

PHOTO ARTS

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Special Issue

First peek into world renowned journalist and photographer **Kounteya Sinha's** much awaited "Project Bismillah"

Get your hands on **Deboshree Ganguly's** iconic 2019-2020 calendar - it will make you leave everything and follow Ganguly's salient call to action - "Head to Kashmir and Ladakh now".



A special issue on renowned journalist and photographer KOUNTEYA SINHA's project BISMILLAH - a 2020 calendar comprising of photographs from Kashmir and Ladakh, an ode to the unearthly beauty of this region.



Dear Readers

In this very special issue we bring to you glimpses from “Project Bismillah” - a heartfelt narrative of Kashmir and Ladakh through the photographs of world renowned journalist and photographer Kounteya Sinha in collaboration with travel aficionado Deboshree Ganguly who commissioned this project for her upcoming 2019-2020 calendar.

Regards

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Indian Photo Arts Special Issue | 01

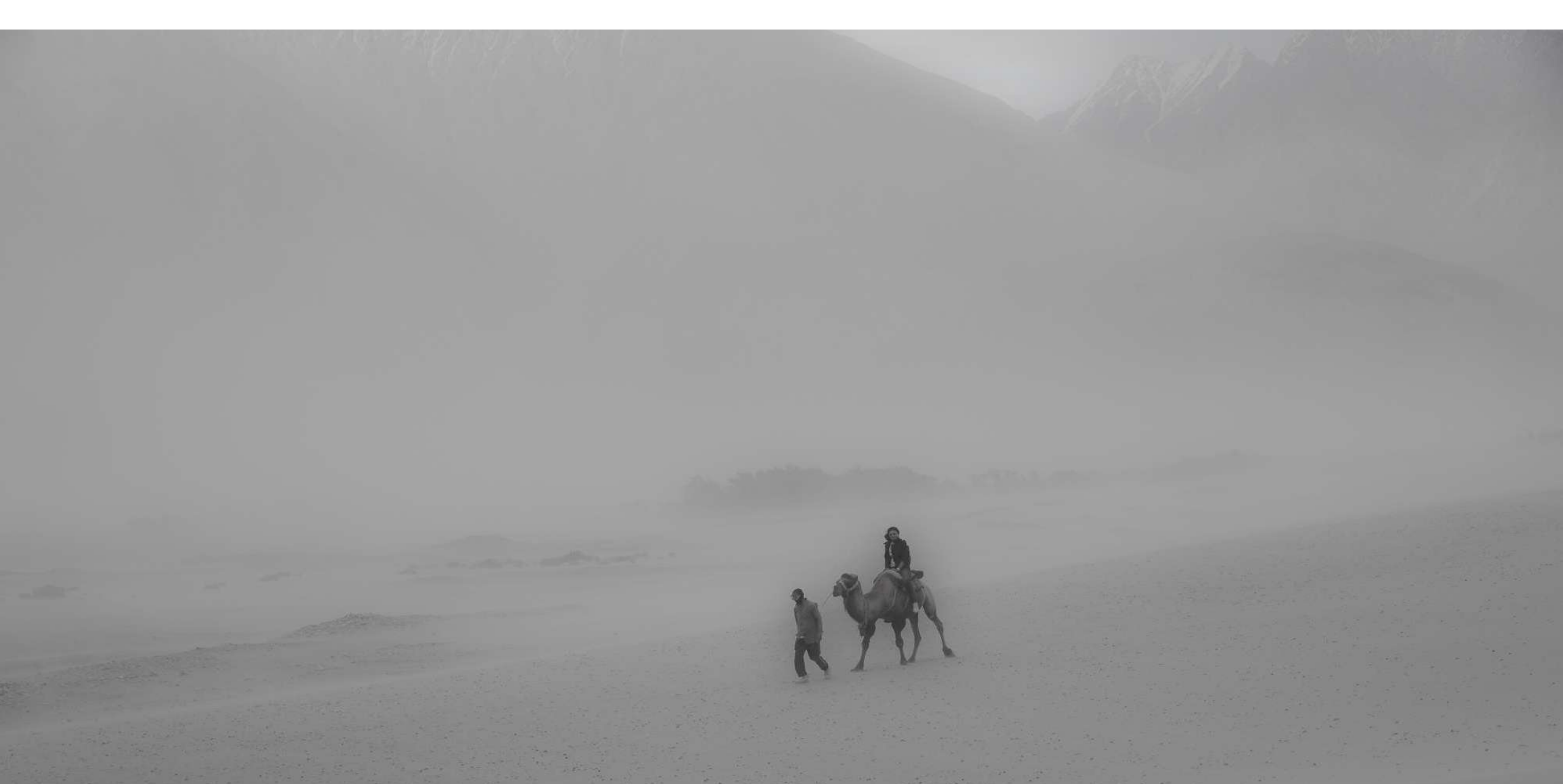
Bismillah - photographs that will make you leave everything and head to Kashmir and Ladakh

