

# PHOTO ARTS

July 2018

The Pink Solitaires of  
Kutch by **Dilipsinh M.  
Chudasama**

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Haldi Festival Chronicles  
by **Dnyaneshwar Prakash  
Vaidya**

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Gajan of Faith, Rituals,  
Regeneration by **Kountik  
Mitra**

## **Dear Readers**

In this issue we bring to you stories from some of the remotest corners of India, stories of how these quaint villages are thrust into the limelight during two very unique festivals, the Haldi Festival of Pattan Kodoli and the rather unique festivities surrounding Gajan in Kurmun village in West Bengal. We bring to you stories from the natural world as well in which we look behind the scenes to find out what goes on in making cheetah the fastest land animal on this planet. We explore a lesser known aspect of the iconic Gurudongmar Lake in north Sikkim to unravel the plethora of wild species which have made these inhospitable terrains their homes for hundreds of centuries. These species, so many of them, have successfully withstood the test of time and have been perfected by millions of years of evolution, nature's very own miracle. In our quest to understand them better we have followed huge flocks of greater and lesser flamingos along the coasts of Gulf of Kutch. The world around us is brimming with talent, however most of them stay in oblivion. We pay our respect to one such man in a small colony of Delhi who has battled against all odds to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. We sincerely hope this issue will unravel some of the lesser known aspects of the world and its people around us and will live up to your expectations.

Regards

Rahul Bera (Editor of Photography & Design)

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 Indian Photo ARTS

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# Haldi

by Dnyaneshwar Prakash Vaidya

## Festival Chronicles

The story of how a small village in Maharashtra dawns a cloak of golden yellow every year on the auspicious occasion of the annual Vitthal Birdev Yatra, the principal deity of the Dhangar community.

India with its population of well over one billion people and a wide range of diverse communities along with their myriad ways of life is home to a plethora of festivities, each unique and significant to the respective communities. As is the case with most ancient civilizations most of these festivals have a deep rooted religious ties. Many of these festivals particularly in the rural settings of India have a close association with a number of natural phenomena such as the coming of monsoon which usually marks the beginning of the agricultural season, or

the season of harvest during the winter months or even the full moon. While some festivals have garnered a pan Indian significance over time, some still remain hidden away from the popular glare. One such lesser known festival happens to be the “Haldi Festival” celebrated primarily by the members of the Dhangar community in the state of Maharashtra. This is the story of this unique festival observed by the people of a small pastoral community of India. Each year a quant village on the outskirts of remote Kolhapur district in Maharashtra dawns a cloak of yellow,

One of the many colourful faces during the festival.

marking a special occasion in the otherwise sedate way of life in this rural setting. The village of Pattan Kodoli springs to life on the auspicious occasion of Vitthal Birdev Annual Yatra, which is attended by thousands of hardcore devotees from the neighbouring villages of Maharashtra as well as from faraway places in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. This unprecedented gathering of thousands of devotees from the remote corners of Maharashtra and other states celebrates the birth anniversary of Vitthal Birdev Maharaj, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu. Vitthal Birdev Maharaj by virtue of being the principal deity among the Dhangars or the shepherd community who largely take part in these festivities holds a special place in the lives of this hardworking community. The devotees believe the offerings made to the deity during the course of these festivities will bless them with rich spells of prosperity in the days to come. The one distinguishing aspect which gives this festival its very unique identity is the unmistakable abundance of the colour yellow all around. At a first glance it appears the heavens opened up and sprayed a burst of yellow upon the entire village with each and every one smeared in the hue. The streets, the houses, the courtyards too aren't spared. It certainly appears the entire village shrouds itself in a thick veil of yellow. Pattan Kodoli's unique appearance during the course of these festivities could be attributed to the use of turmeric powder or "haldi" by the

devotees taking part in this festival. In the local Marathi language the devotees refer to turmeric powder as "Bhandara" which is believed to be rich in various medicinal properties. The devotees taking part in these rituals mix bhandara with fragments of dried coconut as offerings to the principal deity of Vitthal Birdev inside the temple. The deity is showered with offerings of turmeric powder and by the end of these festivities appears to be buried under a significant mound of yellow. In a token gesture of their respect towards the supreme deity once the festivities draw to a close the devotees collect pinches of bhandara from the feet of the deity and carefully preserve them in their homes. Such offerings collected from the feet of the deity are supposed to usher in a season of good fortune and prosperity in their lives.

