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INDIAN

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PHOTO ARTS

September 2019

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the story of Myanmar's novice monks

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Photograph by Samya Sengupta

Some photographs get etched in our memories for no obvious reason, it becomes hard to allude to that one particular aspect which makes them special. I was faced with something similar when this frame from Cappadocia, Turkey, shot by Samya Sengupta caught my attention. On hindsight it could have been the stark contrast between the bright colours of the hot air balloon and the dullish landscape beneath, the spectacular point of view or even the masterful composition. Beautiful frames come from anywhere, a number of factors or one can make it special, this frame bears testimony to that.

Regards

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the *Path* to *Enlightenment*

by Rajani Ramanathan

The story of Myanmar's novice monks - young boys, even toddlers who embrace monkhood and live in the monasteries spread across the country. This is a tale of their young lives, their childhoods, hardships and what the future might have in store for them.

Young monks in Myanmar pray in front of a statue of Gautama Buddha. Praying and meditating form an integral part of monkhood for these young boys.



Two young monks in a playful mood . In Myanmar young boys join the monasteries and embrace monkhood at a very tender age. They may choose to opt out of it although many choose to adopt monkhood for the rest of their lives.



They are young, most of them aged between 6-13 years, largely interested in the simple often mischievous pleasures of childhood, often indulging in them craftily sneaking their way past the watchful eyes of their elders and ever so interested in a game of football. They all bear a similar look, their heads clean shaven and frames draped in robes of signature maroon or saffron. They are the young novice monks of Myanmar. One of the more ancient religions, Buddhism owes its origin to Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism and finds its roots in the annals of the 6th century B.C. In due course of time Buddhism spread far and wide and left a profound impact upon vast swathes of India and large parts of Southeast Asia. The eight fold path, as preached by Gautama Buddha struck a chord with millions across the globe and millions started embracing his preaching, which led to Buddhism spreading to different corners of the world like a wildfire. However Buddhism left a profound impact upon the country of Myanmar. Myanmar of today is one of the most devout Buddhist countries in the world. An estimated 90% of Myanmar's population are devout Buddhists and follow the teachings of Gautama Buddha. The two parameters which bear clear testimony to Myanmar's relentless patronage towards Buddhism are the large number of Buddhist monks who are a part of the country's population and the huge amount of resources which are devoted

by the country to nurture the ethos of this religion. The Burmese closely practice Theravada branch of Buddhism. In this particular branch of Buddhism the followers are expected to adhere to some of the oldest teachings of Buddhism, lead a life of austerity as laid down by the strict monastic codes. Buddhism as a religion finds itself deeply intertwined with the political history of Myanmar as well. Buddhist monks who rallied against the colonial forces during the freedom struggle of Myanmar became cult figures and Buddhism as a religion became a powerful tool for bringing the country together in its quest for freedom from the shackles of colonial era. Even during recent times, Buddhist monks in Myanmar have been at the forefront of the political and social uprisings in Myanmar, the Saffron Revolution of 2007 being one such movement. In September 2007 thousands of Buddhist monks led numerous protests across the country opposing the government's move which withdrew subsidies on the sales of all kinds of fuel. The government being the only supplier of fuel in Myanmar this immediately led to a steep rise in the prices of petrol, diesel and other petroleum products thereby putting the general population under immense pressure. The Buddhist monks rallied against the severe crackdown by the security forces upon peaceful protestors and eventually this uprising came to be known as the "Saffron Revolution". The other important aspect of the Saffron

Revolution was the 80,000 odd monks and nuns who had taken part in it and led various protests made a big push for a democratic set up in Myanmar which was till then under the grip of the military. The Saffron Revolution with the monks being at the forefront managed to bring the military junta ruling the country to the negotiation table and adopt a number of reforms in 2011. It was in these reforms the future blueprint of a democratic Myanmar was laid down which was finally realised in 2015 when Aung San Suu Kyi became the democratically elected leader

ceremony of Shinpyu marks the initiation of a young boy under the age of 20 into the monastic way of life. It is not uncommon for young boys who are still toddlers at the age of 2-3 years to become a part of this ceremony and embrace the monastic way of life as they become part of the numerous monasteries spread across the country. However once they turn into novice monks these young boys are not expected to spend the rest of their lives as monks in these monasteries. They may choose to lead the monastic life before opting out of it although many choose to

Buddhism as a religion finds itself deeply intertwined with the political history of Myanmar as well. Buddhists monks rallied against the colonial forces during the freedom struggle...

In spite of the role Buddhism had to play in multiple affairs of the country, since it was made the state religion during the reign of the Kingdom of Pagan in 1044, the tendency among young Burmese people to adopt monkhood or among the parents to send their young ones to monasteries across the country is certainly a rather curious phenomenon. The root lies in the undying allegiance the population owes to the religion. In Myanmar young children of the families becoming a novice monk is a matter of great honour for the member of the families. The parents take it upon themselves to initiate their young sons to the teachings and practices of Buddhism even if it is for a short period of time. In the Theravada branch of Buddhism the

adopt monkhood and devote themselves towards the service of Buddhism for the rest of their lives. This practice also has a socio-economic impact on the population, particularly upon those who belong to the lower strata of the society. The young boys who adopt monkhood and become a part of these monasteries receive their education for free and during their stay at the monasteries their parents need not worry about their upbringing. Apart from the matter of pride this certainly eases the economic burden most of the families belonging to the poorer sections of the Burmese society are faced with. The ceremony of Shinpyu is a grand one which includes a procession where the novice monks after their initiations dressed in colourful attire are carried on the backs



of horses or oxen. The procession passes through towns and villages and people gather round to witness this spectacle and offer their blessings to the newly initiated monks, some of whom are too young to balance themselves on horsebacks and are accompanied by their parents. Although girls are not allowed to be a part of the initiation ceremony, they play their roles by following the procession decked up in bright clothing with food, flowers and other offerings in their hands. As the procession reaches a nearby monastery it marks the end of the ceremony. Inside the monastery the novice monks get their heads shaven and are finally inducted into the folds of Buddhism and vow to embrace a life of hardship and austerity as they step into the world of monkhood.

The life of novice monks in the monasteries is tough, laden with disciplines which they are expected to adhere to strictly under the relentless supervision of their elders. An average day in the lives of these novice monks begins as early as 4 in the morning. After their morning ablutions they set out in the nearby towns and villages with their bowls to beg for alms. They collect various food items as alms which also include cooked food items such as rice, curry, soups and vegetables. The young monks are provided two meals every day inside the monasteries – breakfast and lunch. The strict discipline inside the monasteries don't permit the monks to eat anything after 12 in the afternoon. Life inside these monasteries

A young monk in Myanmar.

In the Theravada branch of Buddhism the ceremony of Shinpyu marks the initiation of a young boy under the age of 20 into the monastic way of life. It is not uncommon for young boys who are still toddlers at the age of 2-3 years to become a part of this ceremony and embrace the monastic way of life as they become part of the numerous monasteries spread across the country.



The sight of young monks carrying huge colourful umbrellas to shield them from the scorching tropical sun, is deeply engraved in the fabric of this country and encapsulates Myanmar's longstanding and undying patronage for Buddhism.



is devoid of any luxury and the young monks are expected to practice austerity in order to fully understand the essence of the eightfold path as preached by the Buddha. The young monks are however allowed to visit their families on a regular or even a daily basis. It is not considered an act of begging since it is believed that his family invited him over for an auspicious visit. In fact a monk visiting his family is considered to be an auspicious ritual for the family as well as the other members of the village or that community. It is considered as an act which strengthens

opportunity to attend the Buddhist University in Yangon to study Buddhism. Attending regular prayer sessions too form an important aspect of life inside the monasteries. The prayers and chants are an integral component of every Buddhist monk's life. The young monks are no exception to this. They indulge in regular prayer sessions and learn and practice Buddhist chants under the tutelage of their elders and senior monks. In addition to prayers and chants the young monks are also encouraged to meditate and they spend considerable time daily meditating, which

In addition to prayers and chants the young monks are also encouraged to meditate and they spend considerable time daily meditating, which forms another key element of monkhood.

the bond between the monks and the devout Buddhists. The villagers gather around any visiting monk and generously offer various offerings mostly in terms of food items, an act known as "dhananand". After breakfast the monks spend considerable amount of time attending their classes during which they are taught the ancient Pali script. A thorough knowledge of Pali is essential to understand ancient Buddhist texts and scriptures. In addition to Pali the novice monks receive lessons in mathematics, physics, English and other disciplines of academics. During their stay at the monasteries considerable importance is attributed to the education of the young monks. Students who excel in various academic disciplines often get the

forms another key element of monkhood. However in spite of the strict rules and disciplines it would be wrong to assume life inside these monasteries, particularly for the young monks is devoid of fun and laughter. While they might have embraced monkhood and some of them might remain within the folds of it for the rest of their lives, the fact remains these novice monks are essentially young boys aged between 6-14 years, and they crave for the simple pleasures of childhood just like any other kid of their age in any part of the world does. While a life of austerity denies them the material rewards which the outside world has to offer, the boisterous nature of childhood and the undying enthusiasm of youth find a way to make the most out of whatever little is available to them. The



Scenes from the daily lives of the novice monks in Myanmar. Their days begin at 4 in the morning as they set out for begging alms.



The young monks during their spare time indulge in various fun and games, most of which are improvised.

young monks during their spare time indulge in various fun and games, most of which are improvised. The monasteries too encourage such things in order to provide the young boys with some semblance of a normal childhood. The young monks can be often seen indulging in a healthy contested game of football in the afternoons; the monasteries also hold screening of movies which would be suitable for the taste of their young residents.

The widespread presence of Buddhism and the allegiance of an entire nation to this ancient faith are palpable in every nook and corner of Myanmar. The

presence of monks on the streets, at public places, in tea stalls and almost everywhere, draped in their signature robes further reinforces that sentiment. Apart from their signature robes, their friendly demeanour and curious nature characterize their affable personalities. The monks can be seen greeting everyone with a smile and are ever so keen to talk about their faith, their way of life and discuss and share their beliefs with others. In fact the monks, including the young ones take a keen interest in tourists visiting Myanmar. They look at it as an opportunity to interact with people from different parts of the world, learn from them and also as an avenue to

improve their English speaking skills. For anyone visiting the numerous Pagodas spread across the country or the monasteries a chance encounter with the novice monks where they would come up and initiate a conversation could be very much on the cards.

In spite of the skewed statistics such ancient traditions over time have made way for the young girls and women of Myanmar as well and is no longer monopolised by young boys and men. Young girls and women too like their male counterparts choose and are often encouraged to adopt the eightfold path of Buddhism and follow the preaching of the

Buddha. Largely they are identified as Buddhist nuns although that is not entirely true. In the Burmese society these young girls and women are referred to as Thilashin – one who is the possessor of morality as depicted by the ancient Pali scriptures or in colloquial terms a laywoman. The terminologies aside, they lead a life which is fairly similar to their male counterparts. They can be easily identified by their pink robes and brown scarves and shaven heads. However there are certain differences when it comes to the perception of a Thilashin in the Burmese society as compared the Buddhist monks. In the Burmese society it is a

The young monks are essentially young kids, some as young as six years. Childhood co-exists with monkhood in the monasteries and there is always time for some fun and mischief.





The monks spend considerable amount of time attending their classes during which they are taught the ancient Pali script. A thorough knowledge of Pali is essential to understand ancient Buddhist texts and scriptures. In addition to Pali the novice monks receive lessons in Mathematics, Physics, English and other disciplines of academics.

traditional cultural requirement to adopt monkhood for a certain period of his life. However there is no such expectation of a female. The other major difference lies in the status of the monks and the Thilashins. Thilashins are not recognized as nuns or Bhikkhunis in the Burmese society. The tradition of Bhikkhunis in the Burmese society gradually weaned off in the latter part of the 19th century. While there is no clear record of what led to this development it is largely believed the war rattled bloody period which the country witnessed in the 19th century during the British colonial era, the order of monkhood

managed to survive however the order of Bhikkhunis faded away from the Burmese society. In spite of attempts to reintroduce the tradition of Bhikkhunis or nuns in the Burmese society in the 1960s they never reached to any fruition. This was largely due to the opposition faced from the larger civil society. Today's Thilashins are held in slightly lesser regard in comparison to the monks. Several prominent women's rights activists in Myanmar and elsewhere have raised their voices regarding this, however as of today this remains the ground reality in Myanmar. The young girls and women choose to become

Thilashins primarily because of the lure of free education and other basic facilities. Within the premises of the monasteries they live in separate accommodations and are not supposed to assist the monks or look after them. However it is not uncommon for them to take part in cooking sessions or other such activities on a daily basis. The sight of young monks carrying huge colourful umbrellas to shield them from the scorching tropical sun, is deeply engraved in the fabric of this country and encapsulates Myanmar's longstanding and undying patronage for Buddhism. A

faith which has formed the ethos of this country seamlessly passes on from one generation to the next and the young boys some as young as merely 5 years take upon the mantle of Buddhism and ensure the faith lives on through generations. In spite of the hardships they are burdened with which include sharing modest dormitories with other monks, waking up early, performing the daily chores by dint of embracing monkhood, the rather easy going and languid way of life speaks volumes of the Burmese society as a whole. The coexistence of regular, innocent, carefree childhood and the



hardships of monkhood is unique to this ancient culture and is equally intriguing. Furthermore the encouraging and co-operative fabric of the entire Burmese society to ensure this tradition lives on for many more generations to come is equally incredible.

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The monasteries often organise movie shows for the young monks. A bunch of novice monks can be seen engrossed in a Disney animation movie at one of the monasteries.





Two young monks offer their prayers to Gautama Buddha.



In spite of the hardships they are burdened with which include sharing modest dormitories with other monks, waking up early, performing the daily chores by dint of embracing monkhood, the rather easy going and languid way of life speaks volumes of the Burmese society as a whole. The coexistence of regular, innocent, carefree childhood and the hardships of monkhood is unique to this ancient culture and is equally intriguing. Furthermore the encouraging and co-operative of the entire Burmese society to ensure this tradition lives on for many more generations to come is equally incredible. For anyone visiting the numerous Pagodas spread across the country or the monasteries a chance encounter with the novice monks where they would come up and initiate a conversation could be very much on the cards.



About the Photographer

Rajani Ramanathan lives by the credo "Life is a journey, a journey that shapes your life". Photography for her is a medium to capture precious moments in time and record it for posterity since the world is changing so fast around us and not always for the better. The more she travels, the more she realizes how little she knows. Every trip and every interaction provides her new perspectives about how different and yet same people are and the uniqueness of the myriad cultures she experiences. From the simplicity of extremely skilled fishermen in Myanmar Inle lake, to the gypsies of Camargue, to the berbers in Morocco or the sheer beauty and grandeur of Iceland or Antarctica and so on across all seven continents, her experiences have been mind boggling which she wishes to share through the medium of photography.

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

The iconic lush green slopes of Dzukou Valley. The green hills along with the dramatic formations of clouds make this place one of the major tourist destinations in the north-east of India.



a
Sea of *by Debraj Chakraborty*
of

Green on Land

Dzukou Valley, along the border of Manipur and Nagaland in the north-east of India has firmly established itself as one of the major tourist destinations in India courtesy its pristine natural beauty.

For many years now, Dzukou Valley by dint of its scenic charm has been attracting hikers and trekkers from all over the world.





Among the few places in India where nature unravels its beauty in its most unadulterated form, Dzukou Valley deserves a special mention.

Gently rolling mountain slopes covered in a thick carpet of lush green, the murmur of small streams cutting through them, emerald green meadows dotted with the abundant pink of freshly bloomed lily, a soothing cool breeze blowing across this magnificent landscape straight out of an accomplished artist's finest creation – this in a nutshell is the iconic Dzukou Valley, located along the border of Manipur and Nagaland in the north-east of India. The ever present cloud formations which gradually descend into the valley covering

in the myriad hues of wildflowers which pop out among the lush green in the months of May-July. During the winter months, the entire valley metamorphoses into an icy kingdom. The lush green makes way for the frosty white of the winter ice. The serenading streams freeze in their tracks in a long wait for the spring sun to wake them up from their icy slumber. Although the bitterly cold winter months successfully dissuade many trekkers from embarking upon this adventure, winter in Dzukou Valley paints an entirely different picture of this landscape and the stark

The valley is well known for its floral diversity which gets reflected in the myriad hues of wildflowers which pop out among the lush green in the months of May-July.

it in a veil of mist add that extra hint of drama to this already theatrical set up. Among the few places in India where nature unravels its beauty in its most unadulterated form, Dzukou Valley deserves a special mention. For many years now, Dzukou Valley by dint of its scenic charm has been attracting hikers and trekkers from all over the world. At a first glance it appears as if all the beautiful elements of nature are in perfect harmony in this landscape, the tryst of each with the other creating the perfect romantic parable.

The iconic green of the valley is a result of a particular species of dwarf bamboo grassland which dominates the topography of the region. The valley is well known for its floral diversity which gets reflected

contrast between the emerald green of the monsoon and the frosty white of the winter is worth witnessing.

Located at an altitude of approximately 2,500 meters above sea level, the valley gently rolls into either side of the border between Manipur and Nagaland. This has led to some disputes regarding the ownership of Dzukou Valley among Manipur and Nagaland, although from a geographical standpoint it has been established beyond any doubt the valley is a part of both the states. The most striking thing about this landscape is the unadulterated nature of the natural world. There is not a single human-made structure of any kind barring a rickety tin shed which doubles up as a “trekker’s hut”. Most trekkers who visit the valley prefer

Along with the heavy rainfall the valley receives, which is evident from the constant presence of dramatic cloud formations for most part of the year, the valley is well fed by two rivers - Dzukou and Japfu which cross paths at a point in the valley.



When in full bloom, which usually coincides with the month of June, a thin veil of Dzukou Lily's pink covers the thick green carpet which envelopes the valley.



to pitch their own tents and set up camps, however the trekker's hut offers basic facilities for those who are aspiring to be a little less adventurous. The lonely trekker's hut in the lap of these lush green mountains is another reminder to how the natural world rules the roost in this beautiful terrain. Along with the heavy rainfall the valley receives, which is evident from the constant presence of dramatic cloud formations for most part of the year, the valley is well fed by two rivers - Dzukou and Japfu which cross paths at a point in the valley. The

4-6 hours depending on the starting location and the route then gradually descends into the valley until one is surrounded by a sea of green. The added attraction is to make your way through the endless maze of green and make it all the way to the top of Japfu Peak. The ascent can prove to be challenging at times, more so given the undulating nature of the terrain, yet the view that awaits one at the very top is worth all the trouble. Hikers and trekkers usually prefer to carry their own supplies, which include food supplies, sleeping arrangements, utensils and proper

Although Dzukou Valley is known for the abundance of green all around, the valley in fact during monsoon is peppered with a wide range of flowers including different shades of rhododendrons.

abundance of moisture in the air and the top soil explains the predominantly green hue of this landscape.

The popular trekking route which leads into the valley begins from Viswema Village or the Jakhama Village in Nagaland. From the Manipur side the town of Senapati is the ideal location for starting the hike. Among all of these starting points, Jakhama Village is the most favoured location among hikers since it is the closest to the valley. In addition to that Jakhama is easily accessible from the capital city of Kohima which lies at a short distance of 30 kilometres from Jakhama. The route starting from Viswema Village goes uphill and leads the trekkers to a point which offers a panoramic view of the sea of green. The uphill hike can take between

protection from rain among others. Completely deserted, Dzukou Valley lacks these basic supplies and it is always advisable to stack up for the few days of trek through this valley. The trekker's hut though provides all these basic facilities to the hikers, however during the peak season there is always a chance of the accommodation failing to serve scores of trekkers who visit this place.

Although Dzukou Valley is known for the abundance of green all around, the valley in fact during monsoon is peppered with a wide range of flowers including different shades of rhododendrons. However the main attraction of the valley during its blooming season is the Dzukou Lily. Dzukou Valley is home to this endemic species. When in full bloom, which usually



coincides with the month of June, a thin veil of Dzukou Lily's pink covers the thick green carpet which envelops the valley. The juxtaposition of pink and emerald green creates a spectacle which is hard to describe in words, only those who have witnessed it from close quarters would be able to appreciate the true beauty of this beautiful spectacle. At night under the vast open starlit sky it appears as if time itself has forgotten this land. The quiet nights bring with them an unearthly silence, only to be interrupted by the occasional creaking of insects or the gentle murmur of breeze against the leaves. It is hard to imagine a place like this elsewhere, a place surrounded by civilisation yet so primitive, a place where nature still exists in its most pristine form. One tryst with Dzukou Valley is never enough, in fact it only ignites that insatiable lust to return to these green folds of hills time and again and it all makes sense as to why thousands are drawn to the enigmatic charm of this place year after year.

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The iconic green of the valley is a result of a particular species of dwarf bamboo grassland which dominates the topography of the region.





Apart from the scenic beauty of Dzukou Valley the opportunity to taste the local cuisine such as frog meat also presents itself in the neighbouring villages.





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About the Photographer

Debraj Chakraborty, initially a landscape painter, later converted to one of the India's finest landscape photographers. An animation artist in the past and now a business owner, he is based at Silchar, Assam. As he travelled across geographies in quest for landscapes, his amazing experiences made him a travel photographer as well. He has travelled extensively in North-East India and his work on landscapes display amazing light and fleeting atmosphere from those places. He has till date, bagged many national and international awards. His photographs and articles get featured in leading books, magazines and websites. His works adorn walls of some of the prestigious locations across India.

A polluted stretch of Yamuna River. Vast stretches of the river today bear similar look, littered with human waste, industrial sewage the river which once breathed life into thousands of acres of land is gasping for life today.

Yamuna: once proud, now reeling...

by Jai Thakur

The mighty Yamuna, the lifeline of millions, is gasping for life. The rising levels of pollution, the ever growing human presence along its banks and a fast drying up river bed in stretches have pushed this mighty water body to its very brink with no immediate relief in sight unless remedial measures are implemented at the earliest.

This vast stretch of Yamuna which has diligently served millions along its banks is now met with the unrealistic prospect of providing for more, a number which has kept increasing rapidly over the years. The river, yielding to these increased demands, eventually is paying a price which neither augurs well for the river itself nor for the millions dependent on it.

