud identity.

Bangladesh is the only country where the Hilsa population has gone up. Everywhere else, the fish that lives in the sea and in estuaries but goes upriver to spawn is in decline, thanks to overfishing...



About the Photographer

Faruq Hossain is a Bangladesh based freelance photographer. His journey with the camera started 3 years back and now has turned into an integral part of his life. He has completed a photography course from the renowned photography institute "Photoarts Institute". Interested in all genres he has a special affinity for people, culture, street and documentary photography. His passion is to travel to beautiful places and meet inspiring people. He wishes to be known as a creator of beautiful images from all over the world. Find more of his work is on **Facebook:**

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The successful conservation story of a small bunch of islands off the coast of England and what the future has in store for them

The A Farne Islands Puffin Paradise

by Sid Tripathy

A puffin on the Farne Islands with a mouthful of sand eels, a favourite food item among the puffins. Their specially designed bills allow them to carry multiple medium sized fish in their mouth at once.



The puffin is unmistakable, the brightly coloured bill and beautiful patterns of black and white all over leave a lasting impression even after one casual fleeting glance. The bright orange coloured webbed feet which are responsible for the signature awkward saunter on land enable these birds to navigate the strong icy cold currents of the Atlantic in search of food. Puffins are generally found in huge colonies and breed over a wide range of habitat extending from the shores of Norway, Iceland and Greenland to the west coast of Ireland and parts of United Kingdom to the east. Among these one particular group of islands along the shores of England have garnered the reputation of being one of the prominent puffin strongholds in the natural world. The Farne Islands are a scattered group of islands off the coast of Northumberland in England. The Farne Islands are a group of 15-20 islands with the numbers varying according to the rising and ebbing seawater during the tides. Each year puffins visit the Farne Islands in huge numbers during the breeding season. The earliest visitors alight on the rocky shores of the Farne Islands by the middle of April kicking off a season of visitors which lasts till late July. During the months of May and June the islands teem with puffin colonies since this period marks the peak breeding season. Puffins spend most of their lifetime on the icy cold waters and return to land only during the few short months of spring to nest and raise their

young ones. The signature bright orange colouration in their bills occurs during the breeding season when they are on land. While at sea particularly during the cold winter months it dons a dullish winter coat with most of the vibrant facial characteristics lost only to return during the next spring. The Farne Islands provide these birds with the ideal set up for their spring homes. The near non-existent human population, the secluded location of these islands, the rocky shores and the cliffs along them which are perfect setting for these birds to build their nests, the presence of any notable predator together have contributed in making the Farne Islands the favoured nesting location among these birds.

The rocky cliffs along the shores of the Farne Islands are the preferred nesting sites for the puffins. Puffins usually dig a burrow in the peaty ground at the clifftops and lay a single egg inside the burrow. After an approximate incubation period of forty days the puffling emerges from the egg. For the next four odd weeks the puffling remains within the safe confines of the burrow where it feeds on whole fish delivered to it by the parents. The mortality rate among the fledglings is relatively low due to the absence of any major threat in the form of ground predators or human interference. Yet the parents keep a close watch on their nests and young ones. Gulls, skuas or other larger birds are known to pester adult puffins carrying mouthful of fish back to their nests with the intent of

Puffins are possibly the most widely recognized seabirds. The brightly coloured bill, the stocky frame and the signature comical gait make this bird unmistakable.



A typical puffin colony in the Farne Islands. There could be more than a thousand individuals in every colony. The absence of predators, minimal human interference and availability of food have contributed towards making the Farne Islands such a puffin stronghold.





A breeding pair of male and female puffins. Puffins are monogamous and pair up for their entire lifetime. This species doesn't exhibit any sexual dimorphism meaning the males and females are similar in appearance. Males however tend to be slightly bigger than the females in most cases. A breeding pair returns to the same nesting site every year for many consecutive breeding seasons.

robbing them off their catch. On the odd occasion if they get the opportunity to prey upon a wandering puffling these birds will not let go off such an opportunity for an easy meal. At the end of these six weeks the pufflings are fully fledged and they step out of their burrows for the first time. They closely follow their parents as they awkwardly waddle towards the water's edge and take their first swim in what for the major portion of their lives is going to be their future home. Puffins do appear clumsy on ground mainly due to their comic gait however once inside water the comic gait gives way to agile and graceful manoeuvres. Like other seabirds the puffin is in fact at home when it is in the water. The webbed feet help them to steer in the desired direction while the wings act as flippers allowing these birds to plummet to great depths at a rapid rate in search of the next meal. During the peak breeding season in the months of May-June tens of thousands of puffins crowd the waters of the North Sea along the coasts of the Farne Islands. They relentlessly scour the depths of the North Sea in search of fish or sand eel, a staple for puffins. The presence of large number of puffin colonies also acts as an indicator regarding the health of the marine life in the seas and oceans around. Along with everything else these birds prefer to choose such breeding locations from where they don't have to travel too far in search of food. Even sites where the availability of food is at a greater depth under the water's surface is not ideally

suited since it means making longer underwater trips, which apart from being not too energy efficient, keep the parents away from their nests leaving their young ones unsupervised for longer periods of time. Hence puffin colonies, the health of it, the size of it together speak volumes about not only these sea birds but the health of the sea itself.

The huge colonies of thousands of birds which are such common sights at the Farne Islands during the months of April-June have absolutely no similarity with the lives of these birds in water. Once in water puffins lead a very solitary existence. Most documentation of these birds has been carried out on land and there is very little knowledge available about their lives at sea. This is mainly due to the fact that once in water the puffin becomes mighty elusive, primarily due to its solitary existence. It becomes extremely difficult to spot even a single bird among the vast stretches of water. Like most sea birds the puffin too spends considerable time preening. The oily secretion from the preening glands is carefully applied all over its body, particularly the fur so that water doesn't stick to their feathers. Their diet is almost entirely composed of fish although it is not unnatural for these birds to feed on smaller crustaceans, molluscs particularly when they are feeding along the coasts. In search of fish these birds can dive to great depths and hold their breath for almost a minute or even more. They prefer to feed on smaller to medium

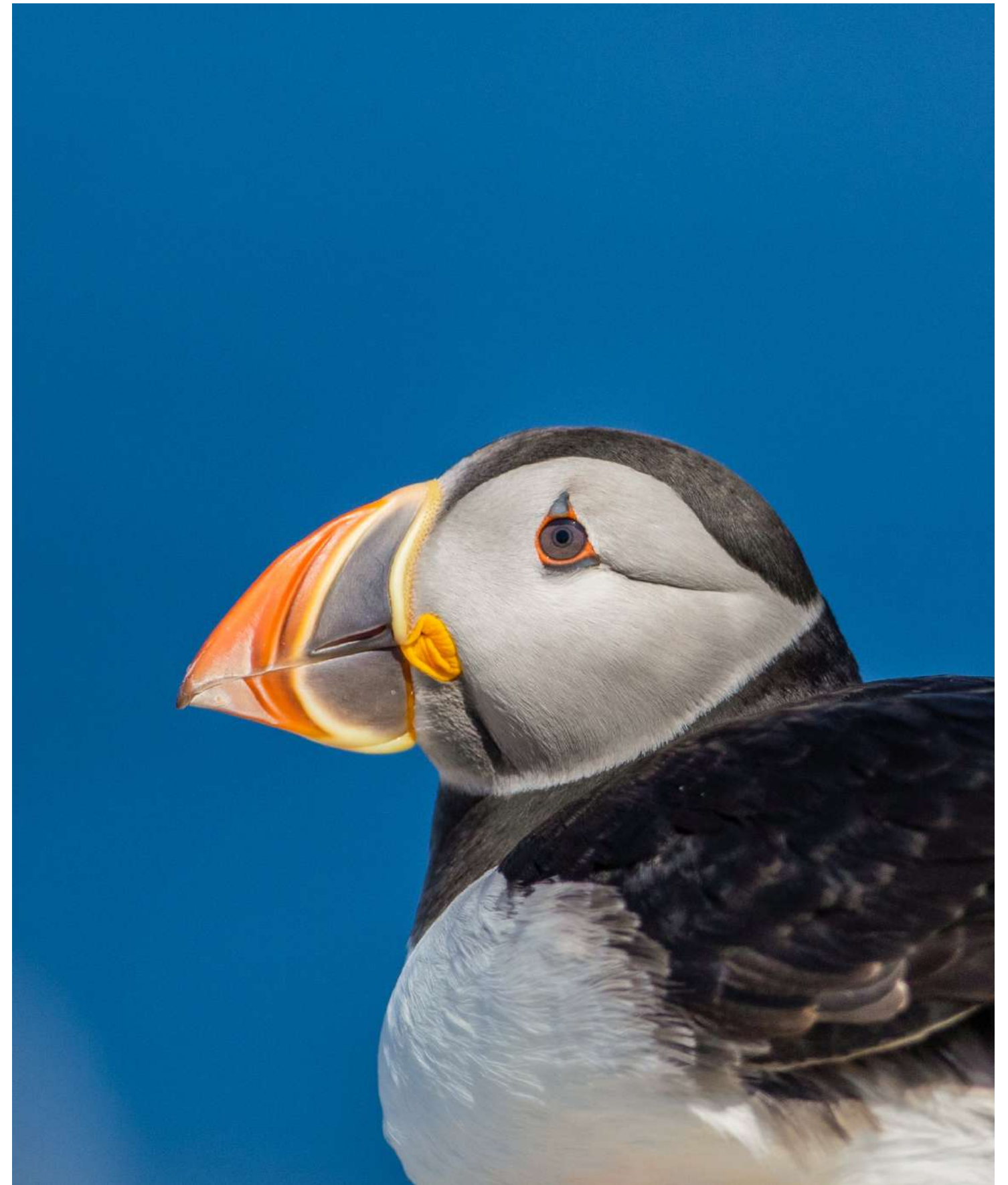
A puffin with a mouthful of sand eels in the Farne Islands. Puffins may undertake multiple diving sessions each day in search of small to medium sized fish and often bring them back to their nests to feed their young ones.