The Dhangars are a community of herding caste of people primarily from Maharashtra with small settlements spread across the states of Karnataka, Goa and Andhra Pradesh. Since their ancient days the people of this community have been largely involved in cow herding, rearing buffaloes, weaving blankets and other woolly materials, butchery and small scale farming. The Dhangars traditionally have been known to be nomadic people migrating between the semi-arid central plateau regions of central Maharashtra and the flourishing agricultural fields of Konkan towards the west. The Dhangar

An elderly man all smeared in Haldi plays a traditional musical instrument similar to cymbal.

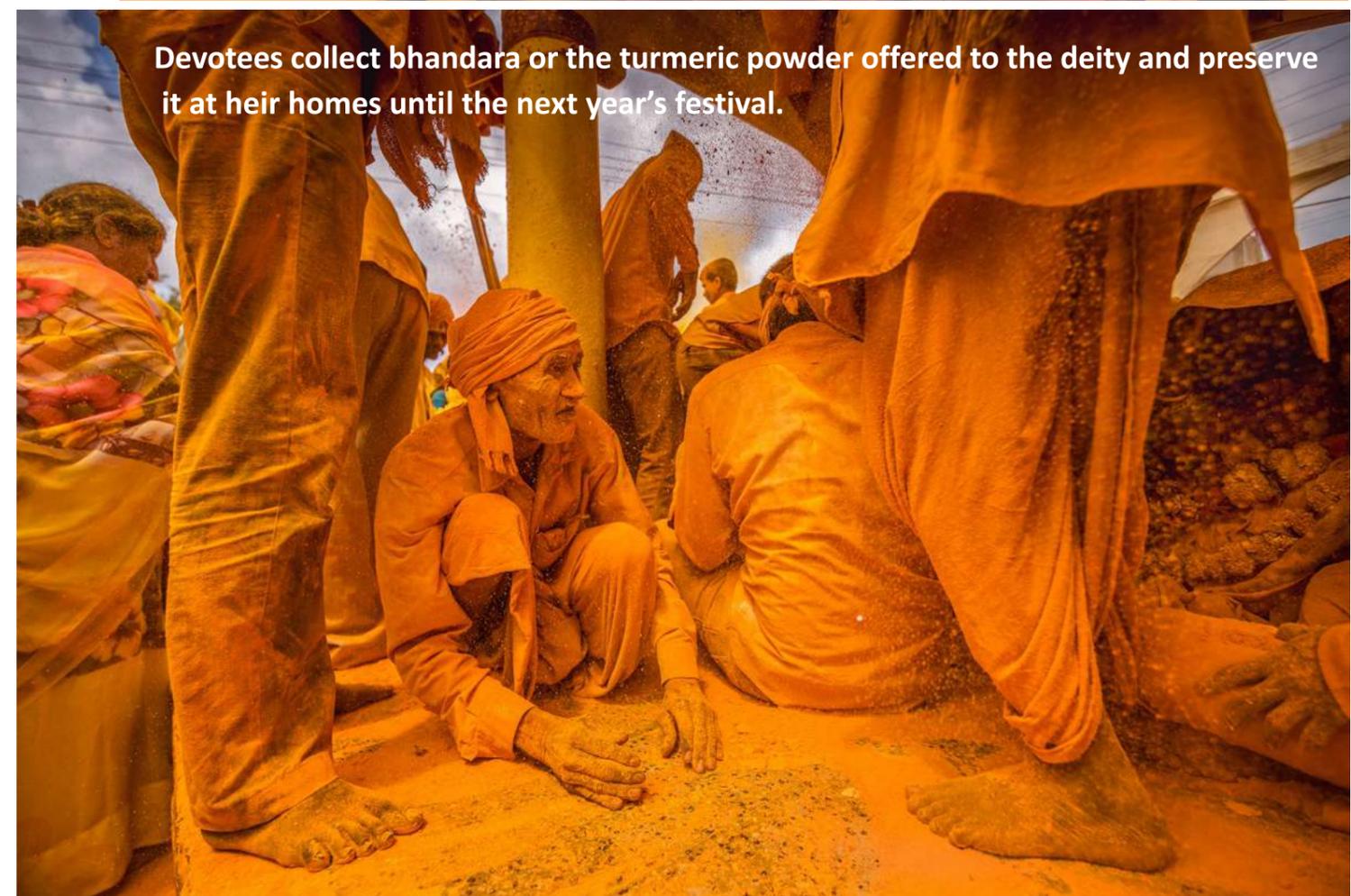




A Baba or a spiritual guru, upholds the holy sword of Birdev Maharaja. This is considered to be the most auspicious moment of the festival.