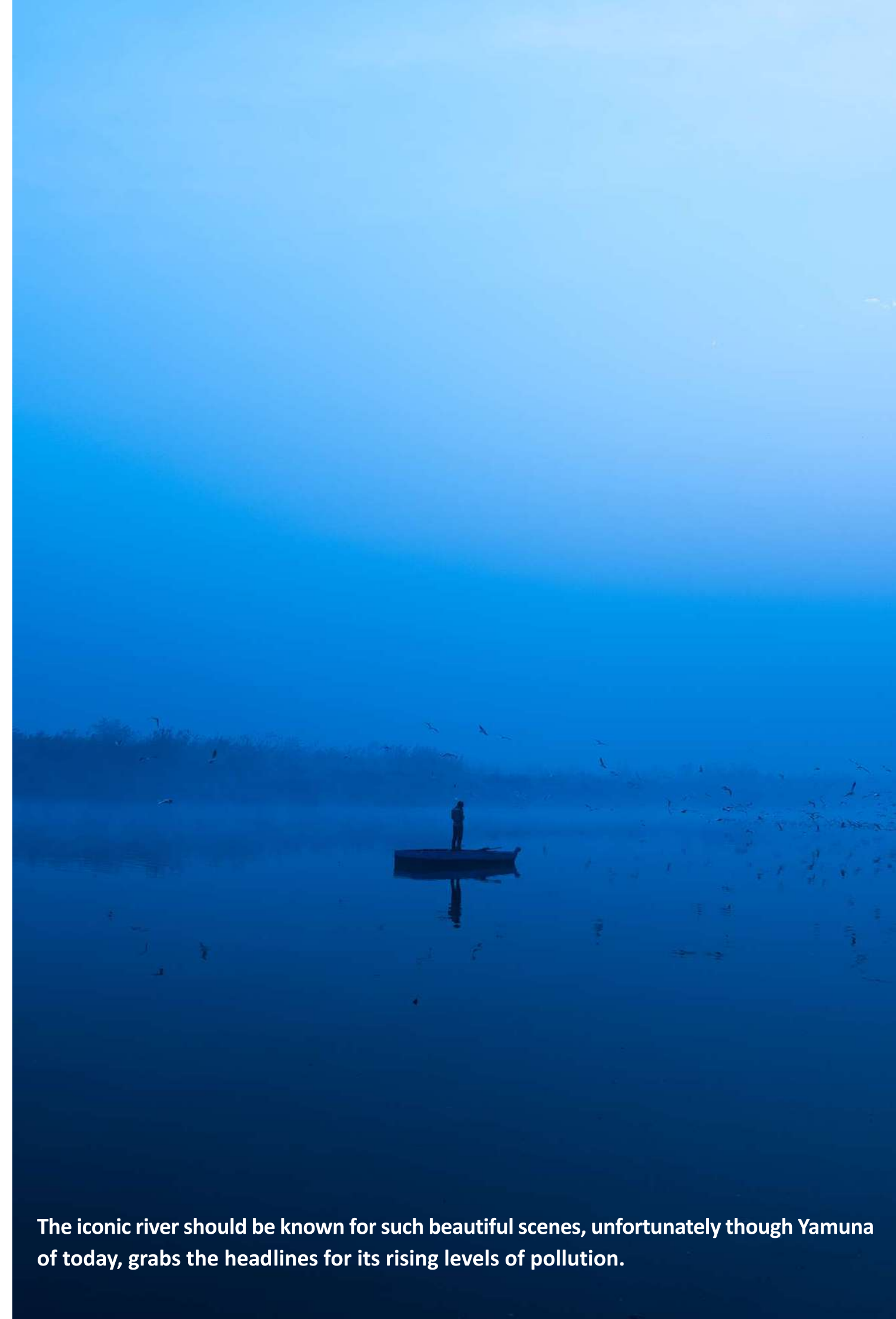


As the first rays of the morning sun gleam across the vast stretch of water the shores and the stone slabs or the “ghats” leading to the water wake up from their slumber and spring to life. Most mornings the crowd starts trickling in from as early as dawn.

Hundreds of people quietly gather along the banks of Yamuna River, most of them armed with buckets and utensils, some carrying stashes of laundry from the past few days, some to perform their morning ablutions while few others to make the most of the clean air along the banks of the river before the cities begin to excrete tonnes of pollutants. Yamuna River, the second largest tributary of the Ganges still remains deeply intertwined with the lives of millions of people spread across the states of Uttarakhand, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. One of the most prominent rivers to flow through India, Yamuna originates in the Yamunotri glacier, far removed from any human settlement at a dizzying height of approximately 6,400 meters near Bandarpunch peaks in the lower reaches of the Himalayas in the state of Uttarakhand. Before it merges with the Ganges, Yamuna travels a massive length of 1,376 kilometres. Yamuna along with the Ganges plays a crucial role in shaping the iconic and supremely fertile Ganges Basin which forms the backbone of agriculture in the northern half of India. In fact some of the major kingdoms and civilisations in ancient India thrived in this basin and owe their origins to the

waters of these two iconic river systems. Some of the major human settlements and cities in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and the city of Delhi itself sprung up along the banks of Yamuna River. Even before Yamuna meets with the Ganges at Prayag near Allahabad in the state of Uttar Pradesh it leaves its own lasting contribution on the highly fertile alluvial Yamuna-Ganges Doab region.

In a cruel twist of fate, water - one of the most essential components of life, the presence of which earned our planet the prestigious distinction of being home to “life”, is scarce today. The availability of fresh water to bulging pockets of populations across India as well as the world remains one of the major concerns for the authorities. The rivers of the world, with their abundant supply of fresh water and the other riches they have to offer from their depths, have played the most significant role in shaping some of the major civilisations across the world. Since the ancient times the hallmark of any great civilisation has been their effectiveness in harnessing the vitality of the major rivers. However our rivers today, are reeling under the intense pressure of fulfilling our ever increasing demands and Yamuna is no exception. This vast stretch of water body which has diligently served millions along its banks is now met with the unrealistic prospect of providing for more, a number which has kept increasing rapidly over the years. The river, yielding to these increased demands, eventually is paying



The iconic river should be known for such beautiful scenes, unfortunately though Yamuna of today, grabs the headlines for its rising levels of pollution.

As the urban settlements expand along the banks of Yamuna the river reels more under the burden of pollutants discharged into its realms on a daily basis.



a price which neither augurs well for the river itself nor for the millions dependent on it. According to a rough estimate more than 60 million people in India rely on Yamuna for freshwater on a daily basis. The river flows through some of the most densely polluted towns and cities in the country and on its wake collects the waste materials produced by such massive human settlements, which all have contributed to the ever increasing toxicity of the water of Yamuna. The river, being an essential part of the fertile Ganges Basin passes through some of the most agriculturally rich zones in the northern part of India. The heavy usage of pesticides and fertilisers for better yields of agricultural products eventually mixes with the water of Yamuna further adding to the level of toxicity. This is evident from the murky, frothy look the river bears as it passes through the towns and cities of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. One look at the river and it becomes evident the health of the river is fast deteriorating. Yamuna of today is a far cry from the river with its clear blue water which often finds its mention in ancient mythologies, scriptures and travel anecdotes of early explorers. Yamuna however, like most rivers, bears an entirely different appearance near its source. Much less imposing in its dimensions, the river snakes its way past rocks and boulders while flanked by lush green mountain slopes on either side. The river in its most unadulterated form, in the midst of this ethereally beautiful setting

is a sight to behold. As it flows down the slopes of these mountains, Yamuna feeds off of the waters of numerous mountainous streams and rivers and assumes gigantic proportion by the time it forays into human settlements. As it ventures deeper into such settlements and approaches the bigger cities and towns the nature of the river begins to change dramatically, both in terms of its appearance as well as its health. While countless cities and towns including prominent ones such as Delhi, Agra, Mathura, Kanpur among others have thrived along the banks of the river, it certainly appears Delhi inflicts the most brutal wounds on the river. According to studies conducted by various agencies and the National Green Tribunal it emerged a mere 22 kilometre stretch of the river from Wazirabad to Okhla in Delhi accounts for 76 percent of the pollution in the river. The river which saw this mighty city develop around it, the river which has often been described as the lifeline of Delhi, quite ironically is gasping for life now. Dumping of human waste has robbed the 22 kilometre odd stretch of the river across Delhi of any aquatic life. Devoid of any aquatic eco-system the river has sometimes been described as a dead river within the confines of Delhi. Experts are of the opinion that the present number of sewage treatment plants across Delhi is not sufficient for the amount of human waste the city produces daily. A significant proportion of the waste and sewage produced by the city on a daily basis flows

The frothy waters of Yamuna which defy all logic of Yamuna being a free flowing water body, is an indicator of the extremely high levels of pollution plaguing this vital river system in India. The locals have little choice but depend on these polluted stretches of water for their daily purposes.



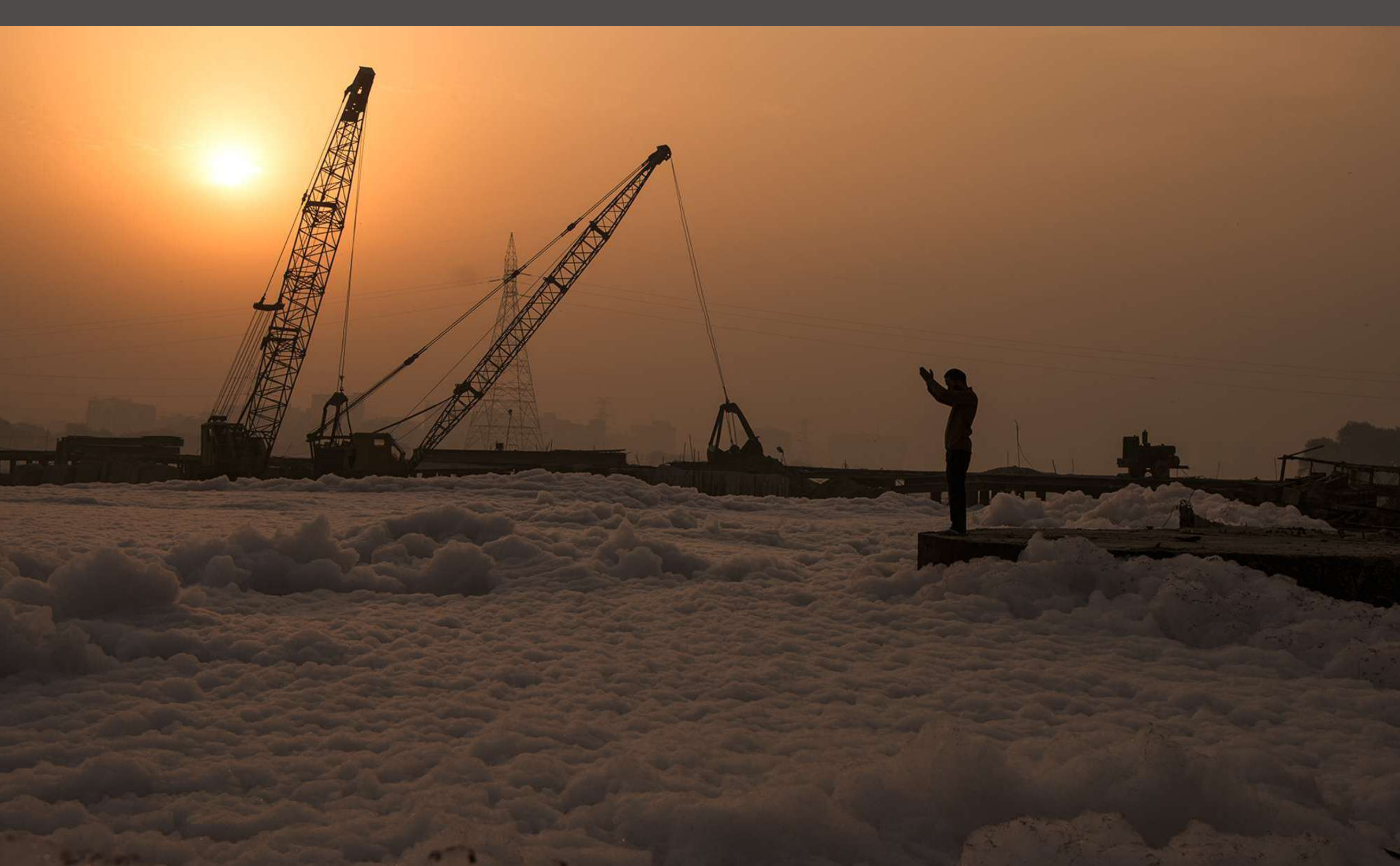
untreated and unchecked into the waters of Yamuna. Experts are of the opinion that pesticides are the primary contributor towards increasing the level of pollution in the river. These pesticides might get diluted and lose their potency provided there is a healthy and abundant flow of water in the river. However during the

summer months when the river is reduced to a mere trickle in parts, owing to the searing heat and unchecked and unplanned construction of barrages and dams which hinder the natural flow of water, these residual pesticides increase the toxicity of water manifolds. In addition to all of this, this particular 22 kilometre long stretch

of the river passes through some of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in the city of Delhi. The incredible amount of human waste produced and disposed in these waters further adds to the ever increasing level of pollution in the waters of Yamuna. The level of pollution experiences a steep surge during the time

According to a rough estimate more than 60 million people in India rely on Yamuna for freshwater on a daily basis. The river flows through some of the most densely polluted towns and cities in the country and on its wake collects the waste materials produced by such massive human settlements, which all have contributed to the ever increasing toxicity of the water of Yamuna.

of festivals. The immersion of idols during Ganesh Chaturthi or Durga Puja and the offerings from millions of devotees during religious occasions such as Chath Puja all contribute significantly towards the deteriorating health of the river. Most of these pollutants in the form of plastic wastes, the synthetic colours applied on the idols mix with the waters of Yamuna rendering it even more toxic. Nearly 12 million people in this stretch of Delhi are dependent on the waters of Yamuna, such increasing toxicity in the long run is certainly going to affect them, and in fact waterborne diseases in these parts of the city are at an all-time high. To further complicate matters, these parts of Delhi, which for many decades now have contributed significantly towards the increasing pollution in Yamuna, are witnessing a surge in population with every passing day. New settlers are coming in and settling down along these shores,



Rapid and unchecked industrialization along the banks of Yamuna and unchecked disposal of industrial sewage into Yamuna have immensely contributed towards the rising levels of pollution in the river. The extreme levels of toxicity render the river with such foamy and frothy appearance in large stretches.



which only aggravates the existing problem. In several parts of Delhi the river appears to be a contiguous stretch of thick bubbly patch. The froth which floats on the surface of the river is believed to be a result of the toxic wastes and filth which get dumped in the river on a daily basis. It becomes evident from the appearance of the river that the water is incapable of sustaining any aquatic species and is not suitable for human consumption or usage. Yet millions of people are dependent on these toxic waters for their daily use, they are left with little or no choice but put themselves in harm's way by constantly exposing themselves to this toxin contaminated water. According to an expert panel set up by the National Green Tribunal, the lack of adequate sewage facilities and unauthorised human settlements which have sprung up along the banks are the two most significant contributors towards the rising pollution level in Yamuna across the city of Delhi. It would be unfair however, to put the onus solely on the city of Delhi. Other major cities through which the river passes too contribute in their own ways towards the increasing levels of pollution in the river, albeit on a scale less severe compared to Delhi. Already reeling under the burden of toxins and filth from Delhi, the river in many parts of Uttar Pradesh has been reduced to a mere trickle. While passing through Agra the river gets contaminated by the aforementioned toxins even more. This toxic water adversely affects

Yet millions of people are dependent on these toxic waters for their daily use, they are left with little or no choice but put themselves in harm's way by constantly exposing themselves to this toxin contaminated water. According to an expert panel set up by the National Green Tribunal, the lack of adequate sewage facilities and unauthorised human settlements which have sprung up along the banks are the two most significant contributors...

thousands of farmers who depend on Yamuna for irrigating their agricultural lands in stretches far beyond Agra. The Agra Canal diverts the water from Yamuna to a number of villages in the outskirts, the residents of which largely depend on these waters for farming and other household works. However the locals suggest over time the water is becoming increasingly unsuitable for any purpose. Some of the elder villagers fondly recall those days when the water used to be clean and even suitable for drinking. The same supply of water today fills up the air with a horrible stench, reflective of the sorry state of affairs. The setting up of barrages in places like Mathura, hasn't really helped matters any more. The flow of water is now being controlled by these barrages, as a result of which during the dry seasons

Citizens walk past the toxic frothy water of Yamuna. The river experiences its worst phase in terms of pollution in the city of Delhi.



The level of pollution experiences a steep surge during the time of festivals. The immersion of idols during Ganesh Chaturthi or Durga Puja and the offerings from millions of devotees during religious occasions such as Chattr Puja all contribute significantly towards the deteriorating health of the river. After the festivities get over hundreds of idols as can be seen here are immersed in the waters of Yamuna. The accessories on these idols and the paintjob on them comprise of chemicals and other materials which are toxic for the waters of Yamuna and further increase the level of pollution in the waters of an already reeling Yamuna.

the force of the current is not strong enough to wash away any floating debris or waste material, which float gently on the surface of the river and as they rot such debris contaminate vast patches of the river. More significantly such debris usually accumulate along the stretches of the river which house significant human population. Rotting debris and even carcasses of dead animals pollute the waters to such extents that the human settlement along these stretches have to refrain from using these waters. A stagnant flow of water provides the ideal breeding ground for insects including mosquitos. Vector borne diseases in such stagnant parts of the river is turning into a common occurrence.

There was a time when the beauty of Taj Mahal reflected in the clear blue waters of Yamuna on a full moon night enamoured millions and sent waves of romance down the souls of even the most pragmatic. This beautiful monument, an emblem of Mughal empire Shah Jahan's undying love for his deceased wife Mumtaz, befittingly had Yamuna for company, symbolic to the very notion of love, which has overcome every hurdle and flowed through generations across centuries. Yet that very river, trudges laboriously in a mere trickle along the Taj, carrying with it tonnes of sewage and filth which get dumped into it. The effects of a polluted Yamuna are far reaching on this iconic monument than just mere blotch on its former glory. A drying up and

There was a time when the beauty of Taj Mahal reflected in the clear blue waters of Yamuna on a full moon night enamoured millions and sent waves of romance down the souls of even the most pragmatic. A drying up and gradually narrowing Yamuna may render the wooden foundation of Taj Mahal brittle and unstable. The milky white marble stone which the Taj flaunted with a sense of pride too is under threat, courtesy the polluted waters of Yamuna.





Even in such polluted state this mighty river remains relevant to millions of lives on a daily basis. For some these waters are holy and a dip in them is enough to absolve one of all the sins, while for many the river is the single most important source of water. The river is also close to many hearts for its appealing scenic beauty and the huge gatherings of sea gulls in the dawn.

gradually narrowing Yamuna may render the wooden foundation of Taj Mahal brittle and unstable. In fact archaeologists fear a stagnant or slowly moving Yamuna may even lead to the foundation of the Taj caving in. The toxins and other corrosive elements in the water of Yamuna may further disintegrate the wooden foundation and compromise the entire structure. The milky white marble stone which the Taj flaunted with a sense of pride too is under threat, courtesy the polluted waters of Yamuna. In the absence of enough concentrated oxygen the river can barely support any significant population of fish,

which has resulted in Yamuna turning into a breeding ground for swarms of insects. These insects frequent the premises of the Taj creating a nuisance for the visitors and leave behind distinct green patches in the form of their excreta on the walls of the monument which require painstaking efforts on part of the workers to remove at the risk of damaging the intricacies in the architecture and design of this iconic monument. The ever rising level of pollution in Yamuna is one of the biggest challenges the government and the respective concerned authorities are faced with today.

Some of the projects which were adopted a long time ago needs to be revamped and are in the process of being so. The Yamuna Action Plan (YAP) entered in its third phase in 2013 and is being implemented. YAP phase three is specifically aimed at cleaning the stretch of the river passing through Delhi at an estimated cost of little more than 1600 crore rupees. Other plans and projects have been undertaken by the concerned authorities as well. A number of waste water treatment plants have been set up by the Government of Delhi. Dredging operations along the bed of Yamuna in the 22 kilometre stretch across

Delhi is also being carried out to improve the flow of the river. A number of open drains from several colonies which opened directly into the river are being trapped and diverted to various sewage treatment plants. In Uttar Pradesh several projects have been undertaken for the treatment of sewage. Among these the project aimed at upgradation of sewage facilities in Mathura deserves a special mention. Along with all these measures as citizens of this country we too should be aware of the perils which are threatening the future of this river and contribute towards the cause of cleaning up of Yamuna. The civil society



can no longer turn a blind eye towards this issue hoping the government and other concerned authorities alone will be able to bring about a solution. We should be careful of not littering the banks of Yamuna or disposing off our garbage in such a manner which may eventually find its way into the waters of this river. Creating a general awareness among the mass regarding the importance of looking after Yamuna also becomes our responsibility and can go a long way in ensuring a safe and secured future for Yamuna.

All these efforts if implemented properly and in a timely manner can go a long way in ensuring the health of Yamuna gradually improves in the days to come. However there is no denying in various parts across its stretch of more than 1300 kilometres the river is gasping for life. These measures which are being implemented while do look promising; it all boils down to the proper and timely implementation. The river which has diligently shaped the lives of millions with a motherly affection is running out of time and the onus lies with us to look after this iconic water body which has nurtured us for centuries now.

Yamuna along with the Ganges plays a crucial role in shaping the iconic and supremely fertile Ganges Basin which forms the backbone of agriculture in the northern half of India. In fact some of the major kingdoms and civilisations in ancient India thrived in this basin and owe their origins to the waters of these two iconic river systems. Some of the major human settlements and cities in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and the city of Delhi itself sprung up along the banks of Yamuna River. Even before Yamuna meets with the Ganges at Prayag near Allahabad in the state of Uttar Pradesh it leaves its own lasting contribution on the highly fertile alluvial Yamuna-Ganges Doab region.



The civil society can no longer turn a blind eye towards this issue hoping the government and other concerned authorities alone will be able to bring about a solution. We should be careful of not littering the banks of Yamuna or disposing off our garbage in such a manner which may eventually find its way into the waters of this river. Creating a general awareness among the mass regarding the importance of looking after Yamuna also becomes our responsibility and can go a long way in ensuring a safe and secured future for Yamuna. All these efforts if implemented properly and in a timely manner can go a long way in ensuring the health of Yamuna gradually improves in the days to come.