sized fish with species such as sand eels, herrings and capelins topping the chart. While underwater puffins are capable of swallowing smaller sized fish or medium sized fish however if they get hold of a number of fish these birds prefer to bring their catch to the surface or to the land before feeding on them. While swallowing their mouthful of catch underwater puffins inadvertently ingest a lot of the salt water of the seas and oceans. In order to counter the effects of sea water with rich salt contents inside their stomach these birds have developed a mechanism as well. Excess salt from the sea water is filtered partly by the kidneys through excretion and the rest is taken care by specialised salt glands. Like other seabirds puffins too possess a pair of specialised salt glands nestled inside a pair of grooves in the skull right above their eyes. The excess salt which they consume moves through their blood stream into these salt glands. Here the salt is processed and the excess salt is removed in the form of a densely salty fluid which is excreted from the nostrils and runs down the grooves in the bill. Once on land the puffin metamorphoses into a sociable creature. Each year the Farne Islands witness a gathering of tens of thousands of puffins. Those who are the earliest to arrive stake their claims to the best nesting sites. In fact it has been noticed the pairs returning to their same respective burrows year after year. Part of this social behaviour is aimed at providing greater safety which lies in numbers to

the fledglings. However clashes do break out among the individuals belonging to one colony if they trespass into each other's nesting site. The residents make it a point to establish their dominance and drive the message to the intruder loud and clear that such transgression will be dealt with severely. Usually in order to establish their dominance the puffins stand upright with their chests fluffing out. This is followed by cocking their tall and an exaggerated walk accompanied by rapid swaying of their heads. Once dominance has been established the surrender is a hasty one with the intruder adopting a hasty retreat during which they lower their heads and while positioning themselves almost horizontally to the ground dart past the dominant individuals. A day full of myriad activities in these puffin colonies gives way to a much quieter night along the slopes and cliffs of the Farne Islands when these birds fly out to sea to roost until daybreak.

There are a number of reasons which have contributed towards the Farne Islands turning into such a puffin stronghold. In fact the Farne Islands are home to a number of seabirds species such as the Arctic terns, seagulls, the guillemots and a sizeable population of Atlantic seals. One of the major reasons for the conservation success story that the Farne Islands are today is the absence of human settlements in these islands. There are remnants from the past in the form of old chapels or other structures which hint at ancient human



The bright orange colouration in their bills fades away during the winter months and assumes a dull appearance. The bright colouration is typically observed during the months of spring which coincide with the breeding season of these seabirds.



(above) Apart from puffins the Frane Islands happen to be the nesting site for a number of seabird species. A brown gull chick waits for its parents to bring it food.

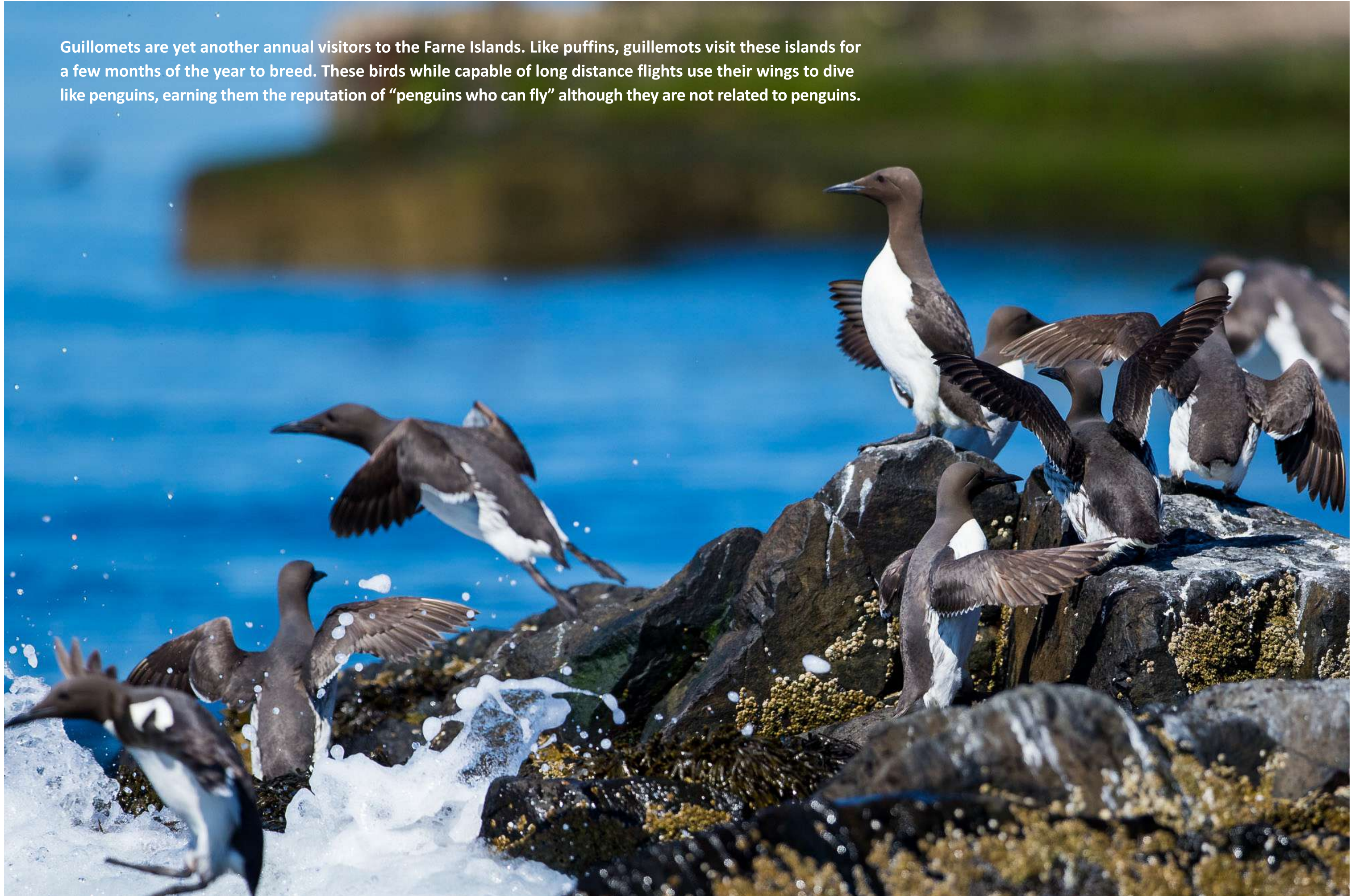


A guillemot basks in the sun on the rocky shores of the Farne Islands.