Families take on arduous journeys to be a part of these festivities.



Devotees collect bhandara or the turmeric powder offered to the deity and preserve it at their homes until the next year's festival.

These elaborate umbrellas form an important aspect of these celebrations and are used to carry escort the deity or the babas, the Godmen to the shrines or the temples.



people are known to worship various forms and incarnations of Gods from the Hindu mythology. However the one incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the form of Vitthal Birdev Maharaj deserves a special mention primarily due to the ever so colourful festivities surrounding the Vitthal Birdev Maharaj Annual Yatra. Every year the occasion witnesses a huge gathering of devotees in excess of tens of thousands with most of them belonging to the Dhangar community. This elaborate occasion continues for almost 15 days although the main festivities last for four days. The origin of this festival can be traced back to the ancient times when it started out as a pilgrimage. The devotees from various villages would undertake the long and arduous journey to offer their worships in the temple of their revered deity. People, young and old from all sections of the society, belonging to different caste and creed take part in this pilgrimage, travelling barefoot for hundreds of kilometres chanting the holy names of their patron saints and their Gods. Apart from being such a massive religious occasion this pilgrimage is the perfect representation of the fellowship and brotherhood which form the backbone of any society. As the pilgrims pass through the villages the local villagers tirelessly strive to provide them with a warm reception, their basic needs such as food, water, shelter even medical emergencies are taken care of by the locals. With time as the occasion gathered momentum the

village of Pattan Kodoli was thrust into the spotlight and gradually turned into the nerve centre of these festivities. Apart from the colourful celebrations involving turmeric powder which paints almost everything under the sun in a golden yellow hue, the processions too form an important part of these festivities. The processions are usually accompanied by thousands of devotees who indulge in performing the traditional Dhangari dance to the rhythms of the traditional music. The music and dances are not just restricted to the processions, during the entire length of the occasion they are a constant presence in the village of Pattan Kodoli. The devotees engage in never ending musical sessions which are accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as the cymbals, veenas, mridungas, dholkis and chiplis among others. Traditionally this festival has been observed in the Vaishakh month of the traditional Hindu lunar calendar. Apart from the abundance of the colour yellow and the rhythmic beats of so many traditional musical instruments accompanied by the dancing devotees the other most significant aspect of this festival is the participation of the “Babas”. The babas or spiritual leaders travel great distances on foot from remote corners of Maharashtra and other states to become a part of these festivities. The devotees firmly believe the babas are blessed with the unique ability of soothsaying and their presence during this occasion is a much revered one. The devotees gather round

Once the Baba is handed over the holy sword of Birdev Maharaja he goes into a state of trance. The devotees gathered around believe Birdev Maharaja himself has descended upon the earth and has taken possession of the Baba's body. The Baba performs with the sword as devotees gather all around him and engage in chanting hymns and mantras and showering the surroundings with generous spells of turmeric powder as a symbol of devotion and celebration.



Such scenes pan out on a regular basis across the entire duration of the festival.





such spiritual leaders sitting under the shades of banyan trees and seek their blessings in huge numbers. It goes without saying like everything else under the sky the babas too are smeared in a thick coat of yellow of the turmeric powder. Thousands of devotees keen to get a hint of what the future holds in store for them escort the spiritual leaders to the nearby temple, during the course of this journey the devotees carry huge and elaborately decorated umbrellas to welcome the babas inside the temple. Once inside the temple the babas act as conduits between the villagers and their supreme deity and while remaining in a trance convey the messages from God to the devotees. The babas also foretell their predictions regarding the next harvest, monsoon and a wide range of subjects of interests to the expectant devotees.

This ancient tradition is much about celebrating the amalgamation of human souls during these few days for the hardworking people of the Dhargar community. For the entire duration of this festival, the members of this community travel from faraway places to come together as one and merge together into something which truly uplifts the spirit of humanity. For the entirety of this occasion the pilgrims, the visitors, the local villagers, the organisers all work in unison in a harmonious manner. This is the perfect occasion to meet new people, to make new bonds, a time to strengthen the old bonds.