About the Photographer

Jai Thakur, a Business Research Analyst by profession is a self-taught photographer. Brought up in a small cantonment of Darjeeling district he is now based in Delhi. He started photography out of his passion for traveling and storytelling. He is a recipient of prestigious Sahapedia Frames Grant and also, won awards at the repute of Paris Photo Prize (PX3), International Photography Awards (IPA), Monochrome International Photography Awards, Moscow International Foto Awards (MIFA), Tokyo International Foto Awards (TIFA), Sahitya Kala Parishad and Jeevika: 10th Asian Livelihood Documentary Film Awards. His work has been published in various media platforms be it print or online like National Geographic Your Shot, 121clicks, Photographer's Forum Magazine, Dodho Magazine, CityAir News, Indian Education Diary, etc. Also, he has been a part of MX Player Web-series "Express Yourself" on River Conservation and recently, appointed as a Brand Ambassador of Tripoto Pvt. Ltd.

Social Media Links:

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Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/jaithakurpix/?hl=en>

Blog: <https://jaithakur0787.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/jaithakurpix>

Members of the Konyak tribe perform their elaborate dance rituals during the Aoling Festival.



Aoling Festival: Beholding the **Konyak** Tradition

by Tania Chatterjee



Elderly members of the Konyak tribe in their traditional costumes and the home-made muskets which since ages have been an integral part of the Konyak society.

A Konyak man weaves one of the traditional headgears.



The lives of people belonging to the Konyak tribe in the northern reaches of the north-east Indian state of Nagaland along the Indo-Myanmar border even in today's time of information boom, has remained covered under a veil of obscurity. There is no well documented history which sheds any light on the ancestry of these people, little light has been shed on their past and there is precious little information about these people which is available to us. Much of what we know about these people today is based on hearsay, folklores and legends

quaint town of Mon serves as the district headquarter. The town of Mon appears no different from any other hill town with its narrow winding roads and days which begin even before the first rays of the sun sweep across the neighborhood. The one thing noticeable about the town of Mon is the significant presence of a number of churches and Christian convent schools across it, a reminder to the time when there was a huge presence of Christian missionaries in the whole of Nagaland. In fact the present day social dynamics in the Naga society can be heavily attributed

The present day Konyak society is a far cry from what it used to be a few decades ago, much of their violent past has been carefully removed from the realms of their current existence...

which have been passed on through generations and eyewitness accounts. It is a daunting task, nearly impossible to put in facts and figures the origin and ancient history of these people, although a look into this society offers glimpses into its veiled past. The present day Konyak society is a far cry from what it used to be a few decades ago, much of their violent past has been carefully removed from the realms of their current existence, yet the remnants of the long gone past, the fragments of their history remain scattered everywhere, eager to give away a unique account of their unique past.

The northernmost district of Mon in Nagaland happens to be the major Konyak stronghold in the state of Nagaland. The

to the influence these missions had on them. There is little in Mon which sheds in any light on the past of the Konyak people, Mon seems like a town which over time has escaped the clutches of history and metamorphosed itself into a different being with no ties to its past. It is the outskirts of Mon where the villages lie scattered, snippets from their past reveal themselves.

The pride which these people take in their bold and fierce history as warriors is palpable everywhere, it is displayed with pomp, they even chose to wear this aspect of their history literally on their skin as tattoos, in other words it may be their warrior days are over yet this remains one society severely hungover from their battle scarred past. It is widely believed though



The Aoling Festival is the annual ‘Spring Festival’ of the Konyak people. During this festival the villages which are scattered around Mon town come to life with a prevalent air of festivities and celebrations. Aoling Festival is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm in these villages each year during the first week of April.

not historically established; the Konyaks were the last among the Naga tribes to give up the custom of head-hunting. Head hunting was a common practice among the Konyaks and other Naga tribes. They used to believe sprinkling the blood from the chopped off heads of their enemies on their fields would ensure a good harvest and usher in a season of prosperity for them. The warriors in the villages would be entrusted with this perilous task during which they would lie in ambush armed with their traditional machete or “dau” ready to pounce upon their unsuspecting victims who would usually be someone

from the neighboring villages. Once they had brought back the chopped head of their victims the queen of the village would reward them by carving out tattoos on their faces which served as symbols of their valor. This practice was widely prevalent among the Konyaks till the early part of the 1980s. However with the arrival of Christian missionaries and with more and more Konyaks embracing Christianity as their religion this brutal practice slowly faded away with time. The remnants of this once violent past resurface once in a while in the form of the old –timers. Most of them in their 70s or even more are long

retired from their days as fierce headhunting warriors and have quietly slipped into a more docile way of life with almost nothing except for the tattoos on their faces giving away their once violent predisposition.

The other notable aspect of the Konyak tribe is their iconic harvest festival. Harvest festivals are not uncommon across India, primarily because India even in the 21st century is an agriculturally rich and diverse country. Different harvest festivals are celebrated differently in various parts of India. The Konyak society, an ancient society like countless other tribal set ups

across the world were largely dependent upon agriculture and their prosperity depended a lot on the ensuing season’s harvest. In fact such festivals have been an integral part of the various Naga tribes. The Aoling Festival is the annual ‘Spring Festival’ of the Konyak people. During this festival the villages which are scattered around Mon town come to life with a prevalent air of festivities and celebrations. Aoling Festival is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm in these villages each year during the first week of April. The timing is significant since it marks the beginning of a new season of harvest. Traditionally



The week long festival is reflective of the Konyak culture and traditions and is punctuated with elaborate song and dance sequences.



Guns, especially the home-made single muzzle or double-barreled ones have always formed an essential component of the Konyak society. Young kids are introduced to guns at a young age and are quite adapt at handling these weapons.

keeping in mind the impending monsoon the sowing of crops and other food grains would be completed by the month of April so that the impending rains of the monsoon would facilitate a rich harvest. The festival also marks the beginning of the traditional Konyak new year. During ancient times,

these festivities were aimed at pleasing the Gods, so that their blessings would ensure a season of good harvest and prosperity. It could be argued that the tradition of headhunting and spraying their fields with the blood of their enemies was an act of sacrifice meant to please the

Gods. However in today's time with almost the entire Konyak tribe having embraced Christianity this festival acts as a bridge that keeps them connected to their roots and traditions and above everything else is a joyous occasion which brings the entire community together and strengthens

the sense of kinship. This is a time for jubilation; everyone dresses in their traditional colorful costumes, ornaments and headgears along with weapons. During this festival the Konyak people proudly display their traditional weapons and guns and their proud lineage as warriors of the fiercest repute in an ancient Nagaland comes to the fore. It is believed the Konyak tribe was one of the first if not the first to have gained access to gun powder. Even today young men and boys often embark upon hunting trips and expeditions in these hilly forests with their homemade guns and gun powder. The various rituals which are a part of these festivities showcase their exemplary hunting and fighting skills which had once earned the Konyaks the reputation of one of the fiercest tribes in the whole of Nagaland. Elaborate feasts are organized across the villages and traditional Konyak cuisines comprising of the sacrifices which were made during the festivals are prepared. The men and women dress up in their brightly colored traditional clothing which is beautifully accessorized by elaborate headgears and traditional jewelry. The use of various animal parts, feathers, fur and skin is noticeable in these traditional wardrobes. The elaborate headgears often proudly flaunt colorful feathers of birds or skin and fur of animals. Extravagant song and dances too form an integral part of these celebrations which last for an entire week. These song and dances are allusions to the Konyak's ancient past and often depict



Young Konyak men display their skills with the country made guns during one of the rituals of Aoling Festival.

Such scenes are common during the Aoling Festival. The colourful costumes, the elaborate headgears, the traditional jewelry all paint a detailed picture of the much lesser known Konyak society.



to the bigger cities of Kohima or Dimapur or even other parts of India. They are no less proud of their Konyak lineage, they are extremely enthusiastic in depicting the brave tales of their ancestors, how fiercely they fought, how bravely they defended their turf, how skilled they were at wielding their machetes at their enemies, how pompously they rejoiced a good harvest, yet there is a sense of pessimism in their voices regarding their future. Caught in between a remarkable past and a future which doesn't promise much, these young people are left to fend for themselves. They gladly embrace the change their society has undergone, yet for thousands of them the change has failed to keep pace with the rest of the world, even the rest of India. There will come a point in time when the last of the head-hunters, will rest in their graves carrying underground with them an intricate and possibly the most significant identity of their existence, a time when any human bridge between their present and the past will cease to exist, yet the battle of this remarkable society against obscurity, against poverty, lack of opportunity and indifference will continue. Their violent rather simplified past has paved the way for a much complex future, the great warrior community has a new battle at their hands, a battle to carve a niche for themselves, a battle to uplift their entire society, a battle which asks for young and fresh warriors and a battle in which the traditional "daus" will be rendered meaningless. And in times like

various episodes and folklores from the annals of Konyak history. The locally made rice beer often referred to as "yu" form an essential ingredient of these festivities. The hospitable atmosphere, the welcoming nature and the all-inclusive nature of this festival have gradually turned the Aoling Festival into one of the growing attractions in the state of Nagaland for

visitors and tourists from outside. The festival also offers the perfect opportunity for outsiders to get a sneak peek into the life of this ancient society much of which lies veiled in obscurity. The sands of time have brought about considerable changes in the Konyak society. Modern ways of life are steadily making inroads into this remote society.

The young generation seems particularly disconnected from their ancient past and are opting for a life which is far more mainstream, they are constantly striving for a future laden with opportunities which unfortunately their ancient society in the hills of Mon doesn't provide them with. It is not at all uncommon for younger people to move away from their homes



During these seven days the past and the present of the Konyak society in spite of their plethora of differences come together as one to celebrate the rich tradition of a race which has managed to hold its own for centuries now. The Aoling Festival in such a context metamorphoses into something far more significant than seven days of merry making.

these the Aoling Festival if at least for a week, bridges the gap between the ancient and the modern. During these seven days the past and the present of the Konyak society in spite of their plethora of differences come together as one to

celebrate the rich tradition of a race which has managed to hold its own for centuries now. The Aoling Festival in such a context metamorphoses into something far more significant than seven days of merry making. It is that invisible thread which

binds the Konyak society together; it acts as that identifying factor which instills the young Konyak people with a sense of pride which was once the hallmark of their ancestors.



About the Photographer

Tania Chatterjee is an eminent photo artist from the city of joy Kolkata, India. Presently she is the Co-Founder and Mentor of a photography organization named FOTORBIT (www.fotorbit.com). Her niche subjects of photography are people, culture, travel, and documentation. Her works have been exhibited in almost all major cities in India and near about 30 countries. Her photographs have been published by several national and international agencies. Winner of "Being a Girl" Travelling Photo Contest, 2016 supported by Govt. of India Initiative "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao", UNFPA India, UN Women India, National Foundation for India and many more. Recently she has won West Bengal Government Information and Cultural Department's State Level Photography award (2016-17) and nomination award from prestigious The Humanity Photo Awards, 2017(HPA) supported by UNESCO. She has been appointed as a jury member in national and international photography contests. For her achievements, she has bagged distinctions like EFIP (Excellence FIP) from Federation of Indian Photography and EFIAP (Excellence FIAP) from Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique (France) Recognized by UNESCO.



Acclaimed street photographer **Bhaskar Kundu** speaks exclusively to us and explains how looking at the world around him through the unconventional eyes of a cockroach helped him develop his unique style.

“I mostly try to look at the frame from an angle which an ordinary person will not look at...I always imagined how a cockroach looks at the world? Won't it be so different from how we look at?”

Bhaskar has been into photography since the last ten years. After having tried almost all genres, eventually he found his true love in the streets, doing candid street & documentary photography. He is a keen trainer and mentor in photography and has conducted several workshops and photography tours. Bhaskar's works have been exhibited in India and abroad in many exhibitions and Salons and have been published in leading newspapers, magazines and websites. Bhaskar is currently based in Gurgaon and works as a senior sales & marketing professional with Nestlé India Ltd.





Please tell our readers how your journey with the camera started. What inspired you to take up photography?

This is very interesting. It's a long story, but to cut it short, I did not have anyone in my family who was ever into photography and casted an influence on me. However I was into painting till my high school days, which I believe transformed into photography later on during my college days. My first camera was a 35 mm film camera Yashika Electro 35 which I still have.

Did you ever receive any formal training in photography? How important a role does formal training play in photography or would you say it is not an absolute essential?

I know many writers, painters, singers who have never formally trained themselves, but have been very successful in their fields. Similarly I know many photographers without formal training. So I would not say that formal training is absolutely necessary, but yes, it helps. Any form of training, whether it is formal or informal, helps. There is no loss. Today,



with advancement of internet and technology, we all learn from online videos and tutorials of the masters. I had a formal training for one year on basics and advanced photography. But continuous learning on the subject is absolutely a must.

What are your preferred camera-lens combinations? Which lens for you would be the workhorse for street photography?

A small mirrorless camera, with tilt screen and a 23mm lens (35 mm equivalent on cropped body). But I work with a kit lens 18-55 mm which is equally good.

If there is one prevalent trend in street photography that you would like to see changing, which one would that be?

I would like to see people creating their own unique styles rather than sticking to the most common trends like juxtapositions & silhouettes. Trying unique point of view, creating illusion, creating a sense of abnormal scale, creating a story, trying to capture the unique moment out of many are some of the things that would interest me.





Who are those photographers who have left a lasting impact on you through their photographs?

There are quite a few. Henri Cartier Bresson has been the most influential in my life. Then of course Elliott Erwitt, Raghu Rai, Alex Webb, Steve Mc Curry, Natan Dvir and many more.

While it is largely subjective and much varied, is there any one particular composition technique which you use the most while composing your photographs?

I mostly try to look at the frame from an angle which an ordinary person will not look at. In that way, many a times, the scale changes, the point of view changes and an ordinary scene looks completely different. I always imagined how a cockroach looks at the world? Won't it be so different from how we look at?

How do you anticipate an intriguing moment when out in the streets? Does it come from practice or a thorough research of the neighbourhood you are in?



“My first ever article was “My 3 P’s of Photography”. You know what the three “P” stands for? Practice, Practice and Practice.”

While shooting what are those essential elements you look for in a frame which you think would make a great photograph?

Lines, curves, shapes, light and of course a hero which is the main element of connection. If you can have all these then it’s a wow! I generally prefer to have one or two living elements in the frame, which form the central character or the hero so to say.

Festivals in India often provide intriguing frames to street photographers. Do you have a favourite festival or an occasion from a photographic perspective?

Holi in Barsana, Pushkar in Rajasthan, Dondi and Gajan in Bengal are some, but actually you can create street photographs from any festival for that matter.

You have shot both coloured and monochrome frames extensively. Do you decide which frame you want in monochrome and which one in colour while shooting or is it something which you decide during the post processing?

Both. But I would give much higher score to practice. My first ever article was “My 3 P’s of Photography”. You know what the three “P” stands for? Practice, Practice and Practice. You need to have keen observation and practice the skill of observing things, always and every

moment, whether you are with the camera or without it. Now a days we are actually never without a camera. Even if you are not carrying your main camera, you still have your mobile camera with you. Many of my awarded photographs are taken with mobile camera. So, the practice can also

happen in your mind every time. The practice eventually should lead to a reflex. How do you drive a car? Reflex, right? If suddenly you need to brake, you do it out of reflex. Such should be the practice of observation and speed of reaction in street photography.



I decide during post processing. To me, it's not a rocket science. Some photographs are rich in colour and colour has a strong meaning in the photograph. I keep them in colour. In some, colour diverts the attention of the viewer from the main

theme and does not play a significant role. In such situation I convert them into black and white and see.

Which is the biggest challenge which you have faced or face regularly in the genre

of street photography?

There is no challenge according to me. The correct word is limitation. Being in a responsible position in a corporate, my limitation is time. I wish I had more time for photography!

But in general if you ask me, many street photographers fear going closer to the subject. They use zoom lenses. That's not right. You have to go close to the subject. There are different ways of doing that, and over practice you become free.

Having travelled extensively, do you believe there is a way to effectively combine the genres of street and travel photography?

Yes that's an option too. But you have to master one.

Lastly what would be your advice to young and upcoming photographers?

I learn from them too. They are very creative. However, with my experience I can say that even if you are not born with a creative mind, you can develop it through practice. So, practice is very important. Then you need to read a lot, study the works of masters, think a lot and always try to create frames in your mind, even when you are not having the camera with you. There are thousands of moments in the street. The instinct and reflex should be developed such that you will automatically press the shutter at the right moment and steal it in your camera.

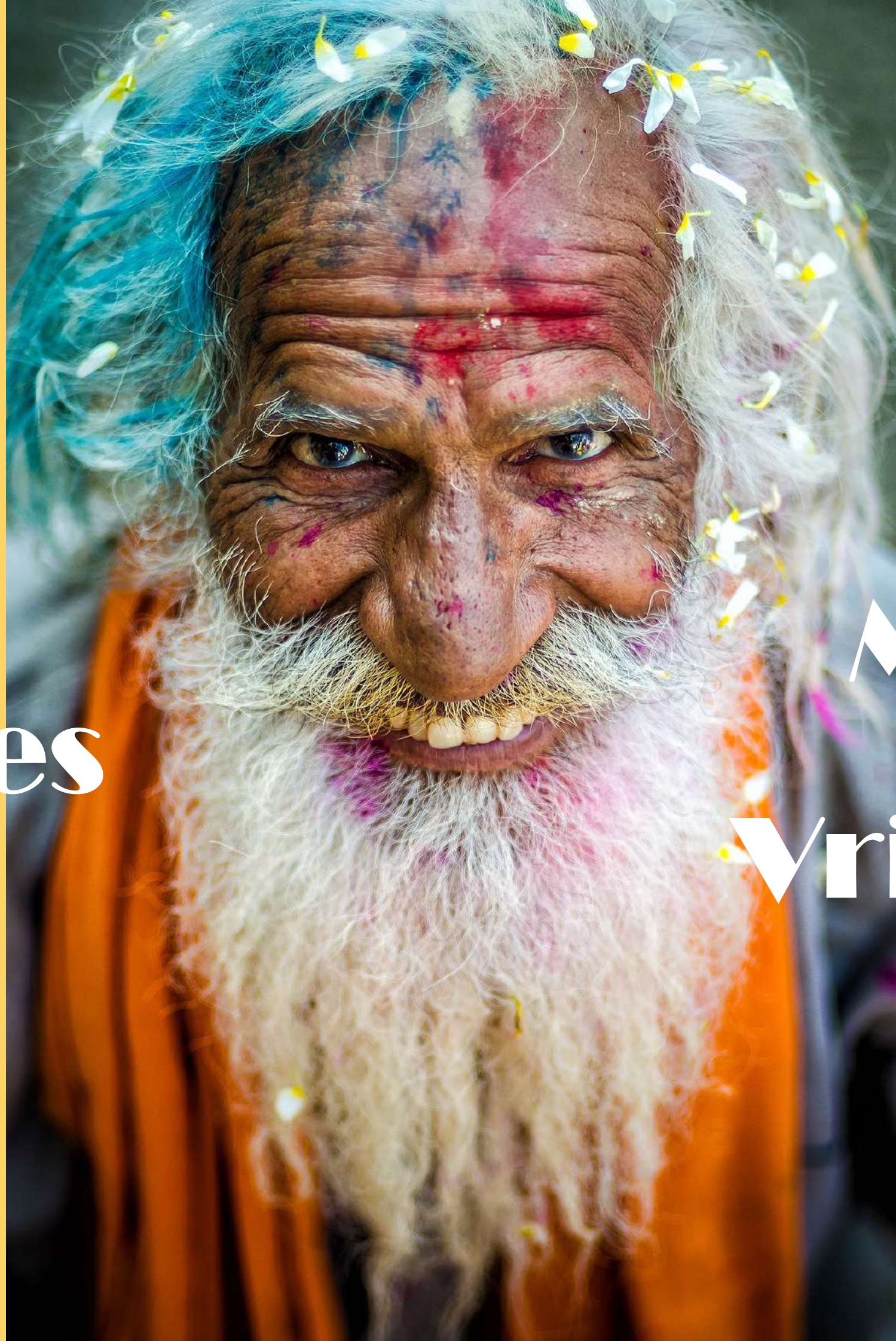




Photo Album

the colour palettes of

HOLI



from Mathura and Vrindavan

by Saurabh Sirohiya

A photo album depicting the colourful
scenes from Holi celebrations in
Mathura and Vrindavan

Such scenes are common during the week long Holi celebrations in the ancient town of Vrindavan. The whole town dons a cloak of myriad hues and there is hardly anyone who is not a part of these festivities.



Mathura - the breeding ground for an epic saga of romance between a young Lord Krishna and Radha, time and again finds special mention in numerous Hindu scriptures and mythologies. However it would be wrong to assume the name Mathura fails to resonate in the 21st century India and remains confined in the annals of ancient Hindu mythology and scriptures. The name Mathura today ushers in with it a feeling of celebration, festivities, revelry. Thousands of years of history, mythologies, legends and folklores all come to life in the ancient towns of Mathura and Vrindavan during the festival of Holi. In fact the colourful spectacle in these two ancient towns soaked in history and deeply intertwined with various episodes from Lord Krishna's childhood and life happens to be the biggest and grandest spectacle of colours in the entire country and draws millions from across the globe to become a part of these celebrations. The towns of Vrindavan and Mathura are part of the holy Braj bhumi, which is referred to as the birthplace of Lord Krishna in Hindu scriptures. Lord Krishna spent his childhood days in this region and his tales of mischief and romantic liaisons with girls of his age and the proverbial love story between Radha and Krishna have carved a special niche for these two towns among millions of devout Hindus across the country. It is not only tourists who visit vrindavan and Mathura during Holi, thousands of pilgrims

also visit these towns to become a part of the festivities. The village of Barsana near Mathura, which is also known as the birthplace of Radha witnesses the celebrations of Holi beginning almost a week prior to the actual festival. These celebrations are popularly known as Barsana Holi and in fact better known as "lathmaar holi" – named after a ritual in which women beat men playfully with their "laathis" or sticks. The village of Nandgaon – the birthplace of Krishna too sees similar festivities and celebrations although they commence a day after the celebrations in Barsana. It is widely regarded during his childhood days Krishna used to visit Barsana – Radha's village to put colours on her, in return Radha along with her friends would visit Nandgaon the next day to return the favour. Keeping that ancient tradition alive the festivities in Barsana begin a day before and eventually the attention shifts to Nandgaon the next day.