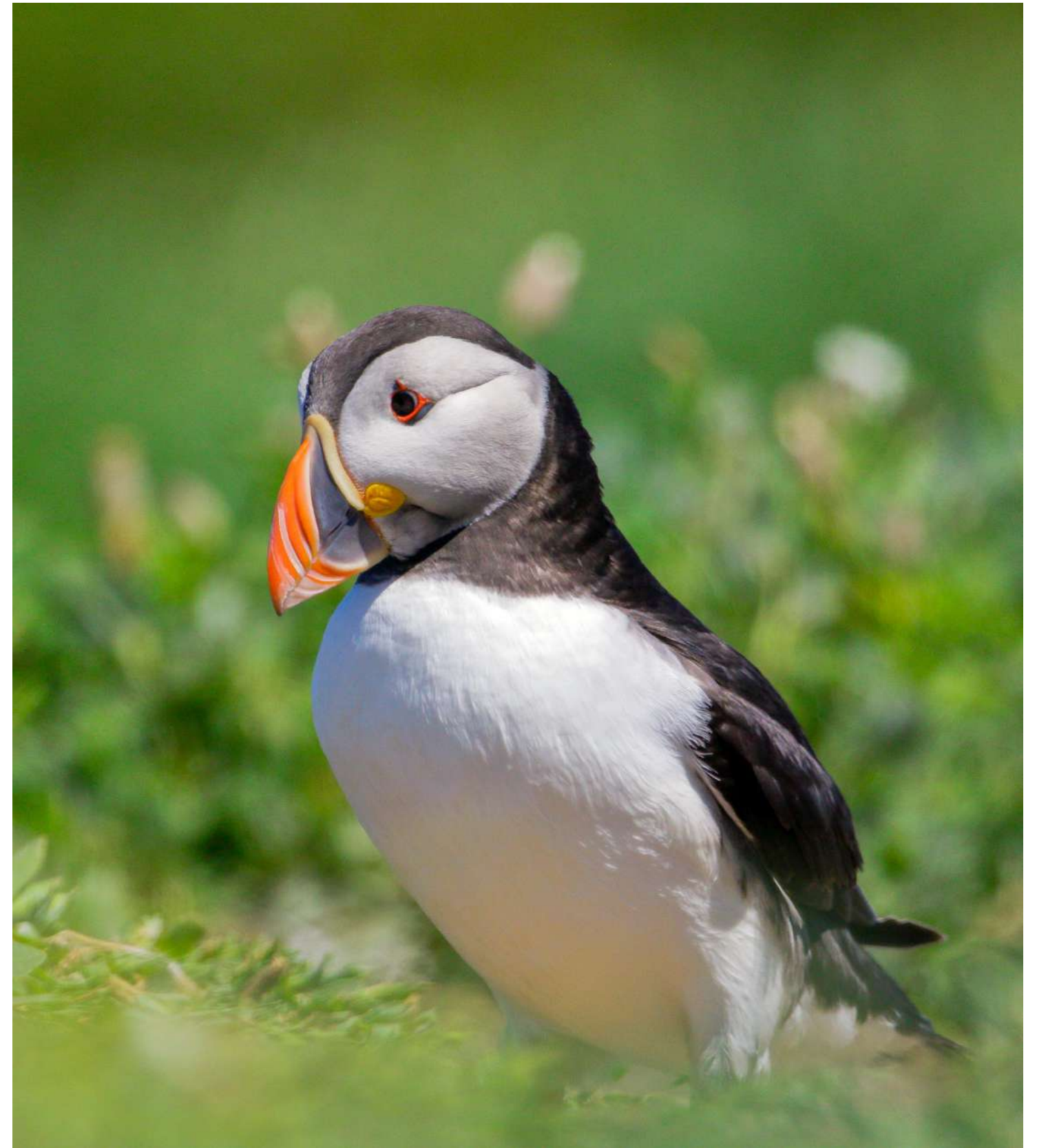
(above) These islands are home to thousands of grey seals, which are also known as Atlantic seals. During autumn every year hundreds of pups are born on these islands.

Guillemots are yet another annual visitors to the Farne Islands. Like puffins, guillemots visit these islands for a few months of the year to breed. These birds while capable of long distance flights use their wings to dive like penguins, earning them the reputation of “penguins who can fly” although they are not related to penguins.



settlements on these rocky islands however in the recent past the Farne Islands have been deserted by human beings. Presently the Farne Islands are looked after by the National Trust England, a conservation organisation based in England which is concerned with places of historical or natural significance. At present the only human settlement in the Farne Islands is in the form of the few National Trust personnel who are present during few months of the year. This lack of human settlement and human society related activities have allowed the Farne Islands to cater to the needs of the striking biodiversity which can be found here. In the absence of any notable terrestrial predator the puffin colonies and other seabird species such as the guillemot find the Farne Islands a safer option to raise their young ones. The lack of pollution has also contributed significantly towards providing the ideal environment for the young chicks that are often susceptible to pollution related diseases at early stages of their lives. However even in such a safe haven not all is well with the puffin colonies. Despite the best efforts from the members of the National Trust there has been a steady decline in the number of puffins visiting the Farne Islands. The census carried out this year revealed a significant 12% drop in numbers compared to the previous census which was carried out in 2013. Such an alarming rate of decline has prompted many to fear that in another 50 years or so puffins may

completely disappear from the Farne Islands. In fact on one of the islets there has been a staggering decline of 42% in puffin population. In addition to that the breeding pairs were almost a month late in arriving than usual. Sadly the Farne Islands are not the only place which is witnessing such trends. Amidst falling numbers the IUCN listed puffins as “vulnerable” in the Red List of threatened species. The factors which are contributing towards such declining numbers may have nothing to do with the Farne Islands which is the most worrisome aspect. Climate change is one of the other reasons which is steadily contributing towards this decline. The prolonged winters, their harsher nature intervenes with the breeding season and breeding patterns of these birds which explains why the pairs were late by almost 4 weeks in arriving to the nesting sites at Farne Islands this year. Untimely storm and torrential rain can wreak havoc on the nesting sites as was the case in 2015 when the fledgling population almost halved due to untimely extreme weather. The changing sea temperature affects the movement and availability of shoals of fish which make foraging harder for these birds or even an acute scarcity of food which can lead to starvation and death eventually. The Farne Islands is an incredible success story in conservation and the puffins have been benefitting from this the most until the recent chain of disturbing revelations. In 1939 only 3000 breeding pairs were recorded. Since then




When out of the water puffins spend most of their time preening their feathers and keep their feathers glossy and oily. This restricts water from sticking to the feathers when they undertake repeated diving sessions off the cliffs in search of fish.

the census conducted every 5 years marked a steady increase in the population until 2003 when the number of breeding pairs stood at above 55,000. Since then there has been fluctuations in these numbers, with a decreasing trend noticed in 2008, a slight increase in numbers in 2013 and an alarming drop in 2018. Amidst such worrying trends the Farney Islands continue to remain a beacon of hope for the puffins and other species on these

rocky shores. The dedicated rangers from the National Trust are fighting against some mighty odds, and their efforts alone may not be able to alter the course of doom which looms large for the puffins and other species unless there is a collaborative effort and awareness. The Farne Islands is one of the biggest examples of how nature and its species often can stage a remarkable comeback with the slightest of help and co-operation and stands out as a rare

success story from which we all can draw heart and courage to further build on the remarkable achievements of these tiny rocky islets along the shores of England. The declining numbers are a big reason for concern, the factors contributing towards this decline have far severe implications and will not stop at obliterating just one species, the delicate balance of nature can get affected even at the extinction of a single species and

presently we are faced with that awful aspect staring at a number of species. In such precarious times places like the Farne Islands become all the more vital to the cause of conservation. As long as these nesting grounds will be available there will always be hope even in the face of dwindling numbers for all that nature needs is a safe yard, if we can provide that life will find a way to pave thousands of miles of safe haven for its species.

A group of puffins, likely Atlantic puffins, are perched on a dark, rocky outcrop. They have black heads and backs, white chests, and distinctive orange and yellow beaks. One puffin in the center is looking towards the right, while others are scattered around it, some looking in different directions. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, coastal environment.

Puffin colonies bustle with activities during the day, from feeding their chicks to making repeated diving sessions in search of food the rocky cliffs turn into hotbeds of activities. The nights are quiet with the adults returning to the sea to roost.



About the Photographer

Sid Tripathy is a wildlife photographer based in London, United Kingdom. He is originally from Bhubaneswar, Odisha. He started his wildlife photography journey back in 2010 after he got his first Canon body. He has travelled across India, China, Kenya, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States in search for his wildlife adobe. He is a regular contributor to various social media groups in Facebook as well as a member of RSPB in the United Kingdom.

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www.instagram.com/shutter_guru

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For decades the Farne Islands have been a puffin stronghold, thanks to a lot of factors which have steadfastly contributed to the ever increasing number of breeding pairs on these islands. However the last few censuses notably the ones conducted in 2013 and 2018 have revealed a disturbing trend. There has been a steady decline in the number of puffins visiting the Farne Islands during the breeding season. In fact in 2018 the birds were late by at least 4 weeks in arriving at their preferred nesting sites. This is directly related to the decreasing populations of puffins across the globe due to several factors among which climate change plays the most crucial role. Amidst such developments places like the Farne Islands become important than ever for the purpose of conservation. As long as these nesting sites are preserved these birds even against all odds will always have a chance of fighting back.

Travel

The town of Riomaggiore in the early light of dawn.