**“Khandoba” is the clan God for a lot of Maharashtrian communities. He is also perceived as the one who fulfills all the wishes. The devotees pledge their offerings at the feet of Khandoba to appease him so that he fulfills their wishes. Khandoba is also believed to be the deity who inspires love, fear, courage and sacrifice. The devotees in an attempt to imbibe the same powers and qualities go through self-flagellation with a whip locally known as “chabuk” to absolve themselves of all sins before they can imbibe these qualities.**



Glimpses from the various aspects of the Haldi festival. The festivities consist of a number of local events such as dancing to traditional songs, singing traditional folk songs even small scale games and events which are organised in the villages.





The unprecedented gathering of thousands of people and devotees from remote corners of Maharashtra and the adjoining states and the unmistakable abundance of the golden yellow hue form the core essence of these festivities.



Like many other traditional festivals across the country, music, dancing and singing form an integral part of the Haldi Festival as well. The rhythmic beats of the drums, to which the devotees perform their traditional dances and sing their folk songs create an atmosphere of joy and celebration all around. More than anything else it is this atmosphere of joy and celebration which brings people from remote corners of the state and binds them together during the few days of these festivities.



## About the Photographer

Dnyaneshwar Prakash Vaidya describes himself as an amateur photographer from a small village near Kolhapur city in Maharashtra. Being an ancient and historically rich state Maharashtra boasts of a rich culture and tradition which gets reflected through festivals such as Haldi Festival, Palkhi Festival, Kushti Festival, Lord Ganesha Festival and others. Mr. Vaidya started his journey with his camera in 2015. Since then in his quest to document this rich tradition and history of Maharashtra and other places in India he has travelled across the length and breadth of the country. He attributes his new found respect towards various cultures and traditions to his journeys with his camera.



GAJAN  
*of*  
FAITH  
RITUALS  
REGENERATION

The story of a nondescriptive village in rural Bengal and its rather morbid rituals surrounding the celebrations of the ancient festival of Gajan.

by  
Kountik Mitra



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

However it is worth mentioning the festivities surrounding Gajan are not strictly restricted within the confines of West Bengal. Similar festivities are observed under different names in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Orissa roughly around the same time. Gajan also known as Shiber Gajan is mainly celebrated by the rural communities who are worshippers of Lord Shiva. Like other pre-harvest festivals, Gajan is also aimed at regeneration. During the

festivities the villagers seek for Lord Shiva's blessings with the hope of a rich produce during the ensuing agricultural season. The festival includes a variety of rituals which are acts of self-penance. But the devotees while performing them transcend the pain and experiences pleasure. In addition, as is the case with every other festival, mostly the festival is about celebrations and ensuring a joyous time for all. Keeping that tradition alive, Gajan too is accompanied by a range of amusements which eventually become the cynosure. There is no concrete theory regarding the origin of this festival. One school of thought points out the uncanny similarities between the rituals of Gajan and the tantric rituals of Buddhism. The acts of self-penance which are at the heart



**(clockwise from top)** The Gajan Sannyasis go through elaborate preparations to look the part for the evening rituals and skits. Before they leave for the rituals the Gajan Sannyasis fully dressed in their respective attires worship the weapons they are carrying in their courtyards.