In Vrindavan the festivities are much more elaborate and last for an entire week. The Banke-Bihari temple is the epicentre of all celebrations. The entire town gets smeared in powdered colours or "gulaal" of different hues and it is impossible to find anyone who doesn't sport a dash of colour. Music, devotional songs or "bhajans" which depict various stories from the life of Lord Krishna are an essential part of these celebrations. The entire spectacle is a treat for sore eyes, with people belonging to different age



One of the many colourful faces during the celebration of Holi in Vrindavan and Mathura.



group, different strata of the society irrespective of their multitude of differences coming together as one and taking part in these festivities. This photo story captures some of those heart-warming moments from the festival of Holi celebrated in Mathura and Vrindavan. It is an ode to those colourful moments which reveal themselves in every nook and corner of Vrindavan and Mathura during this week long celebration.

In Vrindavan the festivities are much more elaborate and last for an entire week. The Banke-Bihari temple is the epicentre of all celebrations. The entire town gets smeared in powdered colours or “gulaal” of different hues and it is impossible to find anyone who doesn’t sport a dash of colour. Music, devotional songs or “bhajans” which depict various stories from the life of Lord Krishna are an essential part of these celebrations. The entire spectacle is a treat for sore eyes, with people belonging to different age group, different strata of the society irrespective of their multitude of differences coming together as one and taking part in these festivities.



The devotional songs known as “bhajans” accompanied by various musical instruments are an integral part of these festivities. The bhajans depict tales from the lives of Lord Krishna.

Thousands from all over the world take part in these colourful celebrations.



A family smeared in “gulaal” or coloured powder revels in the festivities.





Women gather round to take part in "laathmar holi" in the village of Barsana.



“Laathmar Holi” is the main attraction in Mathura. During these celebrations women playfully beat men with “laathis” or sticks. It is widely regarded during his childhood days Krishna used to visit Barsana in Mathura – Radha’s village to put colours on her, in return Radha along with her friends would visit Nandgaon the next day to return the favour.





A devotee takes part in the bhajans and offers his prayers to Lord Krishna in the middle of the celebrations.



About the Photographer

Saurabh Sirohiya is a graphic designer by profession and an amateur photographer by passion. His love for photography was largely inspired by the film camera his family used to own when he was a child. Having started out with a compact Nikon digital a year into his job, he has now shifted to a Nikon D7200.

He has a particular affinity for street, travel and landscape photography. He is also fond of shooting candid photographs and portraits. He has taken part in many national and international salons, contests and competitions receiving a number of acceptances and accolades. He believes photography is never an easy job, one has to shoot in the given situation, light, shadow and composition, the photograph should look appealing without the story. The composition alone should be able to inspire the viewers as without it the purpose of photography will not be served.

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Thousands of years of history, mythologies, legends and folklores all come to life in the ancient towns of Mathura and Vrindavan during the festival of Holi. In fact the colourful spectacle in these two ancient towns soaked in history and deeply intertwined with various episodes from Lord Krishna's childhood and life happens to be the biggest and grandest spectacle of colours in the entire country and draws millions from across the globe to become a part of these celebrations. The towns of Vrindavan and Mathura are part of the holy Braj bhumi, which is referred to as the birthplace of Lord Krishna in Hindu scriptures. Lord Krishna spent his childhood days in this region and his tales of mischief and romantic liaisons with girls of his age and the proverbial love story between Radha and Krishna have carved a special niche for these two towns among millions of devout Hindus across the country. It is not only tourists who visit Vrindavan and Mathura during Holi, thousands of pilgrims also visit these towns to become a part of the festivities.

Minimalism in Landscape...

by Puneet Verma

Landscape photographer **Puneet Verma** shares his views and techniques on incorporating minimalism in landscape photography and what attracted him to this form of story telling

Landscapes is indeed amongst the most loved genres in photography and I'm not an exception to this fact either.

In fact, given my sheer passion for travel and exploring nature, it only comes on its own to me. And after years of self taught amateur photographic journey, I've come to realize the importance of developing one's very own signature style. And yes that takes time and is a slow process of self realization.

So, I find myself today with a clear inclination towards moody and minimal landscape images telling a definitive story. I'm a minimalist in my daily life too so I guess doing this kind of work only helps me reflect on my inner self and hence gives me the "joy" - we all seek as photographers. I most often find myself using "time" as the key element in my images as it renders a very dynamic and unforeseen perspective to the scene. This only explains my love for long exposures that are often spanning over minutes. Coming to the approach part of it, I genuinely believe that making a photograph is never (and can never be) just "pointing and shooting". It in fact is a "3 Step Process" starting with one's "Vision" about the final image then "Capturing" the scene and finally "Processing" the image towards the initial vision (in analog/digital darkroom). I'll try and explain the same 3 steps in this article today.

Vision and Execution (on the field):

On location, I use my love for simple shapes (leading lines, diagonals, curves and such) and try to apply my child like imagination for finding forms in any shooting context. Be it seascapes (my personal favorite), mountains, rocks, waterfalls or even architecture.

Mostly, I try and find an object in foreground for the eye to rest upon and use it as a hinge to lead into anything prominent in the backdrop. This imparts a 3 dimensional perspective to the scene that I'm shooting. At other times, I simply zoom in to find a more intimate composition. Minimal work often ends up demanding for zooming into your subjects. Then comes establishing the tonal relationship between elements, like for example, a lone rock and a cloud hovering above it. At this point I try to establish the "meaning" aka "story" in my shot and try to visualize my final image (let's say, the rock and the cloud having a dialogue of sorts between them). I take my exposure time (and ND filter usage) calls at this point.

Only then, I set up my gear and start the actual shooting work which includes focus setting and exposure metering (F stop, ISO and shutter speed choice).

I always shoot in RAW format for the maximal latitude it offers during post processing.

Knowing your gear definitely helps as the inclement weather and changing light never wait for the photographer. We need



A monsoon morning in Gokarna.



A family of Ibex under giant clouds.

to respect them instead (and then use them to our advantage, so as to speak).

Processing (in digital darkroom):

When it comes to working on a RAW image (out of camera), my simple goal is

to keep it true to my vision.

I try not to get carried away by the absolutely tempting flexibility the software allows us today in digital photography. I strive to get it right in camera and then leverage software to only realize my final

intended JPEG image.

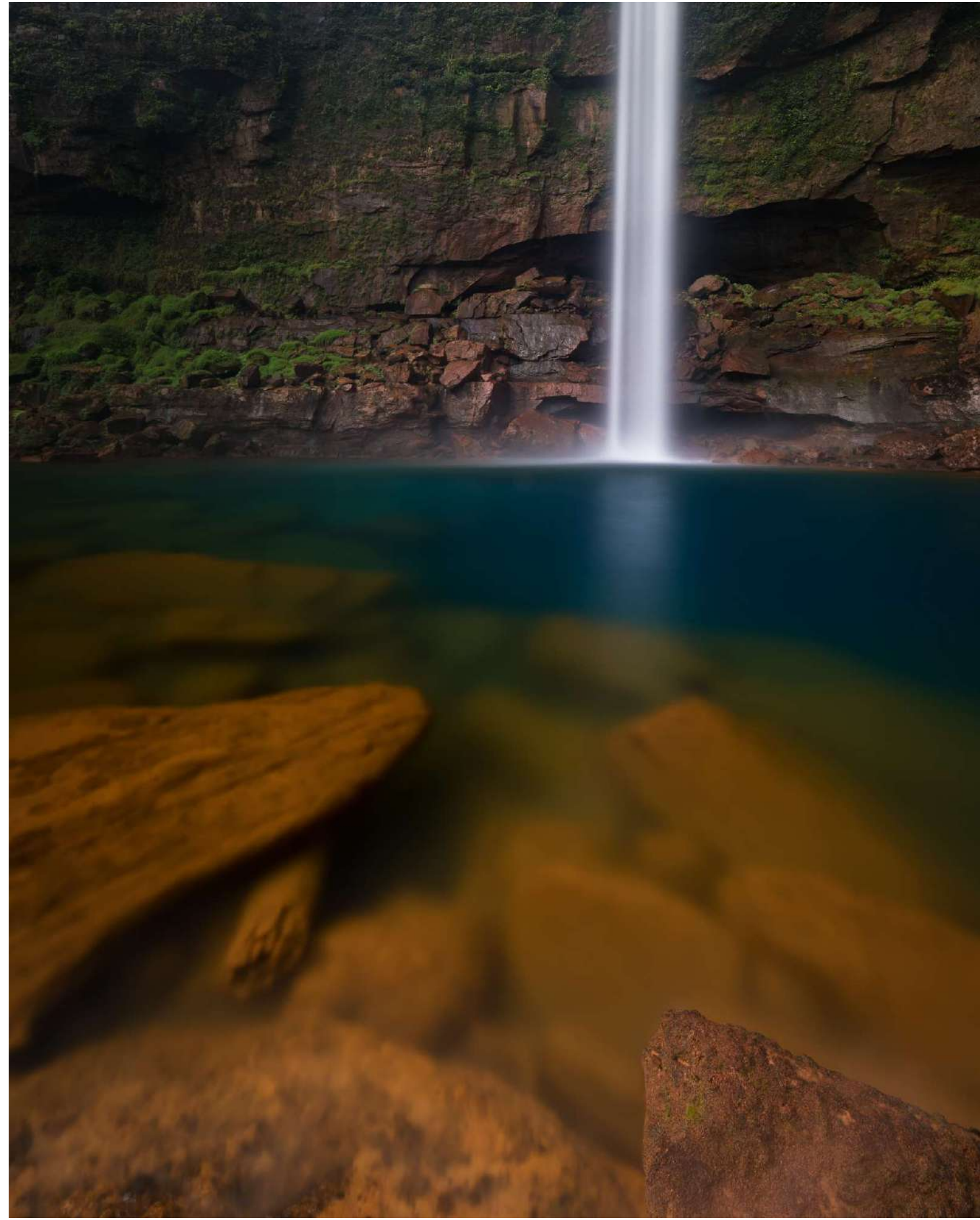
Mine is a 2 staged process where I first import the images into Adobe Lightroom for batched pre-processing.

This is done for only a few initial adjustments - lens profile correction, white

balance, cropping and exposure adjustments. I want to emphasize the importance of its sync feature which enables me to quickly copy settings from one image to another which reduces my processing time drastically. I then batch



A rain shelter under the Milky Way in Meghalaya.



Jaintia Falls in Meghalaya.



A solitary fishing boat in Varkala.

export the images as 16 bit TIFFs. Then for the second (and final) round, I work on every TIFF file (one at a time) in Adobe Photoshop, which (for me) is still the most sophisticated digital darkroom software as I find its tools much more powerful and providing finer control. Needless to mention, its true bread and butter - Layers and Masks. So, I use Curves tool for contrast adjustment and then if it's a color image - Vibrance and Saturation tools for color development. For monochromes, I convert them to greyscale at this point. I use selective Dodge/Burn next to fine tune local adjustments. Finally, comes selective sharpening using High Pass or Smart sharpen filters. Then it's just a matter of exporting the image as a JPEG in a resolution customized for the intended medium - Web, Display or Print.

Gear (that I use):

I currently use a Canon 5DMk4 (full frame) camera body. Combined with that are lenses catered for specific needs ranging from a Canon 16-35mm F4 (for wide angle vistas) to a Tamron 70-200mm F2.8 (for more intimate zoomed in shots). For long exposure work, as it's only obvious, I do use a tripod system (Sirui legs and ball head combination) with a cable operated remote shutter (which helps me make exposure times of my choices leveraging the camera's BULB mode). Then comes the most critical assembly - the filter system. I use a Nisi 100 mm



A misty morning in Gokarna.



Krangsuri Falls in Meghalaya.



Ladakh cloudscape.



The viewpoint at Kodanadu.

square filter that comprises of a filter holder (that can stack 3 filters at a time) and 3 ND (Neutral Density) filters with 3, 6 and 10 stops. I love Nisi's glass ND filters as they impart almost no color cast while retaining excellent optical quality. Without NDs, its impossible to achieve very long exposures in broad day light as they help cut the light and prevent the image from getting overexposed or washed out. I often find myself using them stacked up, for desired intensity.

I do indulge in a lot of web based research for ground work, location scouting, vantage point selections and weather understandings.

There are few amazing mobile phone apps like Photopills too which only make life easier than before.

Closing Notes:

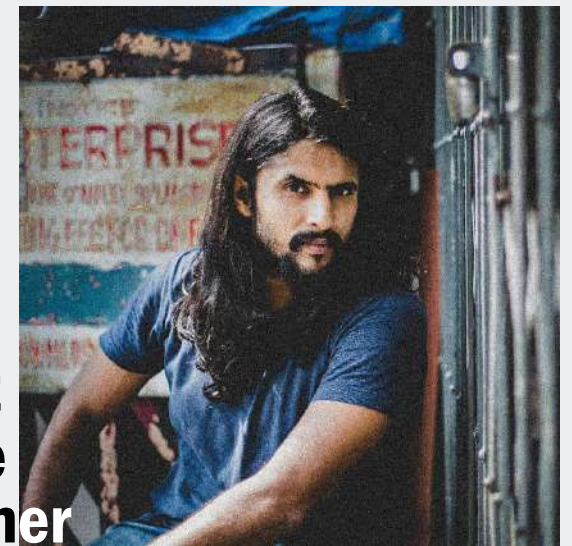
To be absolutely honest, the only thing to understand is there are no rules in photography and it's absolutely fine to chase one's own imagination in the whole process. Also, in this era of social media, where it's only easier than ever to learn and get inspired, we need to be absolutely cautious as well - of not getting carried away by other's works and losing our own vision of capturing and processing.

Happy shooting to you all...



Sunset in Dawki, Meghalaya.

About the Photographer



Puneet Verma is an IT professional based in Bangalore. When he's not busy writing software, he's always out - riding, travelling and making images, almost obsessively. Pretty much a self taught photographer, his passion is creating minimal, abstract and monochrome imagery using long exposure techniques. You'll find most of his compositions without the human element which is a creative choice he made very early in his photographic journey as he always finds more intrigue in exploring and establishing the often untold relationships between the inanimate elements. His personal vision is to create travel and landscape photos that kindle the travel hunger in the audience and perhaps make them pick up their own cameras too. His work has been published, exhibited and accepted in multiple magazines, salons and galleries across cities in India. Two of his images have won Special Mention in the internationally acclaimed "Monochrome Photography Awards" under Amateur Photojournalism and Landscapes categories.

More of his work can be found at :

Instagram:

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

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/thruthatlens>

500px portfolio:<https://500px.com/thruthatlens>



Venice

and the

| Text and Photographs by Sabyasachi Talukdar

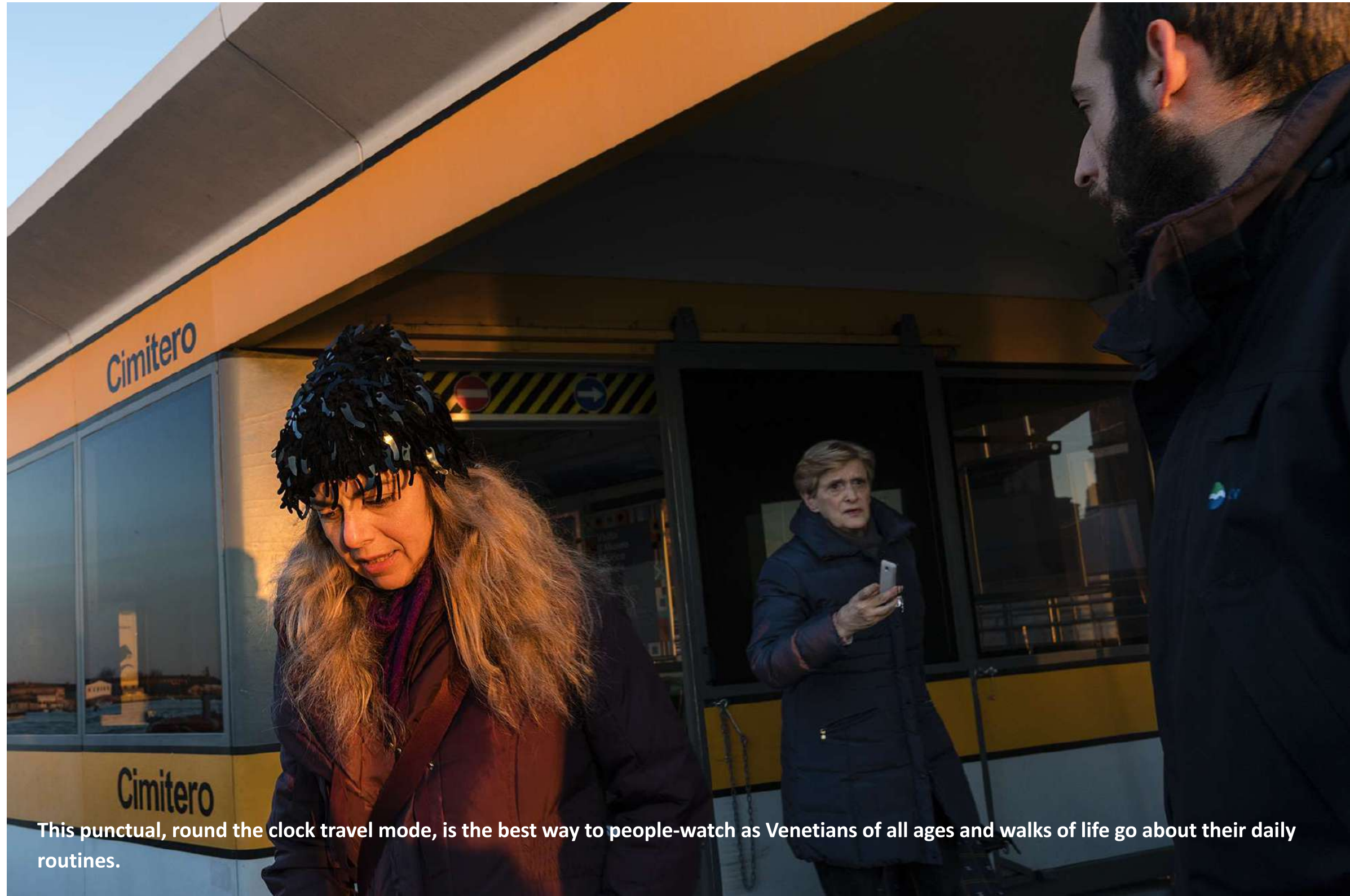
Vaporetto

In the floating city of Venice, the Vaporetto or the “water bus” serves as the major form of public transport for the average Venetian.

It is impossible to think of Venice without conjuring the image of Gondolas. These boats have become iconic thanks to the lagoon city being on top of the list of any European travel itinerary. And boy, is Venice touristy! Come rain come shine, summer or bone-chilling winter, Venice continues to be one of the world's top drawer tourist destinations! But then, there is a Venice beyond the touristy, and Venice beyond the Gondolas.

Venice is a floating city, built around a maze-work of canals and waterways; Venetians rely on water transportation to move from one place to the other, and it's not the Gondolas! The locals use the Vaporettos or the Waterbuses for their daily commutes. And the Gondolas? These thin elegant boats, all dressed up, are almost exclusively meant for the tourists, maybe even tourist traps!

During my first two trips to Venice, once in the summer and the other in autumn, I was just another tourist in the city teeming with fellow tourists, either taking pleasure trips on Gondolas or sightseeing around the crowded San Marco Square. I could not but wonder, how would Venice look



This punctual, round the clock travel mode, is the best way to people-watch as Venetians of all ages and walks of life go about their daily routines.



The vaporetto is hugely popular among the locals and Venetians of all age use this mode of transport on a daily basis.

devoid of tourists, even if for a day, or how would it look from the perspective of a local. I did some quick research and found that barring the Christmas to New Year week, December is generally a quiet month for Venice and if the weather is in your favour, then you are in for a grand

treat.

I landed at Venice's Marco Polo airport one majestically sunny December morning and was greeted almost immediately by a gust of chilling wind. On the way to our hotel, I saw the mountains in the distance had a coat of fresh snow, the season's first.

It had been raining in the previous nights. Over the next five days, I explored a completely different Venice. Devoid of tourists, Venice was in its enchanting best. The sun was out and the locals were out in numbers, soaking as much as possible and making the best of the winter sunshine.

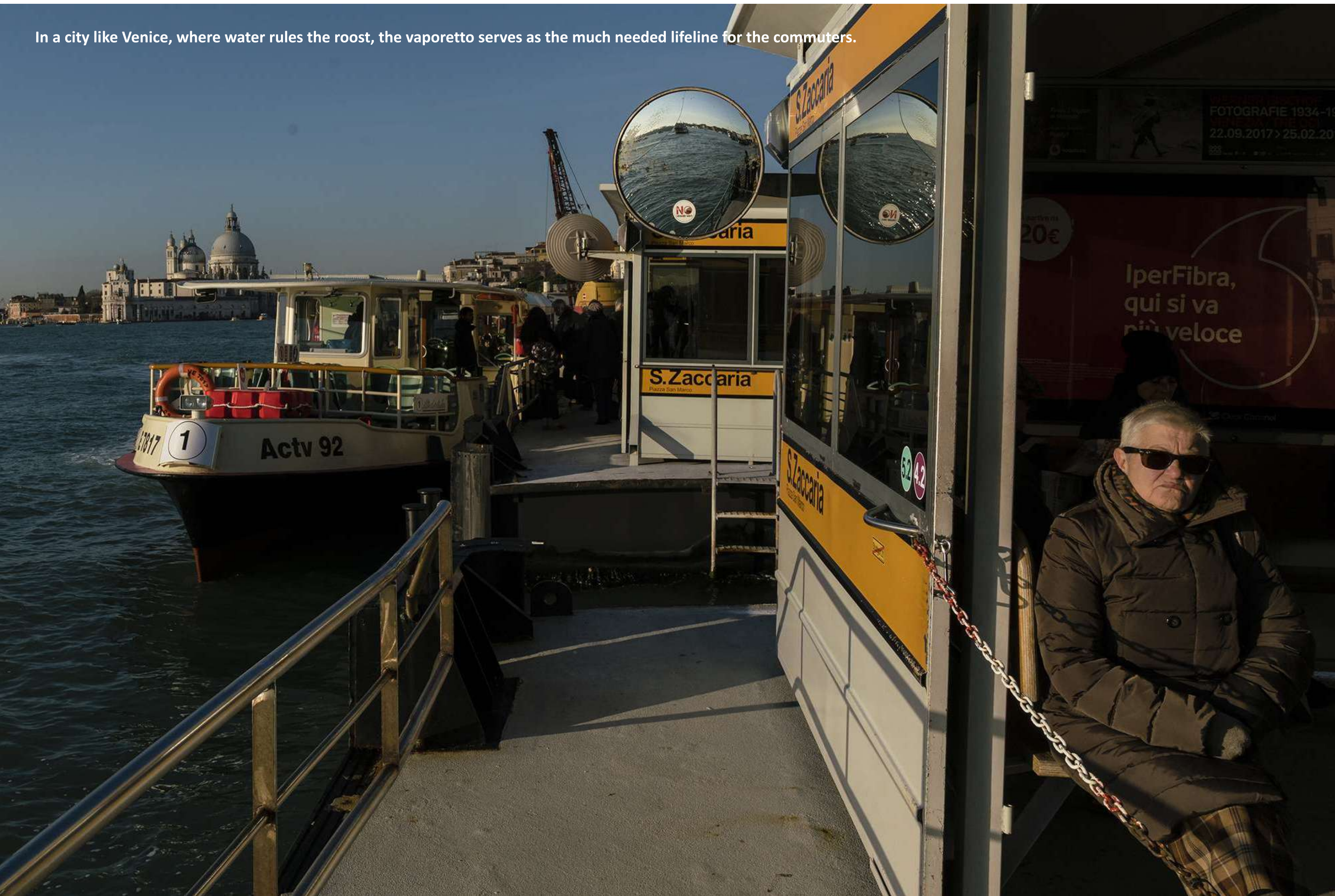
And as I hopped from one island to another, my only mode of transport, other than walking was the Vaporetto. While going around in this punctual, round the clock travel mode, I realised this was the best way to people-watch as Venetians of all ages and walks of life went about their daily routines - commuters travelling to the office, students to their College or University, or people taking pet dogs for a walk...the list goes on...