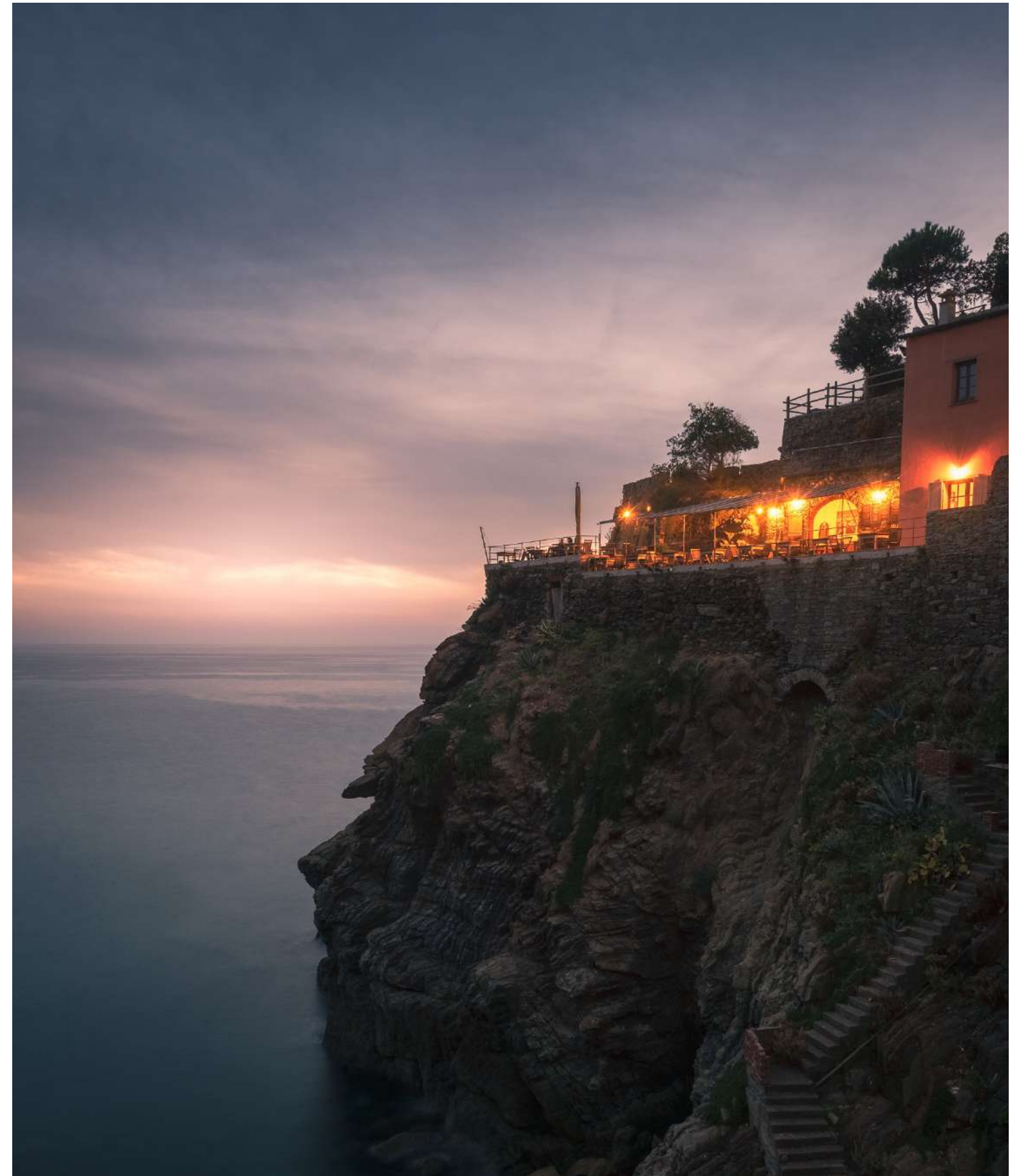
the crown jewel of the Italian Riviera
by Sandeep Mathur

Cinque
Terre

The crescent shaped Italian Riviera is a narrow rugged coastline dotted with numerous romantic villages and small towns which are reminiscent of the old world charm that is bound to evoke the finer feelings which often get buried deep under the rigours of our daily lives. These dramatic coastlines are home to five of the most picturesque fishing villages which are best known for their breathtaking location and their ingenious ways of construction. Cinque Terre is a quintet of five small fishing villages Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso al Mare, and have become one of the most photographed locations in the world. Each of the five villages is a variation of the same theme, a pastel potpourri of homes, built along a rugged portion of coast on the Italian Riviera. It is situated in the Liguria region of Italy, to the north west of the city of La Spezia. The region presents some of the most beautiful vistas of the sea encountering civilisation. They are rooted in antiquity, dating from the early medieval period, founded by settlers escaping from invading Barbarians or Greek settlers escaping persecution in Byzantium. Cinque Terra was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997 and its reputation as being one of the most beautiful places along the Italian coast has catapulted to dizzying heights since then. Cinque Terra is no longer Italian Riviera's closely guarded secret as was the case during the ancient times, in fact this once obscure hamlet has

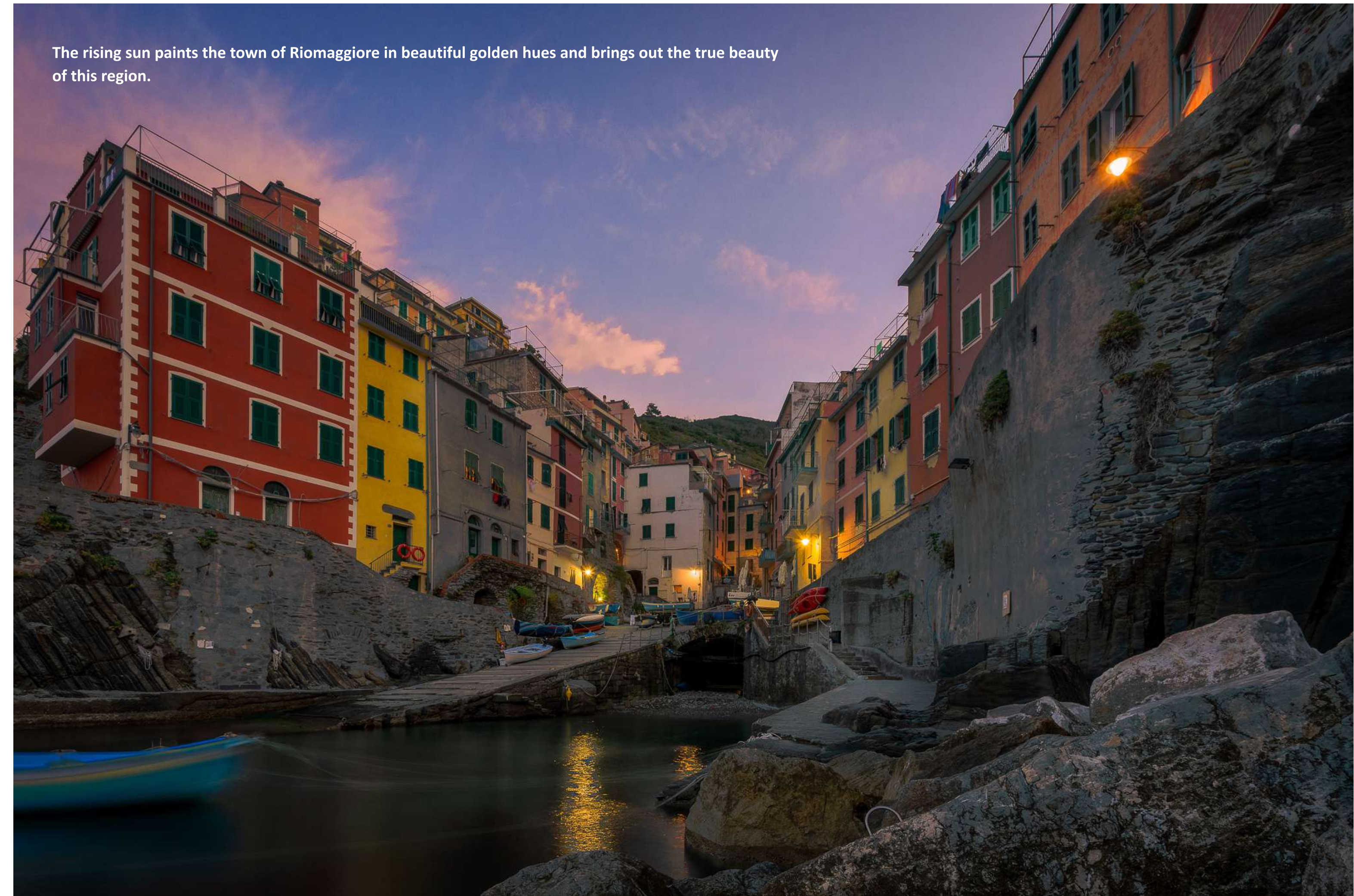
metamorphosed into one of the crown jewels of the Italian Riviera, yet there is something about these coastal towns which is soaked in old world romanticism and remote authenticity.

Cinque Terre in keeping up with modern times is well connected to the rest of Italy although the journey is not a straight forward one. The village of Riomaggiore lies at the southernmost tip of this quintet and is connected to the rest of Italy through an intricate rail road network. The route to Riomaggiore passes through numerous tunnels which do their very best to obscure any view of what lies ahead in a perfect build up to the breath taking beauty that lies awaiting. The Riomaggiore railway station offers the first glimpse of the Italian Riviera in all its glory. The brilliant view of the sea and the village of Riomaggiore do justice to the teasing build up which tantalizes the prying eyes during the course of the train journey. Home to a small settlement of fishermen this small town doesn't lack in spirit, the loud bars and the impromptu musical sessions after work bear testimony to that. Riomaggiore is connected to the next town Manarola by rail road and via the famous Via dell'Amore or translated in English - The Road of Love. It is said that after World War I, the people of Riomaggiore and Manarola decided to build a road joining the two villages so that the young people of the two villages could meet and fall in love, hence the name Via dell'Amore. Manarola at a very first glance stands out for the



The breathtaking view of Riomaggiore from Riomaggiore Railway Station. The islands are connected to the rest of Italy through a railroad network which often passes through underground tunnels.