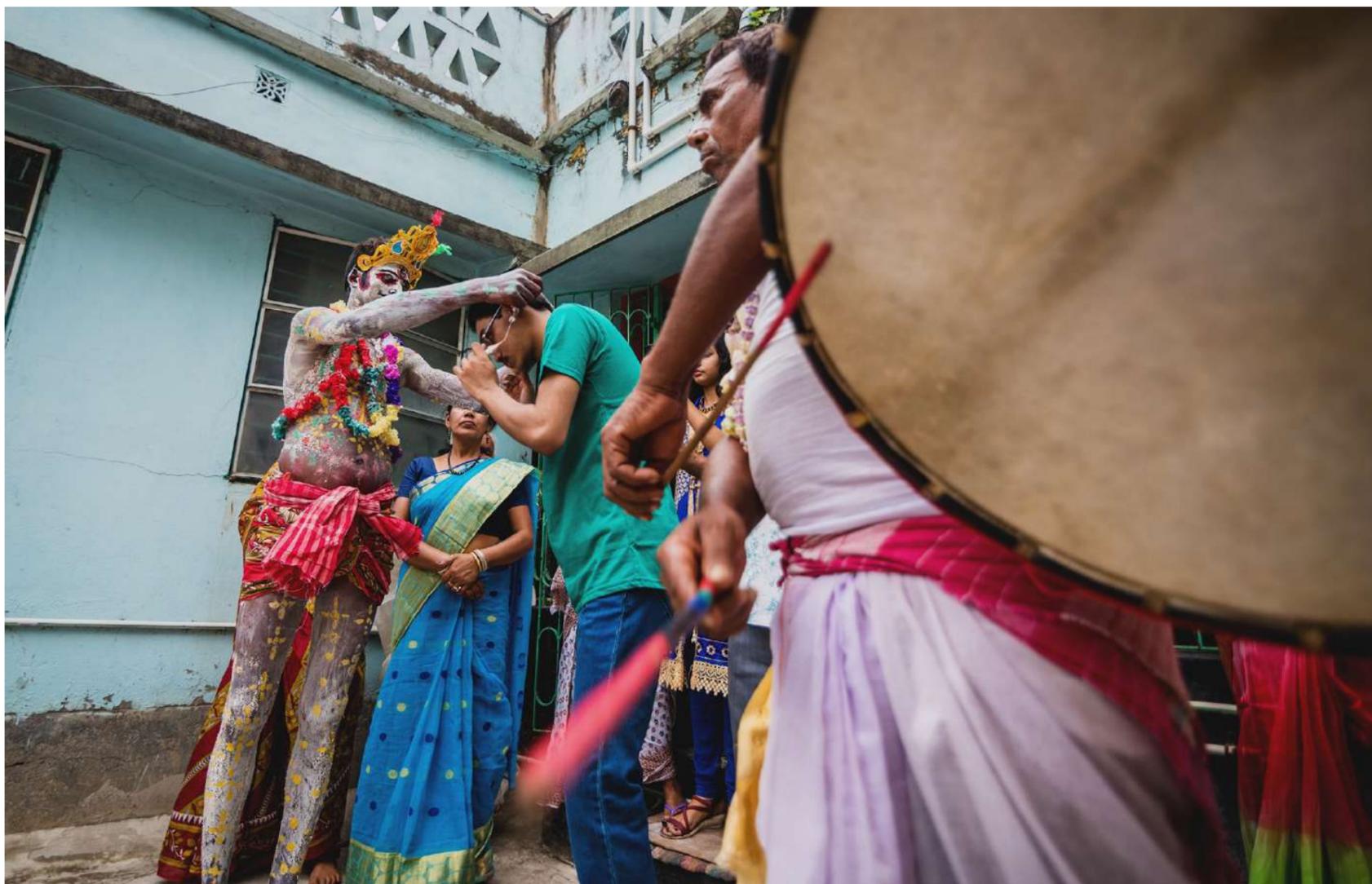
**T**he popular Bengali proverb- “baro mashe tero parbon” perfectly encompasses the community’s deep rooted and long cherished love for festivities. The proverb which means thirteen festivals within a span of twelve months is the perfect metaphor for the abundance of festivities throughout the year in West Bengal. Festivals in Bengal can be broadly classified into two categories governed by the harvest season. The pre-harvest festivals are usually observed before the agricultural season begins, seeking divine intervention for a rich harvest, the regeneration of life and land. The post-harvest festivals generally take place after the agricultural season, once the harvesting





of the rituals practiced during Gajan strongly resemble the tantric rituals practiced by a section of Buddhist monks. Etymologically, the word Gajan comes from the word “Garjan” meaning loud shouts of the devotees. An alternative meaning of the word derives from the word ga meaning “village” and jon meaning “people” which in short can be translated as a ‘festival for the people’. In many ways the festival of Gajan paves a path for the otherwise ignored and peripheral section of the society to rise to a place of prominence. Anyone embracing the rituals of this festival is considered to be an ardent follower of lord Shiva and

enjoys a respectable position in the society. In earlier times the peasant class which faced torture and humiliation from the landlords or Zamindars would use the festival of Gajan as a platform to prove their mettle as a devotee of Shiva and gain acceptance among the upper classes of the society. However the path leading to the upper strata of the society was by no means an easy one. In order to atone for their sins and be considered as representatives of Shiva the devotees were involved in piercing one’s tongue with sharp needles, to hang one from sharp hooks hanging from sturdy wooden structures. The caste differences are not so rigid these days but these practices of self-inflicted pain and sufferings are still very much prevalent.