A sensational new repertoire of photographs - to be launched in the form of a calendar later this - taken just weeks before Kashmir went into lockdown, is all set to remind the world of the region's unparalleled beauty besides asking people to return to this paradise in order to drag it out of "economic and cultural isolation". Called Bismillah - that literally translates into "In God's name I begin" the collection of 16 photographs, clicked by India's most revered and internationally renowned journalist and photographer Kounteya Sinha is majestic, heart-warming piece of world that is bound to leave you awe struck.

Commissioned by travel aficionado Deboshree Ganguly to coincide with the launch of her brand new travel company Onboard Flight D117 (OBF D117), the calendar will clearly adorn some of India's highest offices - considering Sinha's enviable fan following that runs as deep as the prime minister's office to the world's most high powered names from the world of business, arts, culture and diplomacy.

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Project Bismillah - world renowned journalist and photographer **Kounteya Sinha's** collection of sensational and hauntingly beautiful photographs from Kashmir and Ladakh weeks before the ongoing lockdown will grace the pages of travel aficionado **Deboshree Ganguly's** 2019-2020 calendar in a noble attempt which aims at elevating the bullet ridden valley above the imposed isolation by sounding the clarion call - embrace the valley, her people, her apple orchards, embrace Kashmir, for there would be no bigger sin than to forget this paradise and her denizens.



Sinha's work has earlier been praised by prime minister Narendra Modi himself on national television that received 450 million views.

Ganguly's move to launch the calendar shows her deft touch with both business and travel.

Only in her early 30's, Ganguly's argument has a tremendous maturity – asking

civilians to take the plunge, rather than wait for governments to put order in place. It comes at a time when the world is uncertain of Kashmir's future, with India deeply divided debating what could be Kashmir's and Ladakh's fate post the government's decision to revoke Article 370, a constitutional provision that granted them special status.

Ganguly in a single master move has put the onus on the people of India to better Kashmir's economic and cultural fate. Instead of avoiding a place of conflict, Ganguly has asked India and the world to start visiting the region that is often called "Paradise on Earth".

Interestingly, this calendar also dates from October 2019 and not January 2020 like

traditional calendars do. It's because Ganguly wants people to plan their travel from the next month itself.

Ideas have changed the world and this one is a clear master stroke by Ganguly.

So what made Ganguly to decide on Kashmir and Ladakh for her calendar rather than pristine photographs of Europe or the Middle East for example?



She said “I had the great fortune of travelling through Kashmir with Kounteya. He was running a photography residency for some young photographers, teaching

them not just how to photograph a place but how to also understand its nuances. I was mesmerized with what I saw”. “Thanks to the residency, I got access to

places that are off the map, got access to families in Kashmir and Ladakh, understood the deep philosophy and warmth with which they lead their lives,

how happy they are with so little, how content they are – irrespective of their surroundings which is all about violence. It’s not just a beautiful place but is also a



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land of beautiful people. It would be so unfair if they suffer because we decided against travelling there, believing all the lies that emanates from there due to the politics,” Ganguly says.