The rising sun paints the town of Riomaggiore in beautiful golden hues and brings out the true beauty of this region.



There are plenty of signs everywhere which reveal these towns are primarily inhabited by communities of fishermen.



A common enough scene in the town of Riomaggiore.

abundance of grape vines all around. It comes as little surprise that Manarola is known for its sweet Sciaccheta wine. People here speak an esoteric local dialect known predictably as Manarolese which too gives this small village a distinct identity. Staircases going all the way down to the sea level allow one to explore the caves along the shore and the opportunity for a swim in the Ligurian Sea. All the five towns are connected with each other via the railroad network. A short train ride leads to the next town Corniglia. The train station leads straight onto the main street which winds its way to the little harbour and then up to the trekking path for the next town Corniglia. It is on this trail one

can come up to the vantage point which provides the region's most popular postcard view. At the Corniglia train station, the path gains height to reach the town, which sits 300 feet above the Ligurian Sea, the only one not near sea-level. The road passes lemon trees, vines, lilies and vegetation of all kinds and in May the air is full of the sweet perfume of flowers. Vernazza is the fourth, in the sequence of villages and also one of the prettiest. The remnant of an ancient castle with only the watchtower remaining which probably served as the town's lookout back in the pirate days are reminders to those days when the violent shores would stand witness to hordes of pirates plundering

The town of Manarola in its full glory during sunset.



The main street of Manarola lined with shops and fishing boats of varying sizes.



these villages and the resistance put up by the brave communities in these villages. There is a church on the harbour front which is unusual for its entryway which faces east. Beyond the town, vineyards, with their many flowery terraces fill the mountainside. The main cobbled street Via Roma, lined with many small cafes, links the main train station to the small harbour.

The town of Monterosso was originally known as Fegila in old days. Monterosso is a combination of old Monterosso which largely resembles the ancient times and the new Monterosso which has been developed since the 1950s. The two parts of this town are interconnected by a tunnel which is short enough to be safely used by pedestrians as well thus enabling movement between the two parts of the town. The newer part of the town bears a much more modern and swanky outlook and even boasts of a large sandy beach. Quite understandably the presence of modern hotels, restaurants and other modern amenities have made Monterosso a preferred choice among tourists. The old town is similar to the other Cinque Terre towns, though bigger and not quite as steep and has a number of boutiques and other shops.

The mesmerizing beauty of the Italian Riviera is well known, however it is this small group of villages which withstood onslaughts from hordes of pirates and the whims of nature, which truly stands out in this landscape.

Reaching There:

Cinque Terre experiences the busiest months during May to August. The rainy season which usually coincides with the month of November is a relatively off season in terms of tourism.

By plane few of the nearest international airports are at Genoa, Pisa and Milan. Train and car services to Cinque Terre are available from all of these airports, although depending on the point of origin the travel time can vary between 1 hour to 5 hours.

By train is the easiest way to travel to Cinque Terre. The local train from Genoa to La Spezia is the easiest way to travel. There are express trains as well travelling between Genoa and La Spezia. Once at La Spezia there is yet another railroad network connecting La Spezia with Sestri Levante. It is on this route one can get off at Riomaggiore which is the next stop after La Spezia.

One can also easily avail regular boat trips which are conducted between La Spezia to Cinque Terre and also along the shores of Cinque Terre.



The pretty set up for the local kindergarten in the town of Manarola. Everything in this coastal town scores heavily in the department of aesthetics.



The beautiful view of Vernazza, arguably the prettiest among the five towns of Cinque Terre. Whatever remains of the ancient castle along with its watchtower is a reminder to the violent past when these coastal towns would be repeatedly raided and plundered by hordes of pirates.



About the Photographer

Sandeep Mathur is a passionate traveler 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:

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Travel

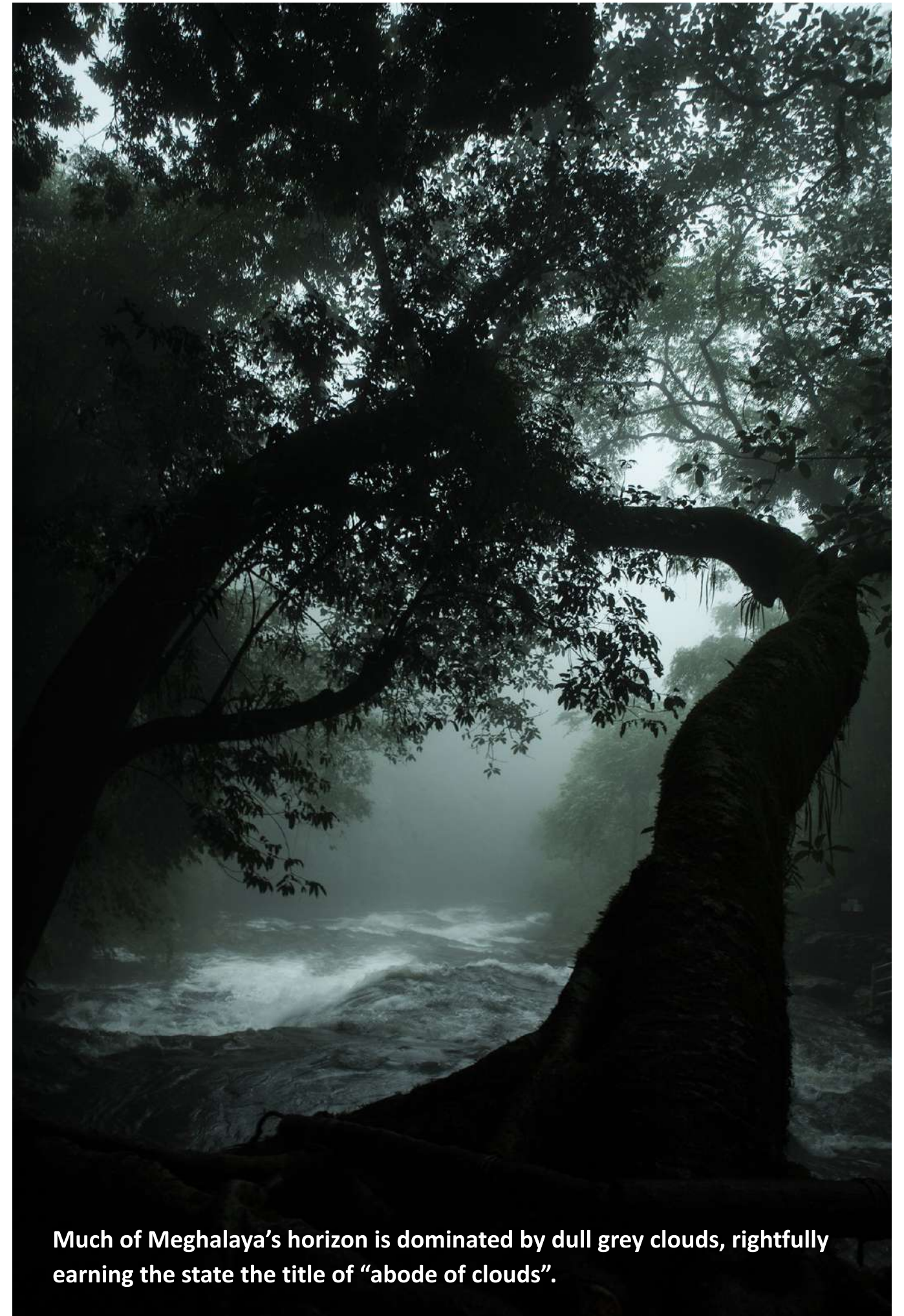
*en route
to
Meghalaya...*

by Avismita Bhattacharyya

Rain soaked lush green slopes of mountains, the energetic and infectious beats of rock music in the air, the warm and welcoming people and a plethora of pristine natural beauty waiting to be explored, the long list of excuses to visit the beautiful state of Meghalaya lures into its folds thousands from all over every year.