**(top)** A Gajan Sannyasi fully dressed in his attire and made up to impersonate characters from Hindu mythologies waits in his courtyard for his counterparts to join him.

**(below)** For the locals the Gajan Sannyasis are nothing less than deities and they believe if they are blessed by the Gajan Sannyasis it will bring them good fortune, good health and prosperity in their lives. One such Gajan Sannyasi blesses a young man during one of the visits.

The festival with all its rituals and revelry pans out for three days. The rituals are usually aimed at pleasing Lord Shiva and dedicated towards him. The devotees also known as the Gajan Sannyasis turn up in colourful costumes and body paintings in an attempt to impersonate Lord Shiva. They parade around the villages as the villagers gather around them to seek their blessings. Usually the elder one among these devotees also known as the Mool Sannyasi or the chief devotee is entrusted with the responsibility of performing the evening worships and other rituals. Before they gather around in one place to perform the evening worships the villagers carry the traditional palanquin which is believed to be the palanquin of Lord Shiva himself



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

before the worships begin. Apart from the religious rituals there is plenty that goes on for everyone to keep themselves entertained. The performers, who take part in various plays and skits depicting various episodes from ancient Hindu mythologies involving the many episodes of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, meticulously prepare themselves for their evening performances.

Costumes and headgears are designed carefully, they are provided with the proper props, their bodies are painted in great details so that their resemblances with the mythical characters are spot on. The devotees who cross-dress themselves as various deities, like Shiva and Parvati and Goddess Kali sport signature bright hues smeared all over their bodies. Their

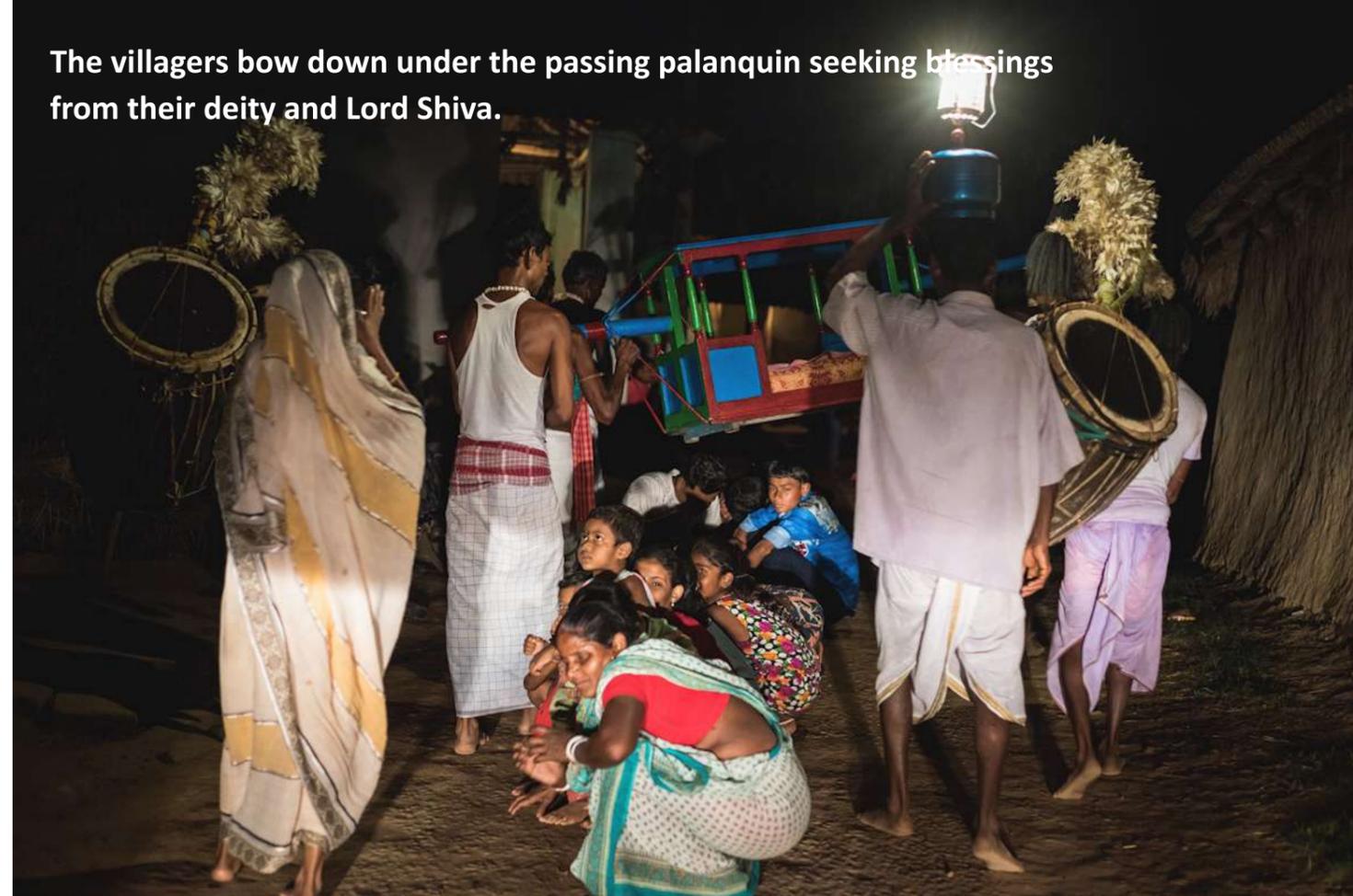
depictions of mythological episodes during the street plays and skits may not always be the most accurate depiction; instead there is a conscious attempt on the performers' part to inculcate some comic elements in their performances. This deliberate tweaking of the mythological episodes to invoke laughter and a sense of light heartedness among the onlookers