Riding a Vaporetto is much like boarding a bus. All you need to do is buy a Travel Pass for the duration of your stay, validate your ticket at the entrance each time you board, find out which pier your Vaporetto is arriving. Although there are digital signs above each pier, signifying the time of each boat, it can be a little confusing for the first-timers, especially in busy stops like Santa Corea where there are several piers, marked alphabetically. If unsure, just ask the locals at the dock and I found them more than happy to help.

Having come from India, I felt perfectly at home on the Vaporetto as there seemed to be almost no rule. There are no queues and one is free to shove his way to the empty seats. The Venetians also tend to park their shopping bags in the empty seats next to them, and become almost oblivious to people standing around; A smile and a gentle 'Permesso' usually does the trick for them.

Vaporettos are a great way to explore Venice, either in the comfort of sitting inside or as we preferred, standing on the

In a city like Venice, where water rules the roost, the vaporetto serves as the much needed lifeline for the commuters.





Although there are digital signs above each pier, signifying the time of each boat, it can be a little confusing for the first-timers, especially in busy stops like Santa Corea.

deck, soaking in the romantic view of the canals and the architectural marvels all around. Despite the bone-chilling wind hitting square my face, as a photographer, the Vaporetto deck was THE place to be! As the Vaporettos docked every few minutes, especially in Lines 1 and 2, which traverse the Grand Canal, people would get off and on the boat and I could catch them waiting for one. The fashionably dressed locals and the handful of tourists standing by the bright yellow marked the piers under the amazing winter sun were unmissable recipes for wonderful photographic compositions. It is also quite nice at night when the lights are on and you pass through the illuminated Academia or the Rialto bridges.

So if you are in Venice, skip the pricey Gondola for once and hop on to a Vaporetto and see Venice from the vantage point of the water. A beautiful city awaits you.

Commuting in a vaporetto can be a fairly relaxed ordeal. There are no queue and one can easily make his/her way to the empty seats.



Even for tourists these water buses could be the perfect alternative to the pricey Gondolas for exploring the city, enjoy its beautiful architecture while soaking up the mild afternoon sun.





Venice is a floating city, built around a maze-work of canals and waterways; Venetians rely on water transportation to move from one place to the other, and it's not the Gondolas! The locals use the Vaporettos or the Waterbuses for their daily commutes. And the Gondolas? These thin elegant boats, all dressed up, are almost exclusively meant for the tourists, maybe even tourist traps!



About the Photographer

Sabyasachi Talukdar is a publisher and editor by profession but his passion lies in travelling the world and photographing and documenting the passing moments. Not one to be compartmentalised into strict photographic genres, Sabyasachi's interest in photography stretches from travel to candid street moments and from portraits to landscapes. He is also a known photo critic who loves to analyse photographs based on his experience.

A magnetic charm draws millions of tourists to Kashmir Valley each year in an attempt to get a closer look at what comes closest to paradise on earth. At the heart of the tourist attractions in Kashmir Valley lies the iconic Dal Lake in the city of Srinagar.

Dal Lake : the jewel in the heart of Srinagar

by Avismita Bhattacharyya

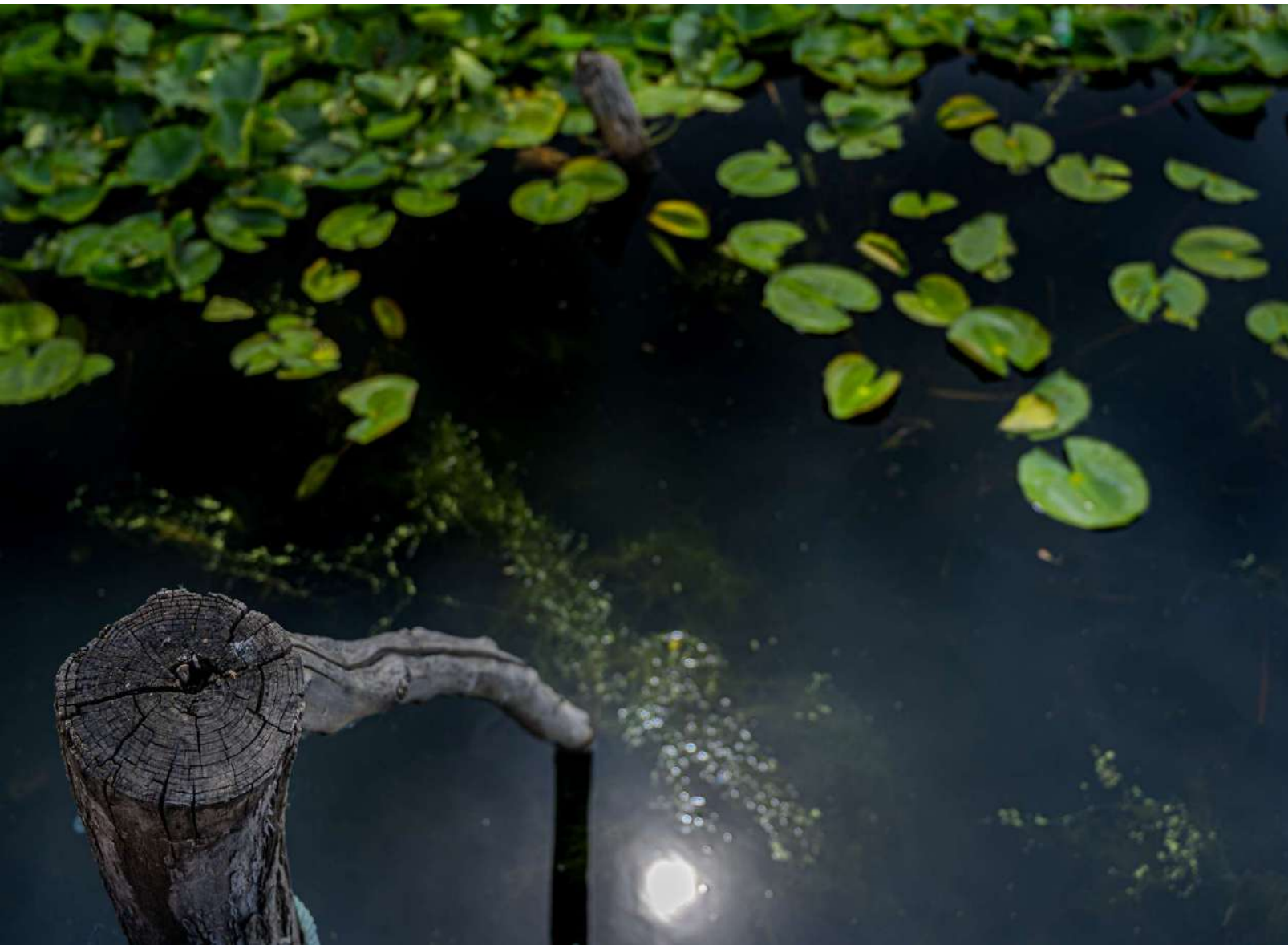


In a Kashmir, ravaged by numerous geo-political unrests, the iconic Dal Lake does its very best to elevate the valley above political bickerings and mindless violence and firmly establish the valley's identity as "paradise on earth".



Dal Lake by dint of its picturesque setting, the houseboats and the shikara rides has carved a special niche among the hearts of millions. Apart from being a popular tourist location the Dal Lake is deeply intertwined with the lives of the Kashmiri people. Being the second largest lake in the union territory, Dal Lake is an important site for various commercial activities ranging from fishing to the harvesting of a wide range of aquatic vegetation.

Kashmir - no longer a state after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution by the BJP led Central Government in August 2019, instead a Union Territory of India now, is a land of contradictions. The former state of Jammu and Kashmir has now been split into the union territories of Kashmir and Ladakh. While Ladakh, which borders China, is a region which is predominantly home to a Buddhist and Tibetan demographic, Kashmir on the other hand is a heavily Muslim dominated landscape which shares its border with neighbouring Pakistan. Since the early days of India's independence when Kashmir was still a princely state and through the course of subsequent developments which saw Kashmir becoming a part of India while enjoying autonomy in various departments of governance till the time it became a union territory as those special privileges were scrapped, Kashmir and the people of Kashmir have been familiar with two things – its ethereal natural beauty and the blood soaked chapters which dot the history of this region. It is heart wrenching to witness a place which is blessed with so much natural beauty is also at the same time cursed with one of the most complex, bloodied and unrelenting saga of geopolitical tensions which has been brewing between India and Pakistan, the two neighbouring countries ever since they achieved independence from the British Colonial rule. The beautiful canvasses of



Dal Lake is a relatively shallow lake which facilitates the growth of underwater vegetation which forms such beautiful patterns on the surface of the lake along with the scattered floating vegetation.

Kashmir have often been marred by the bloodshed which frequently turns the waters of Jhelum red. In decades of violence thousands of people have lost their lives to terror attacks, insurgencies, cross border skirmishes with hundreds of India's security personnel and Kashmiri civilians falling prey to this seemingly never ending cycle of violence. Political agitations often fuelled by the murky inner workings of politics, month long lockdowns, civil unrests have plagued the lives of Kashmiris for decades now. In the Kashmir Valley, life even on its best day

limps on, trying to navigate its way past one obstacle after the other. Yet the valley is blessed with something which in spite of its bloody past and presence draws thousands from all over the world into its realms, the superlative beauty of Kashmir which evoked the sense of being in paradise among millions with its unmatched wizardry casts an enchanting spell which time and again has trumped the violence, the unrests and above everything else embraces the region in a motherly embrace in an attempt to heal its wounds. Nestled between the Pir Panjal in the south

and the mighty Himalayas in the north lies the valley of Kashmir, the seductive beauty of which has achieved mythical status with time. The beauty of this region has stood the test of time, in fact legends of Kashmir's unparalleled beauty soared far and beyond the escarpments of the mountains which guarded it fiercely to faraway lands even in ancient times. In a time when the world was yet to become a small place, hordes of invaders from the Middle-East, Europe all embarked upon arduous journeys across the treacherous mountains and braved the brutal elements

of nature only to enjoy the spoils of Kashmir's scenic beauty and everything else this incredible region had to offer. For at the other end of their troubles lied the promised land where the slopes of the mountains dawn a cloak of lush green, carefully stitched together by the familiar conical presences of oaks, cedars and pines, where the fertile plains offered rich bounties of apple and apricot in the dense orchards, where vast swathes of vibrant saffron fields promised rich returns, picturesque vineyards, lush green paddy fields screamed of plenty and prosperity.



A local Kashmiri man makes his way across the water of Dal Lake in his canoe. These canoes are used extensively by the locals living along the edge of the lake.



Since it is located in the heart of Srinagar, Dal Lake is often classified as an “urban lake” and for many is the crown jewel of Kashmir.

The Kashmir of today, which is often in the news for violence, has still managed to carefully preserve such ancient charms in spite of the ever ensuing gunshots threatening to upstage the serenading voices of fluttering birds in the orchards or the vineyards. And it is this charm which draws millions of tourists to Kashmir Valley each year in an attempt to get a closer look at what comes closest to paradise on earth. At the heart of the tourist attractions in Kashmir Valley lies the iconic Dal Lake in the city of Srinagar.

Dal Lake by dint of its picturesque setting, the houseboats and the shikara rides has carved a special niche among the hearts of millions. Apart from being a popular tourist location the Dal Lake is deeply intertwined with the lives of the Kashmiri people. Being the second largest lake in the union territory, Dal Lake is an important sight for various commercial activities ranging from fishing to the harvesting of a wide range of aquatic vegetation. Srinagar has been a favoured summer destination since the time of the Mughals in India. That tradition lived on through the British rule in India and is still a favoured destination among millions of Indians during the sweltering summer months. The clear blue waters dotted with the brightly coloured shikaras ambling across them, the houseboats with their intricate wood carvings anchored along the shores, the backdrop graced by the majestic mountains with their snow-capped peaks together paint a surreal picture, one which has come

to define the city of Srinagar like nothing else. Such scenes offer a refreshingly new advert for this region marred with violence and paints the valley in a light which rises above the bickering of human conflicts and the dreary ways of politics. Since it is located in the heart of Srinagar, Dal Lake is often classified as an “urban lake” and for many is the crown jewel of Kashmir. Located in a catchment area the lake spreads over an area of roughly 20 square kilometres and is located in the Zabarwan mountain valley. Dal Lake is surrounded on the three sides by the Shankaracharya Hills. A single contiguous water body, the lake is fed by the waters of five interconnected basins - the Nehru Park basin, the Nishat basin, the Hazratbal basin, the Nigeen basin and the Barari Nambal basin. The topography of the lake is characterised by numerous causeways, stilt houses, floating gardens which are home to a wide range of aquatic plant species and lotus gardens. Small human settlements have sprung up along the peripheries of the lake which are characterised by marshes. These marshy lands paved the way for stilt houses which have come up in these regions and are home to scattered human settlements that are largely dependent on the waters of Dal Lake for a number of purposes including their livelihoods. The floating market on Dal Lake provides these settlers with a source of earning their livelihoods. The floating gardens scattered across the lake are used

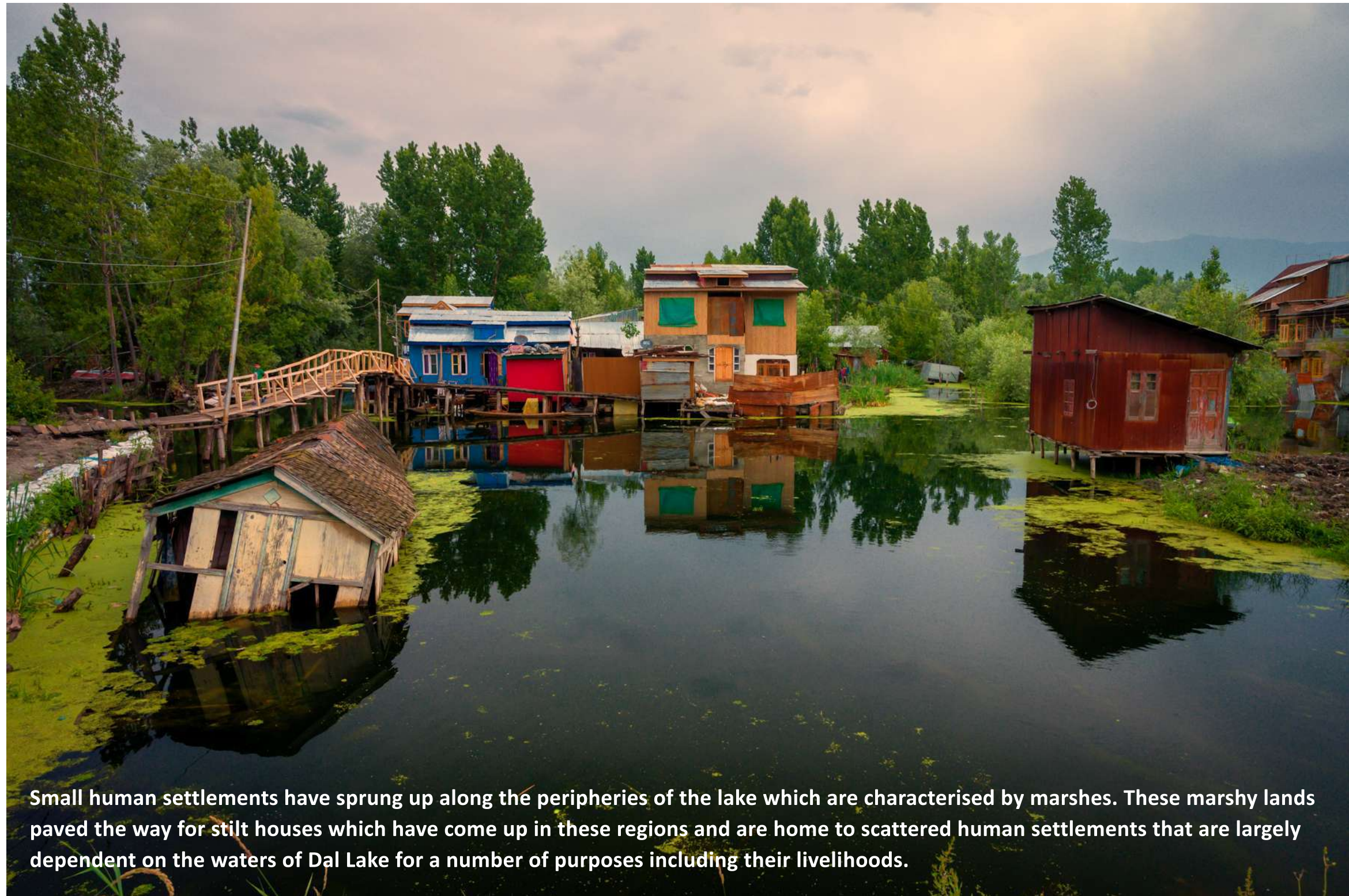
by the local people to grow their produces which range from vegetables to varieties of flowers. The most commonly produced vegetables are tomatoes, cucumbers, water chestnut and lotus roots. The floating gardens are ideally suited for these produces and these items are harvested in huge amounts. The activities commence at the break of dawn when the boatmen arrive in their canoes to the floating markets with stockpiles of their produces. In the midst of the haggling and the commotion the produces sell thick and fast and even before the sun appears in its full bloom over the horizon the bargainings come to an end and the buyers and the sellers return to their respective homes. In this amazing set up it seems the market emerged from the depths of Dal Lake for a brief moment only to be devoured by its depth in the very next. The one reason why the vegetables and other produces are in such peak demand is because of their freshness. Most of these vegetables are harvested barely a few hours before they are brought to these markets. The floating gardens too are extremely fertile which guarantees the produces are of the finest quality.

Dal Lake is possibly best known for its iconic houses. In order to protect the sanctity of the lake and maintain the fragile ecological balance in the lake region the Maharajas of Kashmir, when it used to be a princely state were extremely strict and in a good way rigid about any construction around the lake. The British however came up with an ingenious solution to this. The

houseboats were introduced by the British. Made entirely out of wood, with intricate carvings and elaborate wooden panel ornamenting them the houseboats are prime tourist attraction today. The spacious and luxurious interiors coupled with exceptional services the houseboats are perfect getaways for the tourists from the hustling city life and offer a panoramic view of the picturesque lake. In addition to that the leisurely rides in the brightly coloured shikaras offer a closer tryst with the lake. The shikaras and the houseboats have turned into an integral part of the tourism attractions in Kashmir and have found repeated mentions in several popular Indian movies.