Lush green carpets along the slopes of Khasi Hills, an abundance of greenery all around facilitated by the incessant rainfall, a calm, relaxed yet purposeful way of life, a cool moisture laden breeze sweeping every corner of this beautiful landscape and a remarkable number of picturesque waterfalls gushing down the slopes of the hills- these in a nutshell define one of the most beautiful states in India. Such beautiful elements of the natural world have combined together to seam a beautiful tapestry of colours and scenic beauty which for the past decade or so have been attracting thousands of tourists to its magical realms from all over the world. The name “Meghalaya” literally translates into abode of clouds, fitting for a place which is home to the wettest place on the planet. The village of Mawsynram which receives an average annual rainfall of 467 inches is the wettest place on this planet. In fact Cherrapunji, neighbouring Mawsynram is not far behind with a rainfall of 463 inches every year and is the second wettest place on the planet. The landscape in this beautiful north-east Indian state is often characterized by a thick veil of cloud waiting to usher in a fresh spell of rain at any time of the day. A land of countless waterfalls each beautiful beyond words and imagination, a land where the rising sun paints its landscapes in surreal colours, where crystal clear lakes reveal the most beautiful patterns engraved on their rocky beds, a place where underground caves preserve

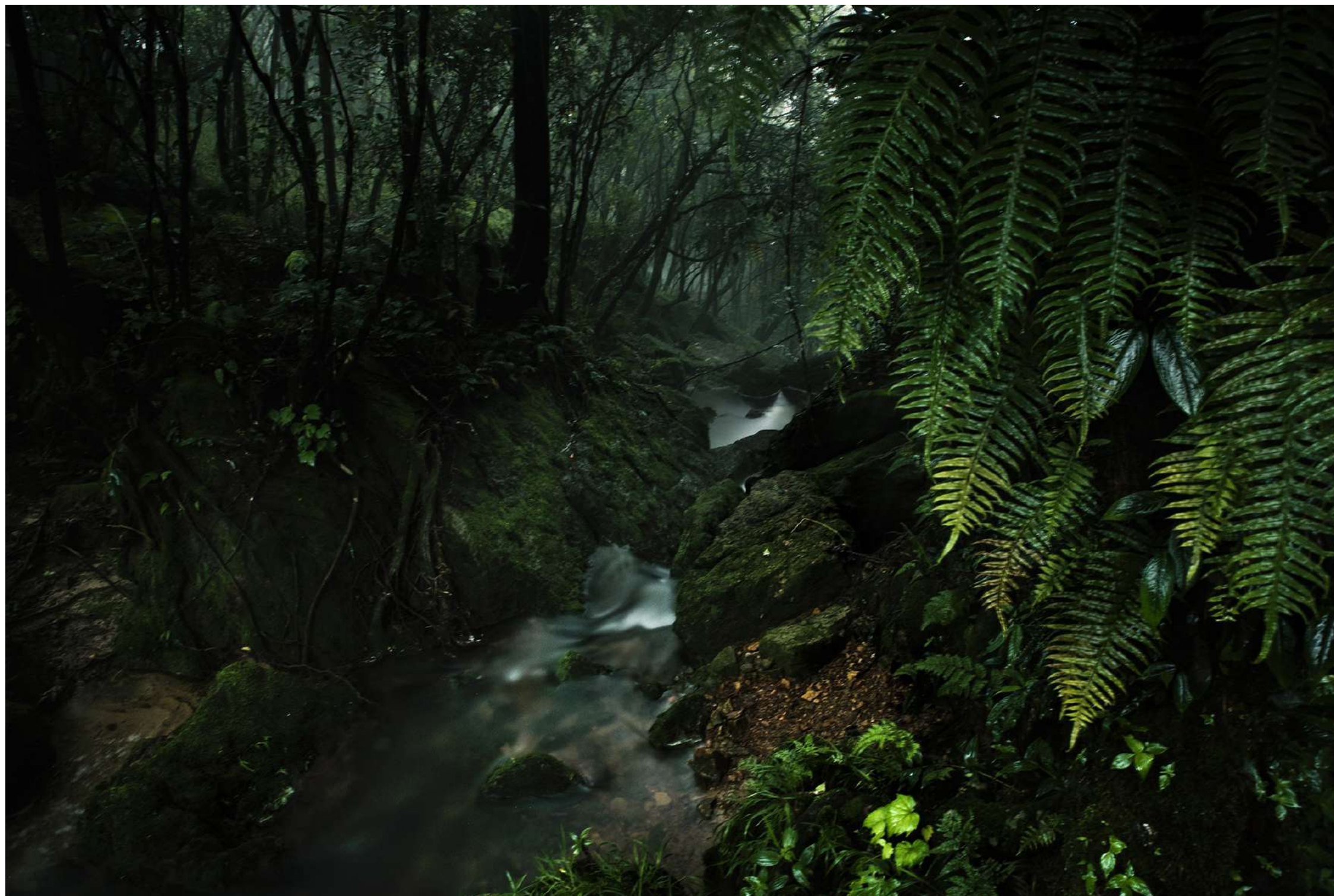
in their dark moisty realms secrets from episodes long lost in time, Meghalaya is truly a treasure trove for those who wish to seek nature’s beauty. While natural beauty largely dominates the landscape of Meghalaya, the way of life is heavily dominated by a rich history and heritage of music. In fact many believe the hugely popular genre of rock music made landfall in India in the state of Meghalaya. In fact such strong affinity for music, particularly rock and metal music has earned Shillong the capital city of Meghalaya the reputation of being the “rock capital of India”. Long before the advent of rock and other genres of popular modern music Meghalaya and its people always enjoyed a rich and profound musical heritage of their own. A rich folk tradition paved the pathway for a thriving musical scenario which is prevalent in the state today. The fact that Meghalaya played host to the popular NH7 weekender in 2018; one of the biggest musical festivals is a testimony to the burgeoning musical scenario in the state. Apart from the fine taste in music which is complimented brilliantly by the beautiful landscapes and countryside Meghalaya is worth visiting for a number of other reasons. One of them is a rare cultural practice which in stark contrast to most other parts of the country truly empowers women in some ways. The Khasi people, the original inhabitants of Meghalaya are part of a matrilineal society. In fact a number of tribes belonging to Garo and Khasi subgroups are considered to be the



Much of Meghalaya’s horizon is dominated by dull grey clouds, rightfully earning the state the title of “abode of clouds”.



Waterfalls paving the way for such narrow streams along the slopes of the mountains are some of the most common features of the landscape of Meghalaya.



Heavy downpour for most part of the year facilitates life blossoming everywhere which is evident from the abundance of greenery in the landscape of Meghalaya. The slopes of the mountains are covered in lush green carpets of vegetation and are home to a wide range of flora and fauna. Meghalaya in fact boasts of being home to two of the wettest places on this planet, the village of Mawsynram holds the distinction of being the wettest place on this planet closely followed by Cherrapunji as the second rainiest place on earth. The cloudy scapes, the incessant rainfall and places like Mawsynram and Cherrapunji do justice to the name Meghalaya which literally translates into “abode of clouds”.

few last remaining bastions for the matrilineal culture in the world. In a matrilineal society the lineage of a person or his/her ancestry is traced through that of the mother. In addition to that in the Khasi or Garo society it is the youngest daughter (Khadduh) who is in line to inherit the wealth and property of her parents. In fact after their marriage the husband of the youngest daughter moves in with his in-laws and is expected to help the youngest daughter take care of her parents. With the arrival of Christian missionaries and members from these ethnic communities embracing Christianity as their religion most of these practices have faded away from the cities or towns but they are still observed in many rural parts.

The another noticeable aspect about Meghalaya is the “cleanest village in Asia” which the state proudly boasts of. The small village of Mawlynnong, barely 100 km from the capital city Shillong, won the status of being the cleanest village in Asia in the year 2003. Since then this beautiful hamlet has been thrust in the public glare with thousands of tourists visiting this place every year to get a glimpse of the efforts of the villagers in keeping their surroundings neat, clean and beautiful, in perfect harmony with the beautiful nature that surrounds them. In fact the simple yet effective methods followed by the villagers can be exemplary lessons in collection and disposal of waste in some of our larger cities. Waste is collected in small dustbins

Thick veils of cloud and gushing streams are a common sight in this north-east Indian state.



made of bamboo which are then disposed in a manure pit. The manure in turn is used for agriculture for the cultivation of betel nut, something which finds a lot of takers across the entire north-east India. The entire community takes active part in keeping the village clean. Use of plastic is restricted to the minimum and smoking or other activities not in accordance with cleanliness are discouraged by the locals. The locals have devised various methods to harvest rainwater as well. In short this small village is one with a mighty heart and stands millions of miles ahead of some of the biggest cities when it comes to tackling the menaces of pollution and even climate change.

Among other things which have made Meghalaya so popular among other tourist destinations are the living root bridges of Meghalaya. They are fairly common all over the state and are handmade out of the aerial roots of the rubber fig tree. The Khasi and Jaintia people have been doing this for many generations now. One method involves guiding the growing roots of these trees across a stream, river or any crevice and allowing them to grow strong over time until they are capable of bearing heavy loads across them. These root bridges often survive the test of time and even hang tough for more than hundred years if the tree stays strong and healthy. The areas around the cleanest village of Mawlynnong are home to many such root bridges. West Jaintia Hills district and East Khasi Hills district are places which

are well known for the presence of a number of such structures. The traditional methods and techniques used for building such structures have been passed on from one generation to the next for centuries now. These living root bridges apart from being fine specimens of the traditional engineering techniques are also fine examples of the near perfect synergy that exists in this part of the world between human settlements and nature.