She added “Both Kashmir and Ladakh run on tourism. If tourists stop going, we have already decided their fate. Their kitchens won’t run, their children will starve. Visiting Kashmir and Ladakh, fearlessly,

will not only bring normalcy to that place and a life back in their homes but will also help the government restore the region to its earlier beauty. It is our responsibility to look after them. Like Kounteya says -



Empty streets create empty pockets. This in turn results in empty lives. If their business begins to run, houseboats are full, hotels are booked, their children are back in school, shops start to reopen, we have done our bit to re-energise a region and help the government. That is why my

2020 calendar is an ode to the paradise called Kashmir and Ladakh”. Ganguly couldn’t have thought of a better person to join hands with than Sinha – a man known for his futuristic and philosophical vision for the arts. Gutsy and brilliant, Sinha’s earlier projects

– all of which have been massive hits across the globe – are known to have “strong meaning and vision”. Sinha in his curatorial note in the calendar makes a hard hitting point. He says “The greatest tragedy of a place is when we forget them. Nothing destroys it like

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isolation. Abandonment, as a result of conflict and disaster – man made or natural, causes its decay. Its lush golden sunsets or the magically whistling woods go silent. How long can a tearing performance last in an empty theatre. But the recent turn of events, whether for better or for worse – only time will tell – has left this living paradise empty. This is when cultures, customs, tangible and intangible traditions and folklore are lost”.

Sinha added “I have loved Kashmir and Ladakh deeply. I am not willing to leave it alone. This body of work is to remind the world what unimaginable beauty runs through the veins of Kashmir and Ladakh. It is to ask people to return to this paradise now – to give it back its much-needed sense of identity, dignity and empowerment. Our return will be a vehicle both to rebuild its economy and society. It will show them we care”.



Kounteya says “Like John Milton had said in Paradise Lost ‘Long is the way and hard, that out of out Hell leads up to light. Awake, arise or be forever be fallen’. Let’s not lose paradise again”.

Ganguly’s phenomenal idea of coming out with this calendar has clearly laid the foundation for a brave new future for the travel industry and it only makes us salivate. She deserves nothing less than a standing ovation.