As the valley dons a cloak of white and grey during the bitterly cold months of winter the lake bears an entirely different look. The clear blue water of the lake freezes into sheets of ice. Winter on Dal Lake comes with its own set of attractions. Skiing on the frozen lake is a major attraction, although such activities are restricted on those parts of the lake where the ice sheet is thin and could be dangerous for any such activity. The entire landscape changes drastically and the lake stands out with its never ending stretch of ice amidst this frozen kingdom. Dal Lake with many facets stands out as the most prominent ambassador for tourism in the valley. Kashmir in its attempt to veil its bullet ridden alter ego couldn't have found a better crusader than this iconic lake. The pride of Kashmir, this ethereally beautiful

water body diligently plays its part to salvage the valley's pride and glory, but it cannot do so all by itself. The lake needs protection, it needs looking after. The ever growing dependencies on the waters of the lake from the local population and also the growing interest in the lake from tourists have taken its toll on the health of the lake. In a worrying development the lake has been gradually shrinking over the past few decades. Untreated and unchecked sewage which flows into the waters of Dal Lake has gradually raised the level of pollution in Dal Lake. This has adversely affected the eco-system of the lake which is evident from the depleting supplies of fish and the drop in the quality of the produces from the floating markets. It goes without saying such developments have affected the livelihoods of thousands of local Kashmiris who depend on the waters of the lake and the floating gardens for their livelihoods. The government and concerned authorities have introduced several measures in order to check the rising level of pollution in the Dal Lake and also to address the issue of the lake gradually shrinking. Huge amount of funds have been allocated to set up sewage treatment plants in the region and efforts have been made to conduct tourism in and around the lake in an ecologically sensitive manner. These are still early days and it will take some time before it can be safely said whether these measures are yielding any positive difference. However on a positive note it is heart-warming to see

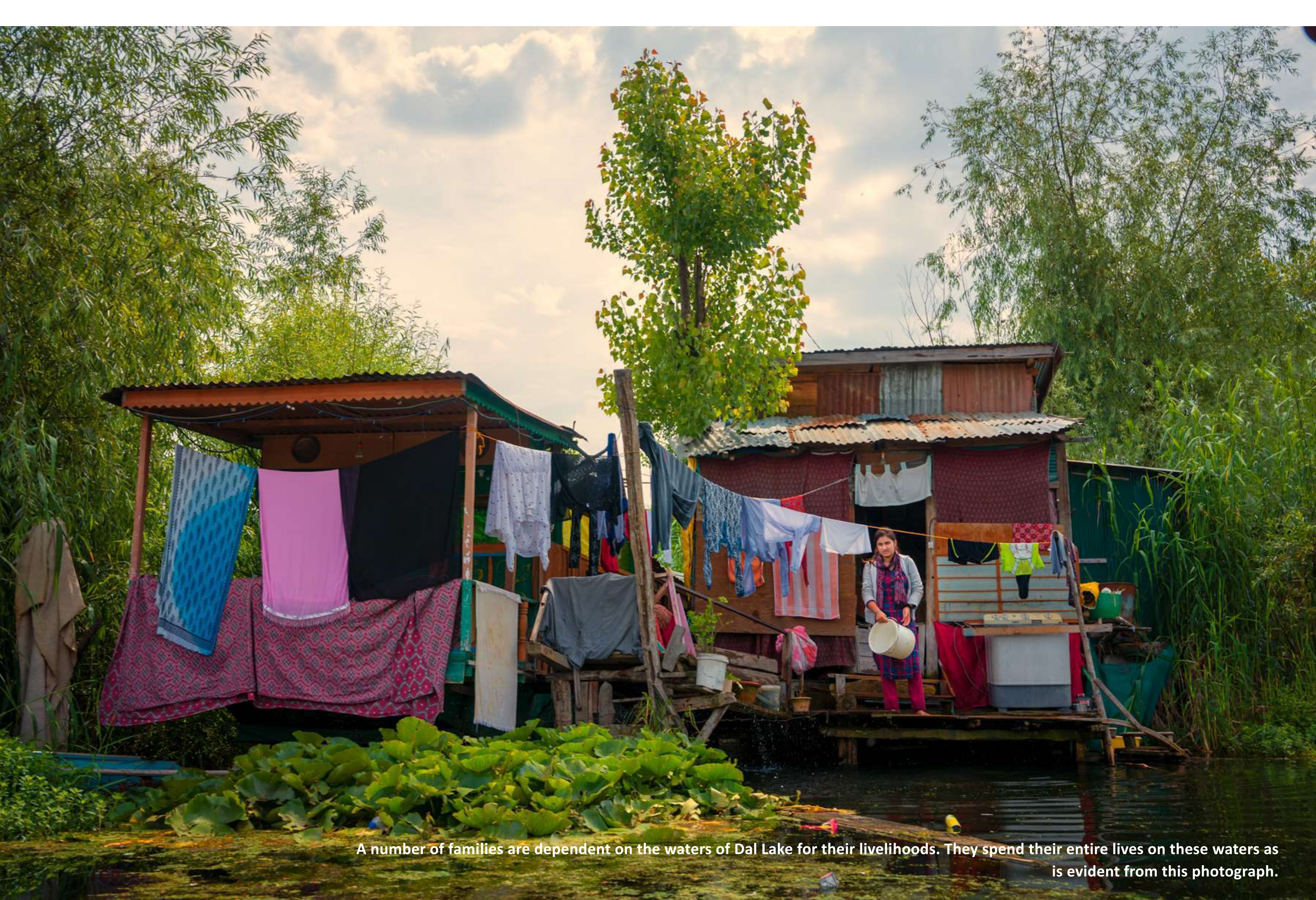


Small human settlements have sprung up along the peripheries of the lake which are characterised by marshes. These marshy lands paved the way for stilt houses which have come up in these regions and are home to scattered human settlements that are largely dependent on the waters of Dal Lake for a number of purposes including their livelihoods.

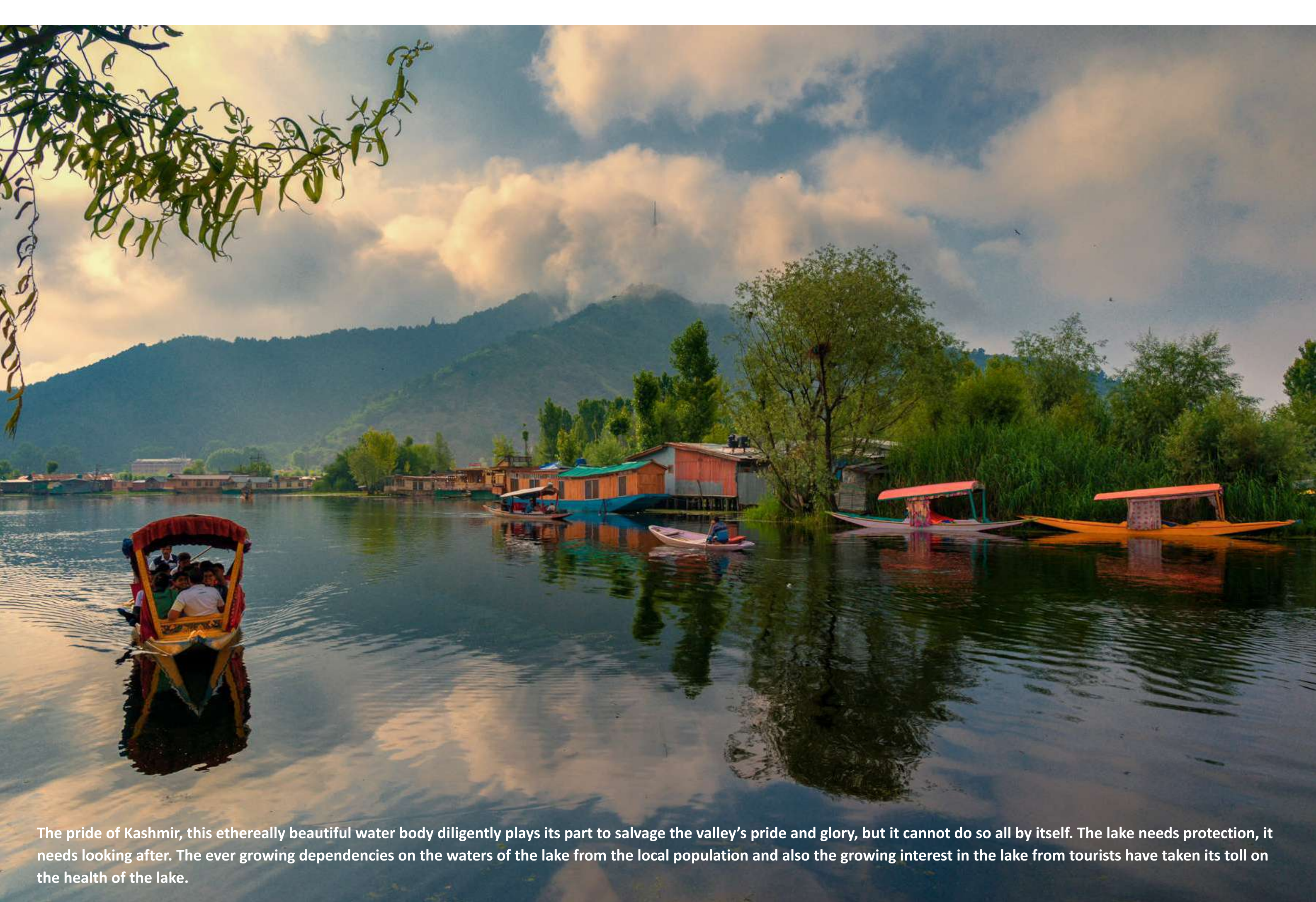
certain measures are being put into place to address these growing concerns. It will be hard to find anyone who doesn't hope the guns will fall silent in the Kashmir Valley one day, the air will smell of fresh blooms of apples, apricots, instead of looming heavy with the smell of gun powder. The lush green slopes of the

mountains will no longer be the fierce battlegrounds between the security personnel and the warring militant factions and the clear waters of Dal Lake along with the shikaras will play backdrop to brewing romance between young lovers, the iconic lake will be the cynosure of the valley and will once and for all establish

the whole Kashmir valley as the epicentre of romance and beauty.



A number of families are dependent on the waters of Dal Lake for their livelihoods. They spend their entire lives on these waters as is evident from this photograph.



The pride of Kashmir, this ethereally beautiful water body diligently plays its part to salvage the valley's pride and glory, but it cannot do so all by itself. The lake needs protection, it needs looking after. The ever growing dependencies on the waters of the lake from the local population and also the growing interest in the lake from tourists have taken its toll on the health of the lake.

Such scenes offer a refreshingly new advert for this region marred with violence and paints the valley in a light which rises above the bickering of human conflicts and the dreary ways of politics.



The Photographer Speaks

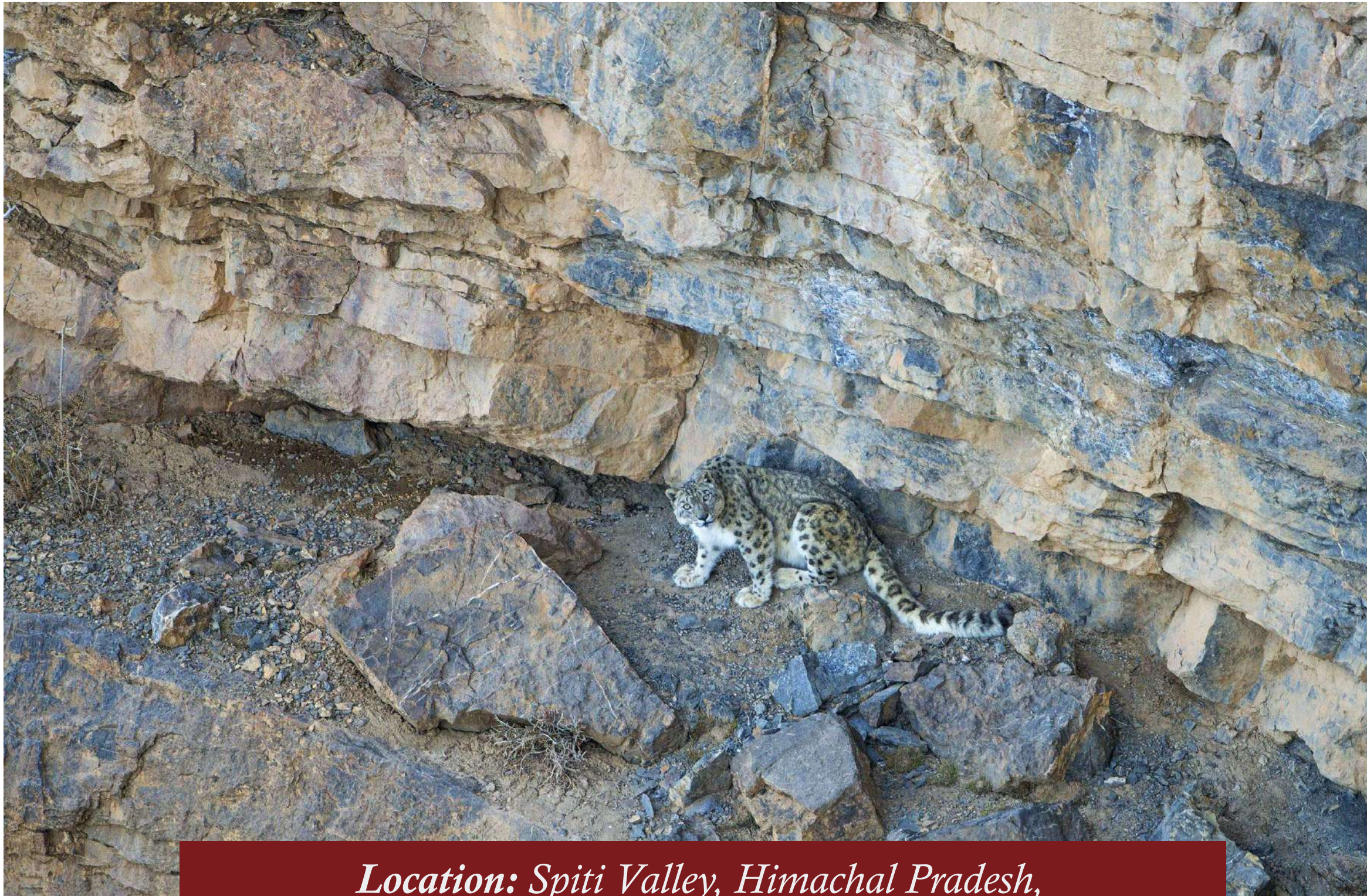
I embarked upon my journey of photography in the year 2012 when I first got my exposed to a DigiCam. From then onwards I never looked back at anything apart from photography and innovative techniques of imaging. My tryst with photography initiated

with landscape, macro and nature and following that I tried my hands on Product & Fashion which I have learnt in due course of time. Being in the wedding photography industry I am trying to innovate my frames and incorporate concepts of street and photojournalism with the nuances of

emotions and drama.

Today I am a full-fledged wedding photographer and run my own company which takes care of photographing any sort of events having options of both still and motion. To attain this, I need to travel across India where I can consummate my deep love for landscape and nature photography. I try to document my travel story through the blog and my website.

I have won several awards at the national level including Camarena Academy (twice), Camarena Academy (SHE Photographer of the Year), WPF (Star Photographer of the Year). My work has been nominated for WPOY (top 6 nominations, twice), Runner up at WPOY 2017. I have several publications in well renowned national magazines like Better Photography, Indian Photo Arts (an online prestigious magazine). My work got featured and published in National Geographic Your Shot (10 times), Retro Kolkata website. Also, National Geographic Instagram Handle has featured my work more than once. Recently Godox has recognized me as a Brand Influencer. I have been a part of an international photography event (35 awards, Moscow) where I was among top 250 photographers across the globe. One of my photographs was showcased by NIKON INDIA brochure for DSLR and Mirrorless segment.



*Location: Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh,
Duration: 1st to 12th February, 2020 inclusive of a wide range
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Photograph by Rajani Ramanathan

Editor's note: It is beautiful how the photographer came up with the idea of incorporating the old world charm of vintage cars in the frame. The abandoned vintage car against the beautiful night sky adds a nostalgic feeling to this ethereally beautiful frame.

Wheels that Connect

Featuring the 17 winning photographs from our previous online contest on the theme - “Wheels that Connect” held in the month of August for the members of the facebook group - “World Photographic Forum”

Hearliest congratulations to all the winners and a very big round of applause for each and everyone who took time out of their busy schedules to take part in this contest. The theme - “Wheels that Connect” was aimed at celebrating one of the greatest discoveries in the history of humankind - wheels. Along with fire, the discovery of wheels greatly altered the course of human civilization and catapulted it to dizzying heights almost overnight. It was a pleasure to scroll through the selected photographs

and witness some unique interpretations of this theme. While some chose to highlight the various modes of transport in our daily lives, others used the wheel as a connecting dot between the old world and the glitzy new age modern world. Some ingeniously used the theme to highlight various social issues, festivals and even the rigors of our daily lives, resulting in compelling frames. It truly was a humbling experience to go through the submissions and witness the works of such talented photographers.



Photograph by Abhinaba Maitra

Editor's note: A refreshingly different take on the topic. While it is natural for us to think of vehicles when it comes to wheels, this poignant frame of this elderly lady on her wheelchair taking part in the festivities in this rural Bengal setting gives the theme "wheels that connect" a whole new and deeper meaning. The beautiful composition further adds to the heart and soul of this image.



Photograph by Subhabrata Roy

Editor's note: The colourful chariot, the motion blur, the interesting juxtaposition of an ancient mode of transport on modern asphalt roads of cities, all combine seamlessly to make this frame a winner and does justice to the theme.



Photograph by Palash Ranjan Ghosh

Editor's note: Another masterpiece from the rural Bengal setting. Durga Puja - the biggest festival of the Bengali community often receives the last few lashes of the receding monsoon. This frame perfectly encapsulates the undying spirit of the festivities against all odds and how these rickety hand carts still play a big role in rural India, and there couldn't have been a better setting to highlight that.

Photograph by Arijit Mondal



Editor's note: The versatile nature of today's wheels, which know no limits and have conquered the toughest of terrains gets highlighted beautifully in this frame. What makes this frame visually appealing is the effective use of the winding roads to draw the eyes in while the brightly coloured trucks add a dash of colour.



Photograph by Soumya Shankar Ghosal

Editor's note: The incredibly innovative composition makes this frame worthy of a thousand praises. The unique vision to capture the reflection of a Durga idol against the glazing body of a parked car speaks volumes of the photographer's uncanny ability to create unique frames.



Photograph by Arindam Das

Editor's note: The rickety bus, the elderly man, the fading rays of a setting sun, all seem to be in perfect harmony in depicting a frame which speaks of fading times. Yet the presence of the young girl on the steps of the bus acts as the perfect foil to this sense of ageing, injecting the feel of a new beginning to this frame. Lovely use of light complemented by beautiful composition make this frame stand out.



Photograph by Manish Jaisi

Editor's note: Even in the 21st century urban India, these cycle rickshaws remain relevant and are effective modes of short distance transport. It was ingenious of the photographer to add life to this frame of abandoned rickshaws by including the goat which possibly was rummaging through the garbage.



Photograph by Bhaskar Kundu

Editor's note: An example of composition of the highest order! The painted figure on the wall, the bicycle, the colours, everything works for this frame and most importantly they are in sync with one another.



Photograph by Vishal Kumar Singh

Editor's note: Yet another photograph which invokes the old world charm. The monochromatic tones perfectly compliment the misty haze of winter. In the heart of the city this lone hand pulled rickshaw acts as that bridge between the city's ancient past and the glitzy present.



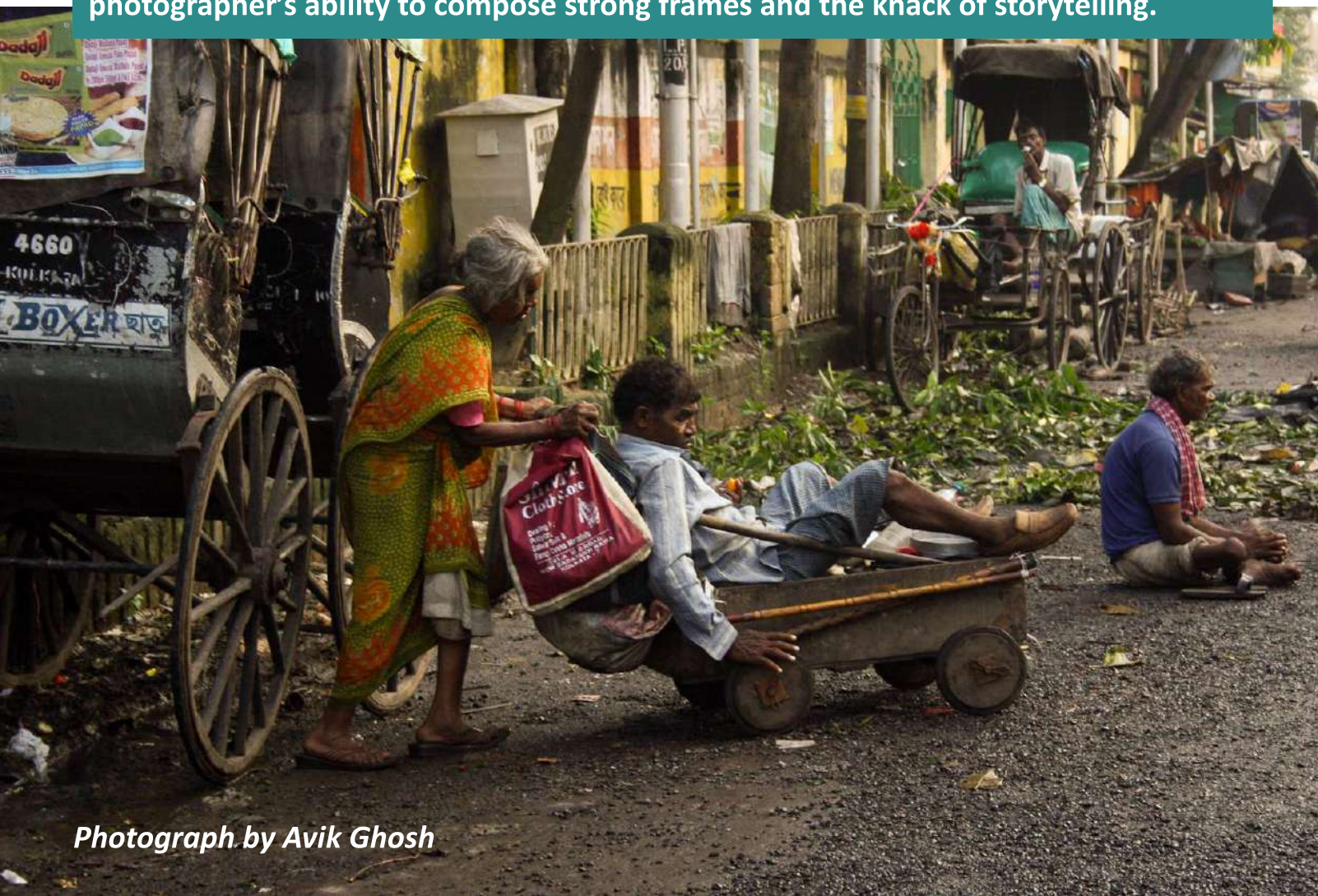
Photograph by Kazi Muhaiminul Islam Munaj

Editor's note: The magical co-existence of fast and sleek modern day cars and these age old cycle rickshaws is a common occurrence in the cities of the Indian sub-continent. This frame clearly depicts that and the rather quirky composition which includes the picture of the smiling elderly man adds a touch of brilliance to this image.

Photograph by Avik Ghosh



Editor's note: Both the photographs (above and below) by the same photographer are exceptionally strong narratives which craftily invoke the theme. The images reflect the photographer's ability to compose strong frames and the knack of storytelling.



Photograph by Avik Ghosh

Editor's note: After all Ferris wheel (albeit not upright here) too is one form of wheel which connects people through a common thread of joy and laughter. A rather unique approach and masterfully layered composition from the photographer.



Photograph by Meera Nerurkar



Photograph by Nilanjan Pathak

Editor's note: Another frame which is simplistic in its approach yet narrates a lot as it takes us back to almost the beginning of time when we discovered wheels. This frame invokes a sense of disbelief while depicting how certain things have stayed the same in spite of the giant strides the world around us has taken.

Photograph by Pritam Dutta



Editor's note: This photograph is all about the composition. The choice of the background, the perfect placement of the subject in accordance with the background and the accurate depiction of the theme make this photograph a worthy one.