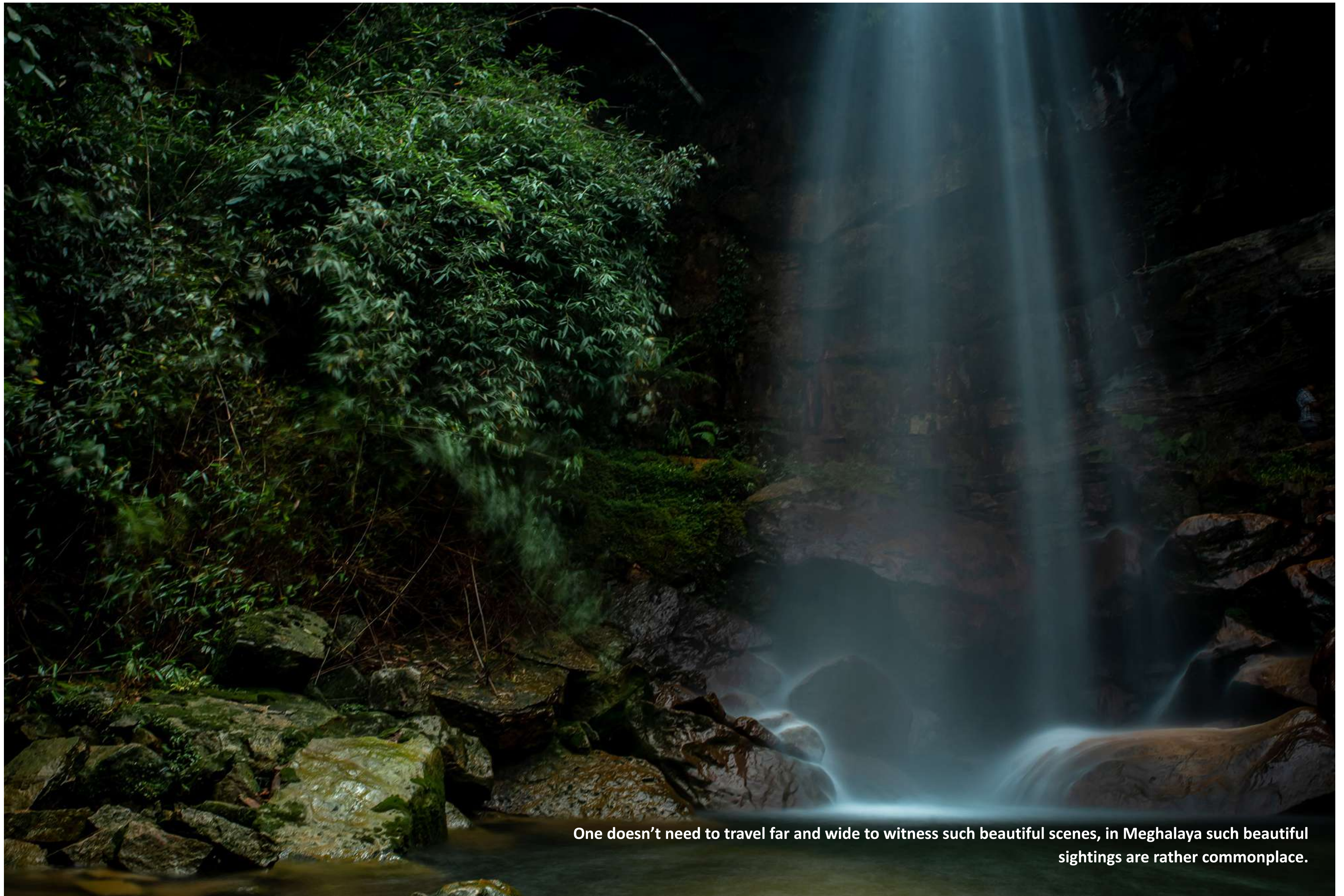
While Meghalaya has steadily been garnering the reputation of being a tourism hotspot the state has largely remained untouched by visitors and travellers. With Meghalaya's growing reputation that is bound to change in the coming years. The pristine beauty of Meghalaya's mountains and landscapes will attract thousands from all over the world. It still remains one of those few places in India where nature can be still found in its most unadulterated form. The natural beauty all around, the warm and friendly faces or an evening of rock music in the lap of the Khasi hills, the excuses can be many for visiting this beautiful state and bring back precious memories soaked in joy from this abode of clouds.



Another dominant feature of Meghalaya's landscape are the living root bridges such as this one. These sturdy structures often stand the test of time for many decades and are crucial for the movement of the locals.



An elderly lady on her way to work on a usual rain soaked morning in Meghalaya. The ethnic communities such as the Khasi or the Garo people are part of a matrilineal society. In such a set up the youngest daughter of the family inherits the properties of her parents and once she is married her husband is supposed to move in with her to her parents' place and look after her parents. Although such practices have eased out over time it is still very much prevalent over a wide section of these societies.



One doesn't need to travel far and wide to witness such beautiful scenes, in Meghalaya such beautiful sightings are rather commonplace.



Beautiful cottages, lush green landscape and clean premises, these are the most commonly observed features in the countryside of Meghalaya. It comes as a little surprise that the state boasts of the cleanest village in the whole of Asia in the form of Mawlynnong which earned this prestigious recognition in the year 2003.



About the Photographer

Avismita Bhattacharyya's tryst with photography began with landscape and macro photography before she tried her hands at product and fashion photography. Over the course of time she has perfected and fine tuned her craft in these two genres. Being in the wedding photography industry she is constantly trying to be innovative with her frames and incorporate concepts of street and photo journalism with nuances of emotions and drama. Today she is a full fledged wedding photographer and runs her own company which deals with event photography of any kind with the options of both still and motion photography. As a photographer she strives to find frames of different flavours amalgamated with feelings and emotional moments. Whenever she gets the time she tries to treat her eyes with the beautiful landscape of India. She truly believes "there are things nobody would see if a photographer didn't freeze those moments".

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Portraits from Festivals

A collection of the 10 winning photographs from our recently concluded online contest on the theme- “Portraits from Festivals”. Festivals are the perfect excuses to meet new people, forge new bonds and rekindle old ones. Festivals are as diverse as the world itself. They can be a joyous carnivalesque celebration, a time honoured tribute to some long cherished tradition or a heart warming family reunion. Irrespective of their myriad shades every festival is a unique way of celebrating the best of humanity. This collection of photographs is a humble attempt on our part to pay our tribute to the plethora of emotions which pan out during the festivities, all of which go a long way in making us that much more humane.

(right) Many believe a cluster of small villages in the remote mountains of Ladakh in Jammu & Kashmir is the last remaining bastion of pure bred Aryans in India. The members of this community known as “Brogpas” or “Brokpas” are considered to be direct descendants of thin skinned and sharp featured European invaders who invaded India thousands of years ago across these trecherous mountainous slopes. Such a contentous claim has never recieved any validation from scientists or historians however that hasn’t come in the way of ever piquing interests for this secluded community largely due to their remote existence. Padma, a young woman belonging to this community in the Garkon village is dressed up in her traditional attire on the occassion of a community gathering.

Photograph by Govind Kiran Kumar Reddy





Photograph by Saurabh Sirohiya

The Dondi Festival is a religious occasion during which devotees throng the temple premises to offer their worships to Goddess Kali. In the city of Kolkata the devotees take a dip in the holy waters of the Ganges to absolve themselves of their previous sins before crawling all the way to the temple premises to offer their worships. The rituals, once they get over give way to some revelry as well in which thousands of devotees take part. On one such occasion two kids are dressed as Goddess Kali (to the left) and Ramakrishna Paramhansa a Hindu mystic and saint and an ardent devotee of Goddess Kali.



Photograph by Abhay Kasture

Scenes from the festival of Holi at the ashrama founded by Bindeshwar Pathak in Mathura where individuals from three different generations come together in one frame. Bindeshwar Pathak, a renowned philanthropist, best known as the founder of Sulabh International and setting up of Sulabh Souchalaya or public toilet complexes all over the country had set up this ashrama for the widows who even in the 21st century are often ostracized from the society after the death of their husbands. The festival of Holi is possibly the only time the 6 yards of white cloth which they drape gets smeared in colours. During Holi they smear each other with colours and dance to the tunes of bhajans leaving their griefs far behind.



Photograph by Abhishek Dey

On the penultimate day of the festival of Durga Puja, the biggest festival of the Bengali community devotees perform a special dance known as “Dhunuchi Nritya” in front of the Goddess as part of the rituals. Those taking part in this ritual hold two earthenware containing fuming incense in their hands and dance to the beat of the “dhaak”, the traditional drum like musical instrument. The rhythmic beat of the dhaak, the devotees swaying to these beats and the sweet aroma of the incense is one of the most endearing scenes from the festival of Durga Puja.



Photograph by Shrideep Nanal

In the village of Kinnaur located in the north-east corner of Himachal Pradesh bordering Tibet the women wear Pattoo- a traditional dress which is worn during the occasion of festivities. Pattoo is essentially a brightly coloured piece of shawl although it appears thicker than a shawl. The women wrap themselves in Pattoo and pin both the ends with local silver broaches called “Boomini” which is a long silver chain. They use a square shaped piece of cloth to cover their head which is known as Dhatu or Thipu.