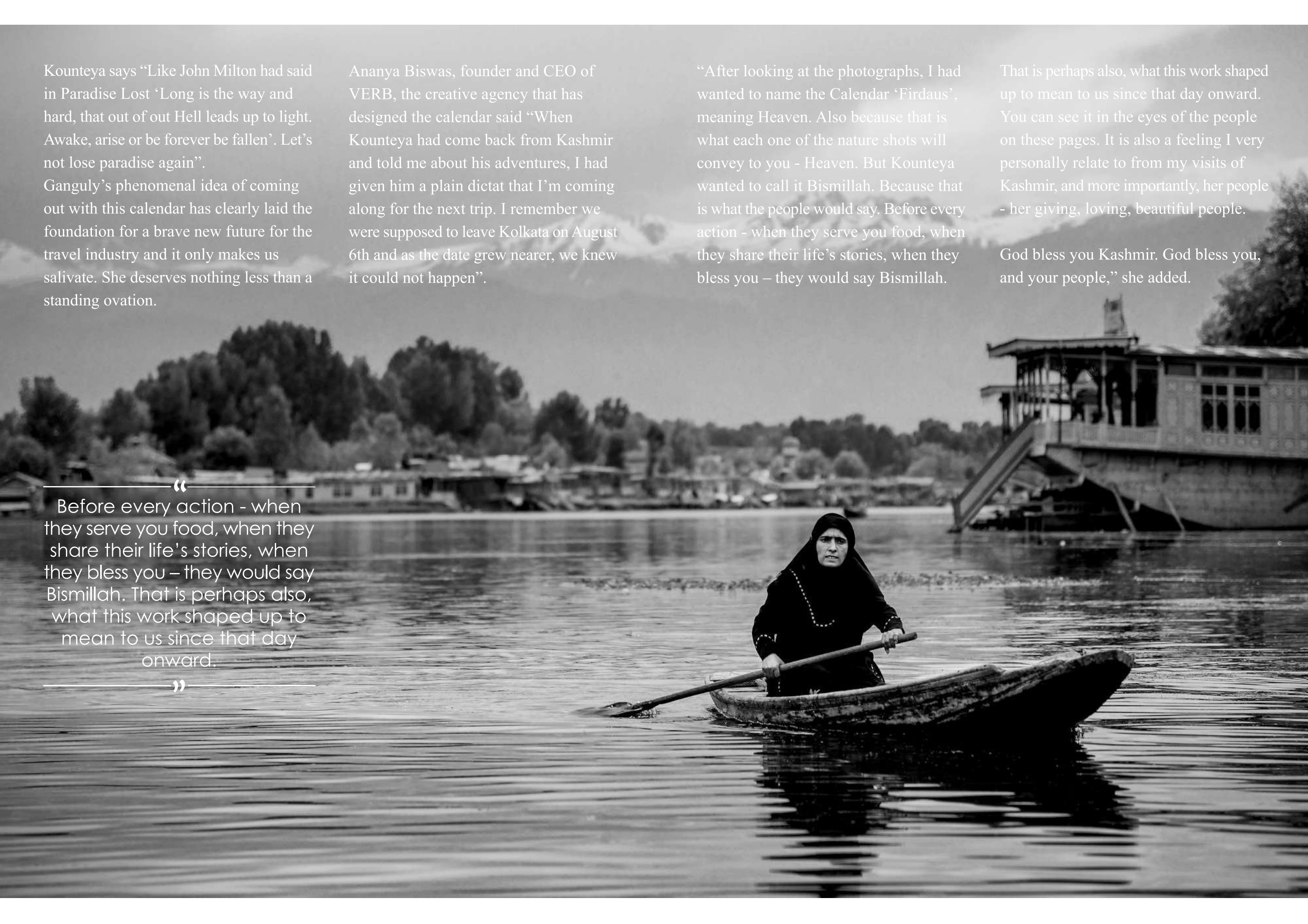
Ananya Biswas, founder and CEO of VERB, the creative agency that has designed the calendar said “When Kounteya had come back from Kashmir and told me about his adventures, I had given him a plain dictat that I’m coming along for the next trip. I remember we were supposed to leave Kolkata on August 6th and as the date grew nearer, we knew it could not happen”.

“After looking at the photographs, I had wanted to name the Calendar ‘Firdaus’, meaning Heaven. Also because that is what each one of the nature shots will convey to you - Heaven. But Kounteya wanted to call it Bismillah. Because that is what the people would say. Before every action - when they serve you food, when they share their life’s stories, when they bless you – they would say Bismillah.

That is perhaps also, what this work shaped up to mean to us since that day onward. You can see it in the eyes of the people on these pages. It is also a feeling I very personally relate to from my visits of Kashmir, and more importantly, her people - her giving, loving, beautiful people.

God bless you Kashmir. God bless you, and your people,” she added.

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Kounteya Sinha - journalist, photographer, traveller, storyteller, a man who dons multiple hats with aplomb, lends his voice to the people of Kashmir and Ladakh and to the surreal beauty of the region in his latest endeavour - Bismillah. It is befitting for a man of his class to take up the mantle of Kashmir's storyteller, for the conflict ravaged paradise couldn't have asked for a better crusader than him to champion her cause in his signature relentless, gutsy ways. Like his previous endeavours, his compelling narrative through Bismillah is bound to tug at the very core of the audience's heart and will play a critical role in unearthing the true beauty of the region which remains shrouded under the murky veil of geo-political unrest.



Deboshree Ganguly - a well known travel aficionado, deserves all the credit for successfully identifying the potential and the footprint Bismillah is going to leave on the hearts and souls of millions in the days to come. She decided to commission this noble endeavour to coincide the launch of the calender with the launch of her brand new travel company Onboard Flight D117 (OBF D117). In one move which speaks volumes of her business acumen and brings out the true traveler that resides in her, she has put the onus on all of us, instead of waiting for the concerned authorities to address the ground realities. Through her efforts, in conjunction with Kounteya's, she has put forth the proposition to every civilian to become a part of Kashmir through their travels.