Photograph by Md.Khairul Islam

Editor's note: This photograph bears testimony to the wonderful abilities of the photographer to identify a moment and frame it beautifully. The workers rolling the tyres placed against the parked truck immediately creates a synergy among all the elements in the frame, a hallmark of any beautiful composition.



Arijit Mondal



Bhaskar Kundu



Soumya Shankar Ghosal



Abhinaba Maitra



Arindam Das



Rajani Ramanathan



Palash Ranjan Ghosh



Md.Khairul Islam



Pritam Dutta



Avik Ghosh



Subhabrata Roy



Nilanjan Pathak



Kazi Muhaiminul
Islam Munaj



Manish Jaisi



Vishal Kumar Singh



Meera Nerurkar

The Honour Board

Our heartiest congratulations to everyone who got featured and a big thanks to everyone who participated in the contest. It was a pleasure going through all the submissions and an equally difficult task shortlisting the final images. Stay tuned for more contests and events in the future.

Join our facebook group - [Indian Photo ARTS](#) and stay tuned for any upcoming contest or event.

Send us your work at: submission.ipa@gmail.com

For your feedback or any question please write to us at: indianphotoarts@gmail.com

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It is estimated there are well over 100,000 brick manufacturing units spread across the country, most of which still use the traditional methods and are heavily reliant upon manual labour.

A high-contrast silhouette photograph showing two figures, likely workers, standing on opposite sides of a gap. They are reaching out to pass a brick over a horizontal wire. The background is a bright, hazy sky, possibly at dawn or dusk, with some smoke or dust visible. The overall mood is one of manual labor and hardship.

the Sufferings which shape our World

by Rahul Machigar

The story of bonded labours in India's brick kilns and their hardships. Thousands of young children, some as young as six years are entangled in this mesh of exploit, torture and deceit.

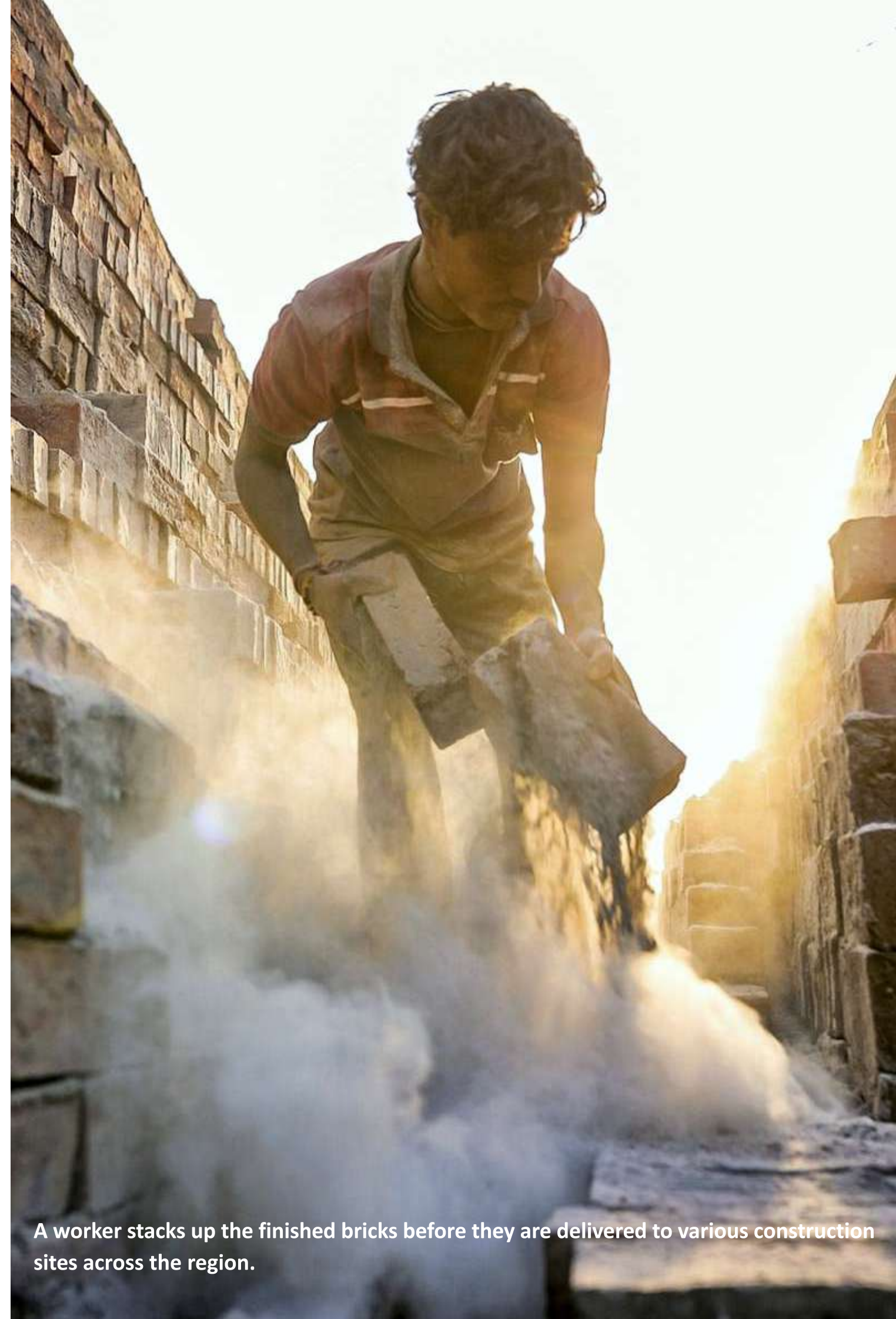


Young kids belonging to the families of the workers stay in makeshift shanties along with their parents and almost all of them work in the kilns for 8-9 hours on a daily basis and are denied of their basic rights such as education.

India at present is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The country is fast taking giant strides towards development in every sector, in every field. This becomes obvious from one look at the changing facades of India's cities and towns. The major cities and towns across the country are a far cry from what they used to be fifteen or twenty odd years ago. Ever widening road networks, upcoming metro railway systems, skyscrapers flaunting the most modern architecture, flourishing shopping malls, commercial complexes, the cities across India have metamorphosed into sophisticated beings quite in tandem with the ever growing reputation of India in the world map as the emerging powerhouse. Far removed from the glitz and glamour of the dazzling urban landscapes of the country there is a silent workforce, which while remaining in obscurity churns out the insane amount of raw materials, required for these giant scale infrastructural developments. A significant part of this workforce are the brick kiln workers across the country, who work tirelessly to meet the insatiable demand for brick, an integral and indispensable component for any infrastructural work. In fact the brick industry in India caters to the rising demands from a number of countries across the globe. It is one of the fastest growing industries in India in terms of export value. According to a recent report India exports more than 13 million dollars'

worth of bricks annually and presently sits next to China and Spain in terms of top exporters of bricks in the world.

The numerous brick kilns scattered across the outskirts of the cities and the rural parts of India largely remain a part of the unorganised sector. Some reports suggest the annual demand for clay bricks in India surged to a high of well over 200 billion units over the past few years. A vast majority of these supplies were provided by the brick kilns in the peripheries of our cities and in the rural parts of the country, which further highlights the predominantly unorganised nature of this industry. This surging demand for clay bricks and its ever increasing nature can be traced back to the initial phases of rapid urbanization and industrialization which the country stepped into at the turn of the 21st century. It is estimated there are well over 100,000 brick manufacturing units spread across the country, most of which still use the traditional methods and are heavily reliant upon manual labour. Clay forms the most important ingredient in manufacturing bricks. The labourers engage in excavating clay from dried up river or pond beds. This particular type of clay is ideally suited for brick manufacturing by virtue of their good plasticity, low burning temperature and the resolute nature to withstand different weather conditions. Once excavated the clay is left exposed to the elements of nature for a few months. This is done with the purpose of seasoning the clay to all weather conditions. Once



A worker stacks up the finished bricks before they are delivered to various construction sites across the region.



In the first phase of manufacturing clay bricks in this traditional method, clay is excavated from a nearby river or pond bed before it is processed manually.

seasoned the clay is mixed with water and sand before being moulded into the rectangular patterns. It is a common practice to mix different types of clay in order to achieve better durability. Sometimes waste materials which would facilitate the process of burning inside the kilns are also added. This is done with the view of saving fuel and quickening the

process of burning. These rectangular blocks of clay are left to dry before they are put inside the kilns for slow burning. Once the burnt blocks assume the familiar reddish tone and are tough and hard they are taken out of the kilns and dispatched to various construction sites or sold in the market. Across the globe, including India there are various methods which are

applied to achieve all the above purposes. These methods differ greatly from each other in terms of production, use of technology and the infrastructural set up. In some of the more developed countries in the world sophisticated and largely mechanized techniques are employed for the manufacture of brick units. However in a developing nation like India one of

the oldest and traditional methods of manufacturing bricks is still largely prevalent and contributes greatly towards the total output. The use of brick clamps still remains one of the most favoured mode of manufacturing bricks across India. In this traditional method the unbaked bricks perform the dual role of serving as a kiln. The unbaked bricks are staked one upon the other and within their hollow groove the fire is set up for the baking of the bricks. This method though traditional and now obsolete from many parts of the part still finds a lot of takers in the developing nations primarily due to its cheap operating costs although the energy consumption of this particular method remains on the higher side. The abundance of cheap labour across the country further facilitates this method since employing a large workforce which renders its supplies in return of meagre wages turns this method into a particularly profitable one. This unorganised sector which is responsible for employing millions and contributing quite significantly to the country's economy has now, for a long time been plagued by allegations, some of which reveal the sinister nature of this sector. Being part of the unorganised sector such traditional brick manufacturing units often remain beyond the purview of the concerned agencies which are responsible for implementing the necessary guidelines which would address the important issues of human rights pertaining to the workforce. In addition to that corruption

A brick kiln worker enjoys a rare moment of rest with his son. The workers are mostly bonded labours and toil in these fields with their entire families including the young kids.



The dug up clay from a nearby river or pond bed is thoroughly mixed with water and other substances which would facilitate its burning and is left to dry.



often plays a key role in turning the overseeing agencies into mere puppets or casual bystanders as the human rights of this massive workforce get trampled upon on an everyday basis. Activists have long raised serious issues of human rights violation in these set ups which even touch upon incredibly sensitive issues such as modern day slavery and child labour. A large proportion of this workforce comprises of migrant labourers more so in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The other noticeable pattern in the workforce is the higher participation of women workers. An economic analysis of this workforce suggests these workers belong to the economically weaker and vulnerable strata of the society and a vast majority of them belong to the lowest strata of the society with little or no asset and incredibly limited avenues for employment. This in a sense paves the pathway for their exploitation in these manufacturing units, where in spite of the hardships and the exploitations they are left with little or no choice to move out. A further study of the brick kiln workers suggests most of them hail from the marginalised sections of the society – the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes, the Dalits who are often subjected to discrimination and torture and remain largely oblivious to the giant strides the world around them is taking as they still wage a daily battle against poverty and other forms of exploitation. In a scenario like this the workers even when faced with

various forms of atrocities and human rights violations remain largely stripped off any other option but silently endure these hardships and cruelties as they toil under inhuman conditions for months. The exploitation begins with the meagre wage which they are paid and often wages are paid on an irregular basis. Often the workers are paid in accordance with the number of units they are able to manufacture on a daily basis. They are provided a bare minimum allowance at certain intervals to procure essential supplies which almost never is in accordance with the rising prices of basic goods and inflation in the market. In addition to these, often wages are deducted on the flimsiest of pretexts or the workers are paid lower wages by the owners of these manufacturing units in order to increase their profit margin. This power imbalance and the skewed employee-employer relationship find its roots in the procedure in which the workers are recruited. The poorest segment of the society is soft targets for the kiln owners. The kiln owners offer these debt ridden individuals momentary relief by loaning them a certain sum of money in exchange of heavy interest rates which from the onset are beyond the capabilities of these individuals to pay back. Unable to pay the interest rates these individuals are left with no other choice but work for these owners for meagre wages. Already burdened with the weight of repaying the loans the workers are in no position to negotiate the

The clay brick moulds are left to dry in the sun for seasoning for a few days before they are burnt inside the kilns at an optimum temperature.





These brick kilns spread across India largely belong to the unorganised sector and mostly employ migrant workers.

terms and conditions of their employments. In addition to the meagre wages, the appalling conditions in which the workers live and work are shocking to say the least. In tiny makeshift shanties the workers are forced to live by dozens, these rickety establishments often lack the basic facilities such as electricity or even running

water. The kilns are often located in the outskirts of the cities or in rural areas, which still remain largely beyond the grasp of the developing infrastructure that the rest of the country experiences at its doorstep. This in turn means even for the basic supplies the workers often have to travel at length in order to procure them.

Even the threadbare facilities which are available to them are filthy, often violating the basic health norms. The owners in order to maximize their profits provide the workers with food which in most cases can be best described as non-palatable and unhygienic. Frequent outbursts of diseases are a common occurrence in such an

unhealthy and unhygienic environment. However none of this compares to the biggest horror which lies in the darkest underbelly of these brick kilns. The sheer number of children, most of whom are aged below 10, who toil hard in these appalling set ups, can be heart wrenching. These young children are denied a normal childhood, their right to education and grow up in an environment which is far from conducive for a young mind. In these kilns workers are hired as family units, although on most occasions it is only the elderly male in the family who gets paid. The women and the children in the family toil relentlessly along with the males as support workers. It is common for young children to work alongside the adults for almost 9-10 hours on a daily basis. The families, especially the parents too are left with little choice. They are almost compelled to let their children work alongside them in order to meet the daily demand of the kiln owners in terms of the number of bricks manufactured by each family. In case they fail to meet the demand their payments are either withheld or a portion of their wages is deducted. Each year thousands of young children get entangled in this vicious web as they are trafficked along with their families into unregulated brick kilns which have mushroomed all over the country, courtesy the booming construction industry in the country. These brick kilns though unregulated as a result of which often the labour laws and other relevant guidelines



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fail to penetrate their dusty realms, serve the purpose of supporting the ever growing construction industry. Hence it would be safe to assume the officials too at times turn a blind eye towards the plight of the migrant labourers and the children who are entangled in this mesh of modern day slavery. The numbers reveal a shocking and saddening truth. A staggering 80% of children working at these kilns are aged between 5-14 years. A miniscule proportion of them are paid any wages while almost 70% of them toil as support workers which means they are not paid any wage and are not entitled to any other benefits. Given the large number of brick kilns which have mushroomed across the country, despite the government's best efforts, barely 20% workers have access to basic education facilities for children under the age of 12. A vast section of these young children have no access to education and other basic services which a young child while growing up is entitled to. This further paves the pathway for this cycle to continue for decades to come. This is a gross violation of the Child Labour Act which prohibits any children under the age of 14 from working in any occupation other than assisting their families outside their educational curriculum. The kiln owners make good use of this clause and project most of these kids are merely "assisting" their families whereas the truth remains they are made to toil for 9-10 hours daily and more than 80% of them have no access to education. This again



A staggering 80% of children working at these kilns are aged between 5-14 years. A miniscule proportion of them are paid any wages while almost 70% of them toil as support workers which means they are not paid any wage and are not entitled to any other benefits. Given the large number of brick kilns which have mushroomed across the country, despite the government's best efforts, barely 20% workers have access to basic education facilities for children under the age of 12.

is in gross violation to the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act which was implemented in 2009. According to this act the government must ensure all children between the ages of 6-14 have access to free education. Although many such rules and regulations are violated in these kilns, the government certainly lacks the infrastructure or the machinery to impose these regulations in a strict manner, if not the will.

Findings by various human rights activists and organisations and concerned governmental agencies have proposed a

number of steps which should be implemented with immediate effect in order to curb these menaces which are plaguing the lives of millions of people including young children. The foremost suggestion insists there should be changes made in the labour laws and labour codes, starting with regular payment of wages at the end of each month instead of providing any advance. In addition to these proposals such as payment of wages directly to bank accounts in order to bring about transparency, maintaining the records of all the employees so that the concerned

agencies can intervene if and when the labour or child laws are violated, setting up of worker's union to address the grievances of the workers on a timely basis have also been suggested. However as is the case with many other schemes, the biggest hurdle lies in the proper implementation of these schemes and regulations. In addition to the lack of manpower and overseeing agencies, corruption too proves to be a big hindrance when it comes to implementing these guidelines. Subsequently it becomes the responsibility of the government to provide

the workers particularly the migrant workers with the proper and relevant documents so that they are eligible for the various welfare schemes run by the government. Access to these welfare schemes will certainly bring about tangible changes in the lives of these people, particularly the young children. For far too long these hardworking people have been subjected to cruelty, exploitation and discrimination by the society, we have wronged them collectively time and again. Today it becomes the responsibility of all of us, not only the government to remedy



According to a recent report India exports more than 13 million dollars' worth of bricks annually and presently sits next to China and Spain in terms of top exporters of bricks in the world.

all that. We cannot be casual bystanders and expect the government and other agencies to step in and eradicate these evils overnight. The civil society too needs to raise its voice and create awareness, if required confront the kiln or brick factory owners legally regarding such exploitations. The hands which shape our

cosy homes, our swanky offices, shopping malls, the glitzy commercial complexes in our metropolitan cities are the hands which have to forage for the bare minimum and toil relentlessly to make ends meet. We can no longer afford to sit comfortably in our homes the very foundations of which are being crafted by these hardworking

hands across the country without caring for them, the time is ripe for all of us to take a pledge and come together to address these evils which are affecting the lives of millions of hardworking human beings across the country as well as the world.



About the Photographer

Rahul Machigar hails from a small village near Sion, Mumbai. A passionate photographer he is primarily interested in street and travel photography and has already travelled to various locations across the country in search of stories which are worth telling. His passion for street photography prompted him to explore the dusty grounds of the brick kilns spread across rural India. The plight of these hardworking yet unfortunate people comes to life through his photographs and he hopes he will be able to address many such social issues through his story telling in the days to come.



Participants along with Fuji mentors and photographers at the Fuji X Talk workshop held at The Lalit Great Eastern.

The Lalit Great Eastern witnessed the gathering of some of the finest photographers in the city of Kolkata accompanied by more than a hundred eager participants who turned up to attend the workshop - Fuji X Talk organized by Fujifilm India. It was the perfect opportunity for the participants to interact with Fuji mentors and photographers and develop a better understanding of the nuances of photography.



Fuji X Talk
Organized
by
Fujifilm India



(above and right) Fuji X mentor Mr. Raj Sarkar shared his street photography experiences with some of the participants.

Recently Fujifilm India had organized a one day workshop on photography at Lalit Great Eastern, Kolkata, on 31st August 2019(Saturday). Nearly 250 participants registered for the workshops although since seats were limited, only 100 participants got the chance to attend the workshop. There were two sessions, in the first session Fuji X mentor Mr. Raj Sarkar shared his street photography experiences with some of the participants. It was a wonderful interactive session as the participants were very eager to learn the concepts of street photography as a whole. In the second session Fuji X

Photographer Mr. Debarshi Duttagupta shared his experiences about landscape photography, especially about cloudscapes which was followed by lunch. The entire event was free of any cost for all the participants. Fuji India has become one of the giants in the mirrorless camera industry. With innovation, production and sales Fuji is also concentrating on promoting photography throughout India, specially the young photographers of the country by organizing workshops, X-talk, etc. Participants also got the chance to use the various advanced mirrorless camera models available during the workshop.



Fuji X Photographer Mr. Debarshi Duttagupta shared his experiences about landscape photography, especially about cloudscapes.



Mr. Anindo Basu, Fujifilm X Evangelist spoke about his experience of using the new mirrorless and medium format cameras while Fuji X photographer Bikas Das also shared his views and inputs with the participants.

Mr. Anindo Basu, Fujifilm X Evangelist shared his experiences about the new mirrorless system and the medium format cameras.

The Entire Fuji X Team of Eastern Zone, Rakesh Soni, Goutam Basak among others were present under the leadership of the all India product head - Mr. Ashwini Joshi.

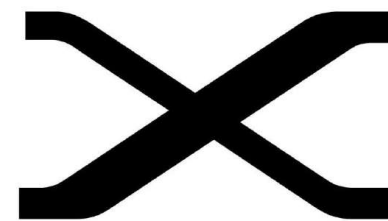


Fuji is fast establishing itself as the leading camera brand across India and their rising popularity can be attributed to such events which are held on a regular basis by team Fuji. Such workshops and other photography related events are crucial in reaching out to young and upcoming photographers which also speak volumes of the customer base. Such events also provide the organizers with the perfect opportunity to introduce and even launch some of their newest products.

FUJIFILM

The event was organized by Fujifilm India.