Photograph by Angshuman Paul



At The Lighthouse for the Blind, an organization in Kolkata which is home to visually impaired students the festival of Holi is celebrated with various colourful flowers. These girls cannot use the powdered colours available in the markets for their rich chemical contents which might cause further damage to the girls' eyes. This somewhat different celebration of Holi stands out for the wonderful idea of compassion and inclusiveness engraved in these celebrations.

Photograph by Yamini Krishna

Every year during the Haldi festival of Pattan Kodoli thousands of devotees embark upon the annual Vitthal Birdev Yatra. Haldi or turmeric is offered to the deity and sprayed upon the devotees in huge quantities. The entire temple complex is engulfed in a thick haze of yellow of the turmeric and everyone around is covered from head to toe in a thick blanket of yellow. This elderly lady in the middle of the celebrations frantically looks for her fellow companions with whom she was visiting the festival.

Married Bengali Hindu women take part in a ritual known as “Sindoor Khela” on the last day of the festival of Durga Puja. During this ritual married women apply Sindoor or vermillion on each others face and forehead and offer sweets to the idol before the idol of Goddess Durga is taken out for immersion thus marking the end of the festivities. This ritual symbolizes the power of womanhood in protecting their husbands and children from all evil. The women pray for long and happy married lives for each other during the course of this ritual.



Photograph by Debarchan Chatterjee

Photograph by Ananda Mohan Paul



The immersions of Durga idols at the end of the festival witness a huge gathering of people. People from different background, castes and communities become a part of these processions. During one such immersion procession this young man holding two similarly aged kids makes his way to the nearby pond where the idol in the background is being taken for immersion.



Photograph by Jaideep Thakur

(left) The festival of Holi which started at Barsana in India has earned itself a global reputation of being the festival of colours. Every year thousands of foreign tourists visit different parts of India and Barsana to become a part of the Holi extravaganza. Among them was this German women who had travelled thousands of miles to Barsana to experience her first Holi.

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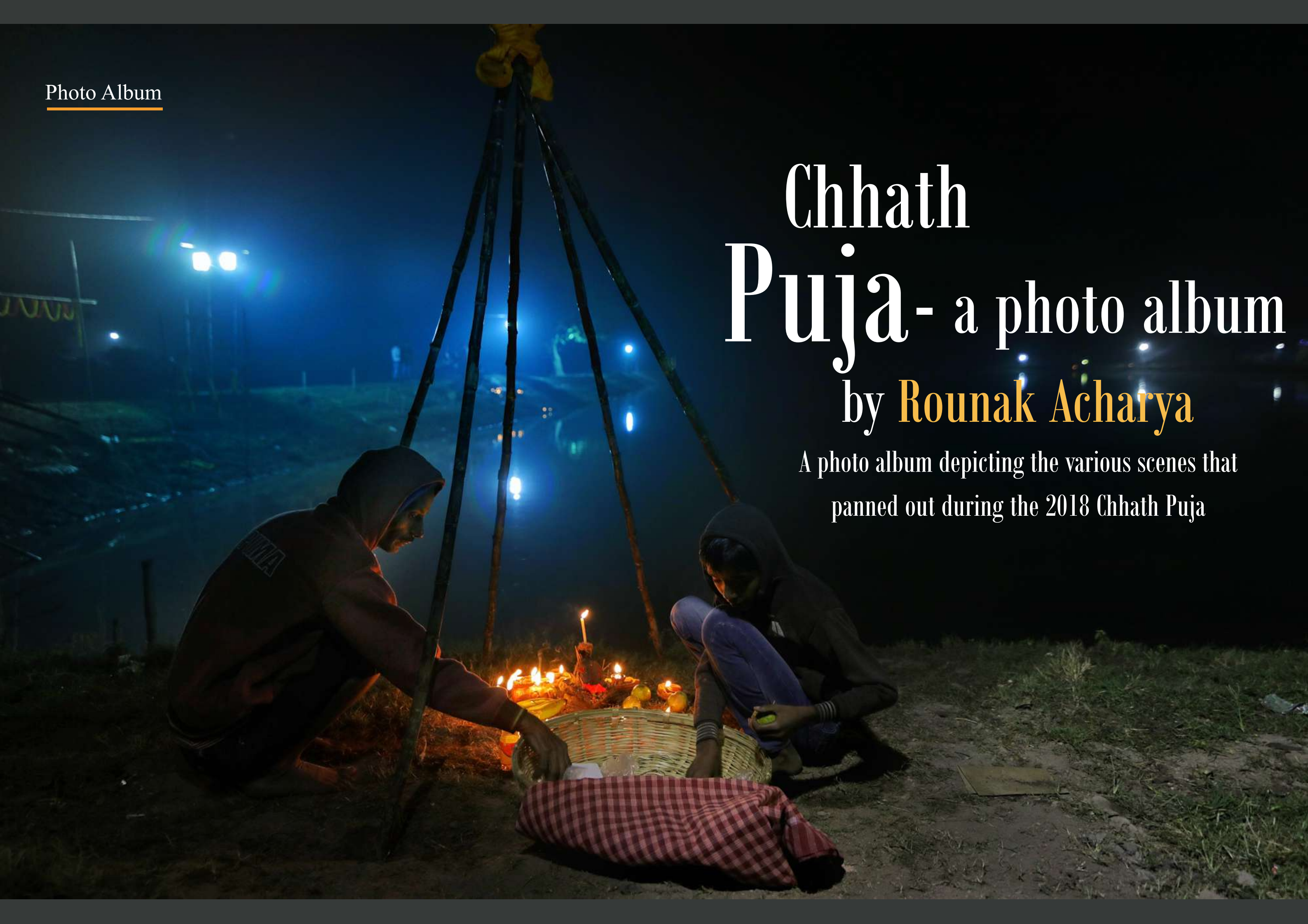
We would like to thank each and everyone who took part in our contest. It was a pleasure going through all the submissions and an equally difficult task shortlisting the final 10 images for publishing. We would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to everyone who got featured and gratitude to everyone who took part. Stay tuned for more contests and announcements.

Photo Album

Chhath Puja- a photo album

by **Rounak Acharya**

A photo album depicting the various scenes that
panned out during the 2018 Chhath Puja





The rituals which are observed during the four day long festival of Chhath Puja are rather harsh compared to other Hindu festivals. The devotees are supposed to follow these rituals strictly which involve fasting, taking dips in the waters of lakes, ponds or rivers and offering their prayers and worships to the Sun God by lying prostrate on the ground as these two women devotees can be seen doing in this frame.

In India, each festival brings to the fore its very own sights and sounds, some of them rather unique, some more vibrant than the others while some very rich in their historical and religious significances. The festival of Chhath Puja is one such ancient festival significant to millions of people and during the course of this festival the Sun God is at the centre of all the proceedings. The festival is celebrated from the sixth day from Diwali, hence it is known as Chhath Puja. On this day millions of devotees particularly across the eastern states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, parts of West Bengal, Delhi and even in the neighbouring country of Nepal as well gather along the river front or banks of lakes or ponds to offer their tributes to the Sun God amid strain of folk songs. Chhath Puja is unique in the respect that it happens to be the only Vedic festival which is dedicated to the Sun God. The devotees believe the Sun God's blessings will usher in a new era of prosperity and well-being in their lives. During the rituals Usha-the younger sister of Surya (the Sun God) is worshipped as well. The devotees taking part in this four day long festival observe a number of rituals which involve observing strict fasts taking dips in the rivers or lakes while offering their worships, offering their worships to the sun during sunrise and sunset. This photo album showcases some of the scenes from the 2018 Chhath Puja which was celebrated all over the country with pomp and grandeur.



Devotees offer their worships during the evening worship session.



Devotees gather in huge numbers to perform the worships and rituals during Chhath Puja.



A Chhath Puja procession passes by a regular neighbourhood as one of the shopkeepers looks on.



Amidst all the celebrations a busy marketplace prepares to retire for the day as night approaches.



The devotees gather around with “Prasad” or offerings to the Sun God during one of the rituals. These offerings include fruits- mainly sugarcane, banana, sweets, thekua, rice laddu which are neatly packed and offered in small bamboo or straw containers. Often these bamboo containers along with the offerings contain an earthen lamp or diya which is lit up and the vessel shaped bamboo structure is floated in the waters of rivers or lakes during sunrise or sunset as offerings to the Sun God.



About the Photographer

Rounak Acharya, is 18 years old and is a B.Com Honours second year student. He is from the city of Howrah in West Bengal, India. He is a freelance photographer with a special interest in street, travel and landscape photography. His journey with his camera started in the year 2016. His photographs have been published in Natgeo yourshot, Pravegs Travel Magazine, 35awards Russia, GoodshotzIndia, Times of India and Ei Samay newspaper. He is a winner of the World Photography Day Contest organised by GoodshotzIndia. For him photography is nothing less than pure love.