Location courtesy: The Lalit Great Eastern

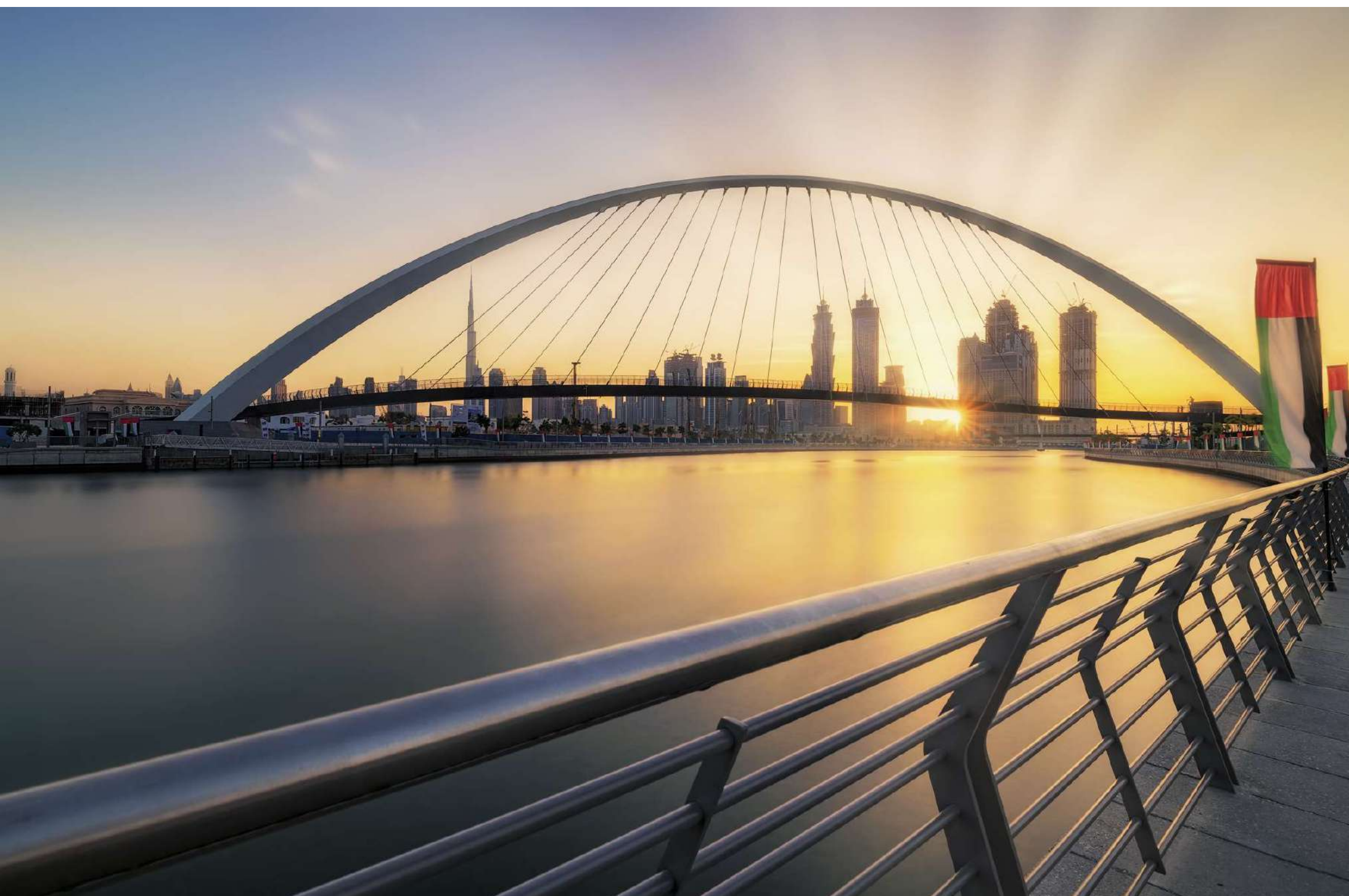


In Conversation with Sanak Roy Choudhury



One of the finest landscape photographers around - [Sanak Roy Choudhury](#) speaks exclusively to us on a wide range of topics - how he prepares for an upcoming shoot, why he is partial towards the colour Blue, some of his favourite destinations and many more in this exclusive interview.





Please tell our readers when and how did your journey with the camera begin?

Well I did travel a lot during my childhood days across the length and breadth of the country as my father was employed in the Indian railways. However photography was never a concern as I was more into enjoying the place and again in those days we had a small yashica camera and we used to take few family pictures during our travels. Photography addiction actually happened by chance when I was inquisitive enough to hold a “big camera” from the photographer who covered the first rice ceremony of my son in 2011. I loved the feeling of holding it and thought of buying one! Late in 2012 I gifted myself a Nikon D7000 and kept it unused in the cupboard for months until the arrival of Muscat festival in jan2013 which saw me winning the Grand Award organised by Times Of Oman in my very first venture! Interest and curiosity started to flow thick and fast since then influenced by social media and several other awards and today I love to class myself as an amateur PASSIONATE photographer.



What according to you is the fundamental difference between landscape and urban landscape photography?

Landscape photography is described as capturing the places within the world, sometimes vast and unending, but at other times microscopic. Landscape photographs typically capture the presence of nature but can also focus on man-made features or disturbances of landscapes. The word “urban” refers to a city or a town. When we combine them, urban landscape, we are referring to images that capture scenes within a city or town that can be vast (think cityscape or shot of the city from above) or they can be more “microscopic” in nature.

Urban landscape photography can be done from within a city or town, above it, or from the outside looking in. Urban landscape photography is one of the best ways to document our experiences when visiting new places through our viewfinder. The array of so many colors, symbols, architecture etc makes our senses overwhelmed with joy and there are chances of one missing out on a lot if not captured properly to enjoy the scene later.







“The array of so many colors, symbols, architecture etc makes our senses overwhelmed with joy and there are chances of one missing out on a lot if not captured properly to enjoy the scene later.”

optimal dynamic range captured in the same place and time. Whereas “CREATIVE COMPOSITES” is a phenomenon which has more to do with creative thinking where two different pictures taken in different location and time are merged for the desired outcome. I categorise myself in the first category! Yes I take different exposures when I am shooting and later blend them to make my viewer see what I saw while shooting. Why I need to do that? No camera till date can match the dynamic range (optimal balance between highlights & shadows) of the human eye and hence the need arises to blend exposures! My final image depends on several factors highlights intensity, shadow intensity, content, and last but not the least the ambient light. Once I reach my desired vantage point I do analyse the conditions before setting myself up for the shoot.

A lot of your work is made up of composite images. Do you previously envision the final scene and shoot accordingly or produce the final frame based on what you have shot?

Well interesting question! Unfortunately there is a huge misconception about the

very idea about the term “COMPOSITE IMAGES”. I’ll try my level best to explain the ACTUAL idea behind composite images and to clear prevailing unnecessary doubts and misconceptions about the idea. Now when one talks about composite images let’s have a look into the definition

of the same.

A composite Image is a picture that is made from the combination of multiple images merged into a single surface. Composite can again be subcategorised into 2 parts, one where blending of different exposures are done to gain the

Would you kindly tell our readers in what are those basic post processing techniques which you apply to your RAW files?

ADOBE CAMERA RAW(ACR), LIGHTROOM and PHOTOSHOP CC.

Typically how long do you spend in finding a suitable vantage point or a scouting for the right location and how important is that in this particular genre of photography?

The most important part of a successful landscape/urban landscape photo lies in the capability of the photographer to conduct a successful research as a prelude to the actual show. When I travel I am into extensive reading through various portals available and I try to connect with the local photographers of the region. Nothing is as valuable as another photographer who has been there. I like to use social media to meet people, or through websites where there's a forum to connect and ask

questions. My homework starts at least before 3 months of my travel and gets intensified as the date approaches. When I am into shooting in a place where I am staying I do shortlist some vantage points and then wait for the suitable conditions to execute my plans.

Is there any one particular location which you can never get tired of shooting?

I am conducting a workshop this year in Dolomites (Italy) and certainly that place

is one of the most desirable places for me to shoot. However if given a chance I would like to shoot in Amsterdam, Prague, Ladakh, Patagonia ,Greenland, Iceland , Lofoten time and again.

Tell us a little bit about the equipment you use ?

I prefer a camera possessing the highest dynamic range and a wide angle lens. I use a Nikon D850, D4, Tamron 15-30 f2.8, Nikor 24-70 f2.8, Nikor 70-200 f2.8.



“I feel that I’m inherently tuned into the melody of the natural world when I am shooting landscapes...Seeing is not enough, one needs to feel the picture before pressing the shutter.”

Is there any particular photographer belonging to this genre who has inspired you with his/her works?

There are plenty but I religiously follow the works of the legendary landscaper Ansel Adams, Michael Kenna, Nadav Kander, Sebastio Salgado. Landscape photography has evolved immensely along with digitalization of the technology and there are some very noteworthy names like Marc Adamus, Max Rive, Daniel Cheong, Daniel Kordan, Ted Gore who inspire me time and again to enhance my skills.

In days to come, according to you how significant a role technology is going to play in this genre of photography?

Certainly huge! Advent of high end pixel packed cameras with stunning dynamic range has created a huge paradigm shift in this genre of the photography world. One may recover shadows up to 6 stops without the fear of getting noise which was a dream in yesteryears. There are



scenarios when setting up a tripod is not possible and still one can come up with the desired outcome because of the extremely capable ISO performance. Overall the battle between industry giants is actually making our life easier!

When it comes to shooting urban landscape, we see a lot of photographers

preferring to shoot at night. Do you have any such preference?

As I mentioned earlier that I take deep interest in shooting Landscapes, Urban Landscapes and Architecture, I firmly believe to continue learning everyday from the stalwarts of this genre. My initial reads about the great Ansel Adams gave me a strong reason to thrive upon one of his

sayings.

“Photography, as a powerful medium of expression and communications, offers an infinite variety of perception, interpretation and execution.”

I feel that I’m inherently tuned into the melody of the natural world when I am shooting landscapes. A gamut of natural emotions flows deep into my mind and I

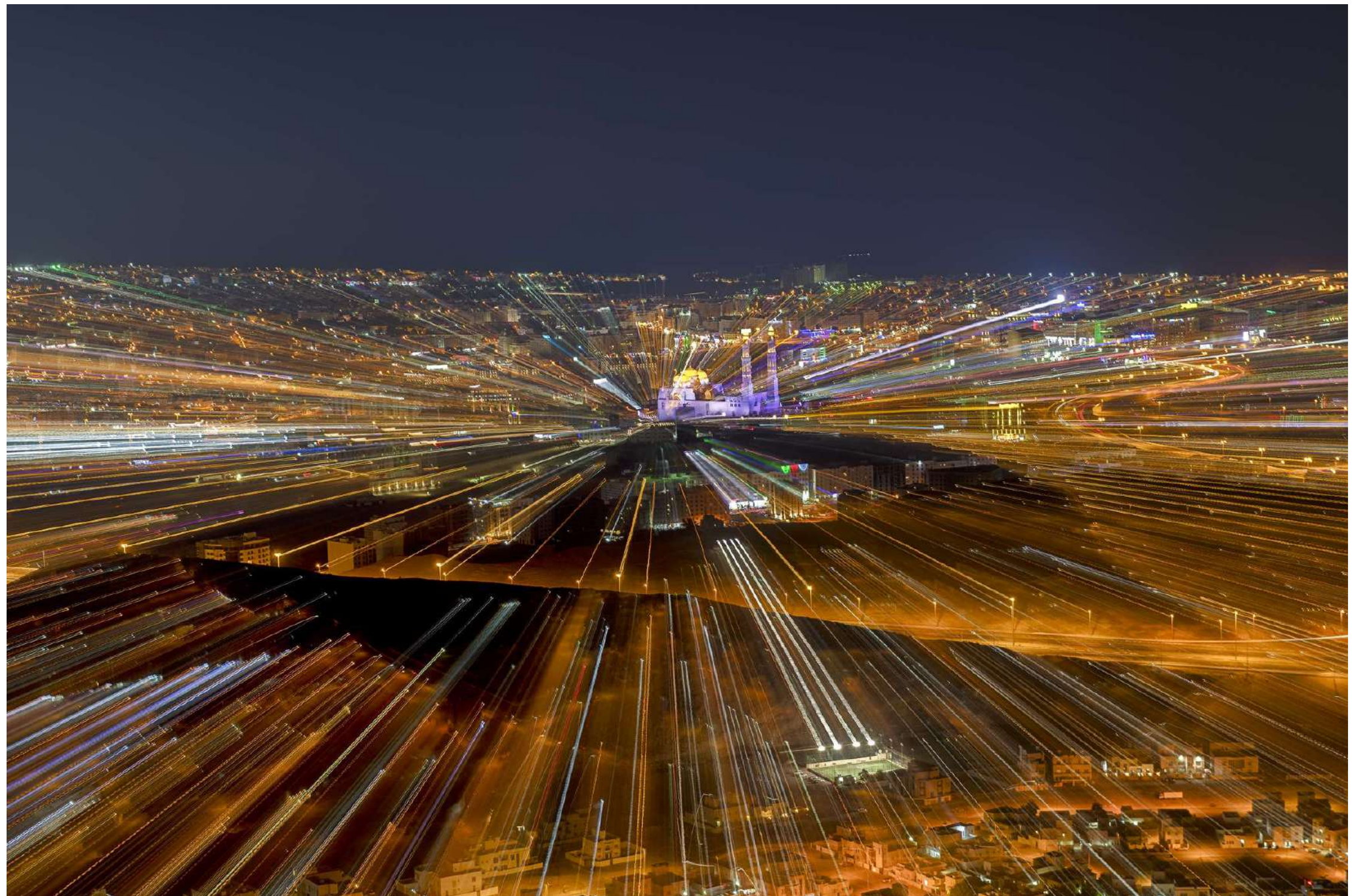
always try to connect with the circumstances. Seeing is not enough, one needs to feel the picture before pressing the shutter. Feeling prioritises everything when I'm into shooting landscapes, urban landscapes. Communicate with nature and express it with your viewfinder to create your own perception and interpretation of the same.

For Urban Landscapes and Architecture I love to shoot during the blue hour.

Why I choose Blue Hour for Urban Landscapes?

Colours have specific emotions & can really help in storytelling. Photographs will radically increase in visual value by adding certain colours to provide certain emotions.

Blue is very interesting because blue can give a sense of alienation, of emotional coldness, of loneliness. Even a frenetic energy that makes people felt anxious, and if we use that for specific images we will get a certain result of that cool cold aspect. However BLUE is also really interesting because it also has an effect of EMBRACE, of really crisp & cleanness. BLUE & YELLOW share a really interesting relationship. They are at the opposite end on the colour wheel. Which means when we add blue & yellow to the same picture such as typical urban landscapes we are almost always going to get a guaranteed winner provided you know how to correctly blend exposures and understand tonal relationships of the colour.



While selecting a particular location do you purely go by instinct or is it something which you have nurtured over the years through hours of hard work and experience?

A mixture of both. There are times when I fail but again failures are the pillars of success! However after a bit of experience I do manage to foresee my frame much

earlier before pressing the shutter and definitely there is no shortcut and I am mastering the art with hard work coupled with dedication, and passion.

Lastly for anyone starting out in this genre of photography what would be your advice to them?

We all are trying to get that “GOOD

PHOTOGRAPH”. To be deliberate and purposeful is the key to evolve successful photographs. Evaluation with consciousness of each and every element in the scene is essential. Every hour of the light and dark is a miracle in nature and every micron space is filled with information, be inspired from the stalwarts while staying original.



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Photograph by Shrideep Nanal

A stunning frame involving rich colours which have been used expertly by the photographer, this image stands out by dint of its colour palette.

The brilliant contrast, the action filled moment and the details in the form of the flying egret make this image a worthy one. Often simple set ups such as this one carry with it the potential for such compelling frames during the golden hour.



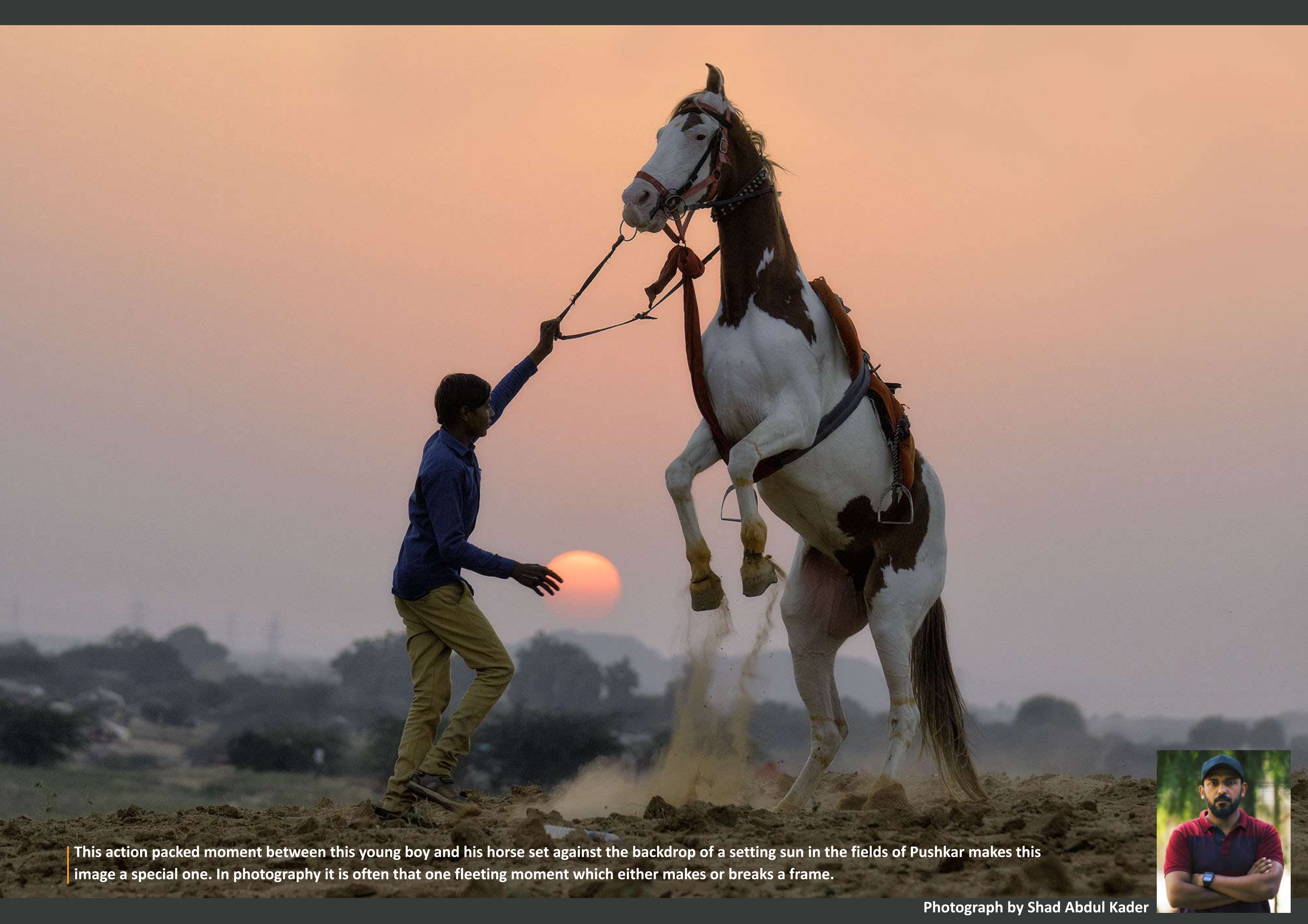
Photograph by Naveen Joyous

This frame is all about the perfect moment and the soothing colours of monsoon, the rather uncluttered horizon in the background also works perfectly for this frame.



Photograph by Tejaswa Trivedi

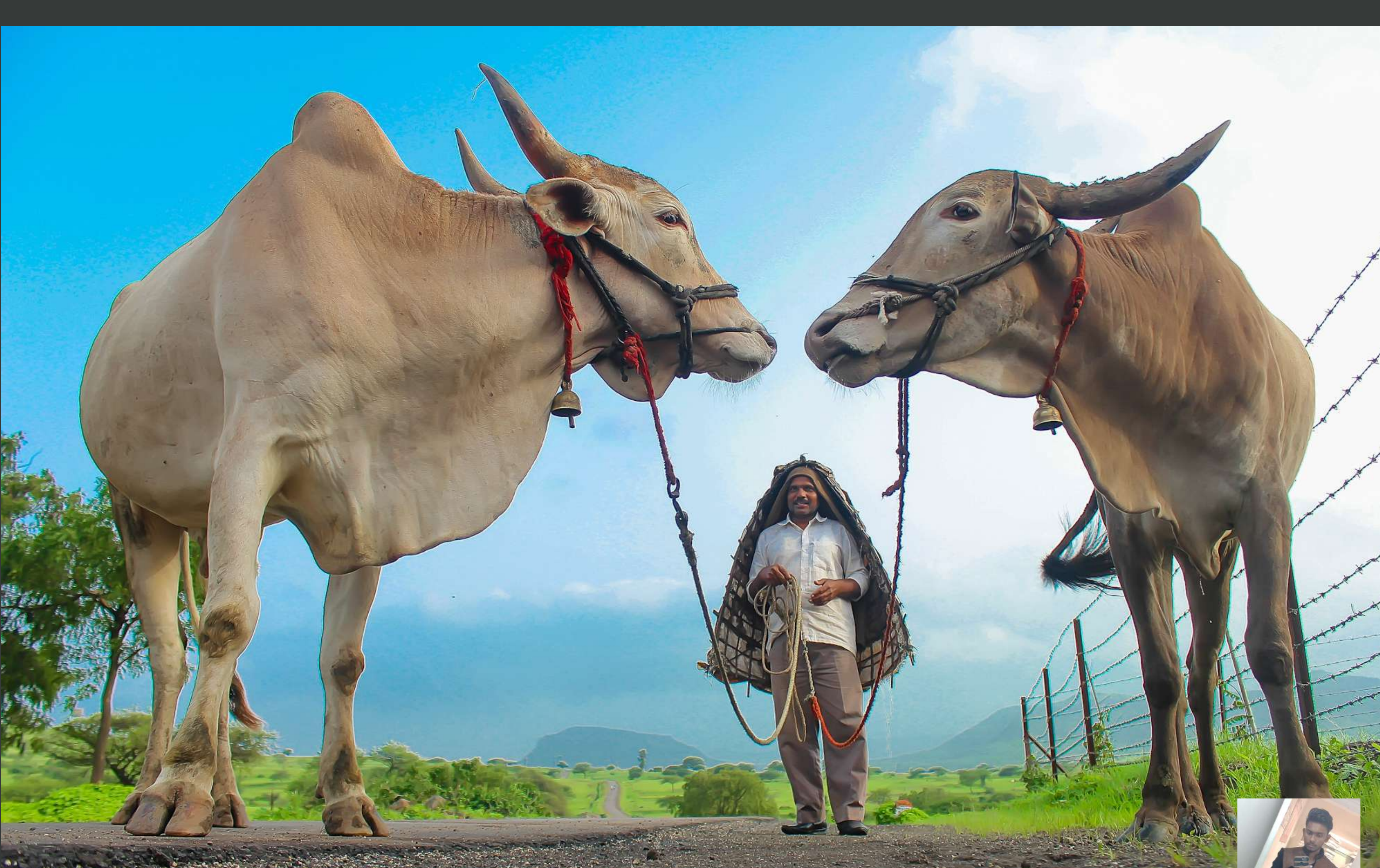




This action packed moment between this young boy and his horse set against the backdrop of a setting sun in the fields of Pushkar makes this image a special one. In photography it is often that one fleeting moment which either makes or breaks a frame.

Photograph by Shad Abdul Kader





This image stands out for its wonderful composition, the near symmetrical positioning of the bulls in the foreground of the frame, the leashes tied to them leading up to the man in the middle ground and the pitched road leading one's eyes to the scenic horizon in the background - all of it combined works brilliantly for this frame.



Photograph by Prathamesh Shewale