works just fine, since at the end of the day Gajan more than being a religious occasion is still primarily a festival largely aimed at providing some much needed respite to people from their everyday mundane lives.

In some of the rural settlements of Bengal Gajan happens to be the biggest festival in their lives. Quite understandably the excitement leading up to the festival is palpable all around. The entire month of Chaitra witnesses relentless preparations for the festival and some kind of ritual or the other being performed in almost every household. All of this reaches its zenith on the final day of the Bengali calendar known as Chaitra Sankranti. Most Bengali households observe some ritual or the other on this day, followed as it is by Poila Baishakh—the auspicious first day of the Bengali year. Chaitra Sankranti is particularly significant because of the hoof-swinging ritual of Charak, which also happens to be the concluding ritual of Gajan and possibly the single most widely recognised aspect of this festival. The ritual of Charak attracts the maximum number of people and audience. Even those who are the least involved in the month-long preparations gather to witness the awe-inspiring spectacle of Charak. The unbelievable feats of strength, self-penance and strength performed by the devotees or the Gajan Sannyasis truly defy all logic and common sense. The devotees at the stroke of dusk are suspended from the top of a Charak tree with the help of a rope at



A Gajan Sannyasi waits for the Mool Sannyasi to begin the evening's proceedings.



The villagers bow down under the passing palanquin seeking blessings from their deity and Lord Shiva.

the end of which two iron hooks are attached. These iron hooks pierce the skin and flesh of the devotees as they dig deeper into the backs of the devotees while they remain suspended in the air. In this state of suspension the devotees start revolving around the Charak tree. These jaw dropping stunts where the devotees bear tremendous pain and showcase superlative skills and strength never fail to evoke a collective sigh of awe from the crowd gathered down below. Understandably this remarkable ritual during the festival of Gajan has gained the maximum prominence over time and has turned into the biggest attraction of these festivities.

While Charak remains the most widely followed ritual during the celebrations



The traditional palanquin of Lord Shiva and Boro Thakur- the village deity is carried around across the village.

surrounding the festival of Gajan, the rituals slightly vary in nature in different parts of West Bengal.

Some of these rituals take a morbid turn when dead decaying bodies and other human body parts such as skulls and bones become an integral component of these rituals. The remote village of Kurmun in the district of Bardhaman in West Bengal has been a witness to these morbid celebrations for decades now. According to villagers, this practice has been going on for more than a hundred years. It is needless to mention the practices are primal enough to challenge the finer senses of the uninitiated. The local administration is believed to be in the knowhow of things and although the legality of some of these



The chief devotee, locally known as “Mool Sannyasi” is entrusted with the responsibilities of performing the rituals and the worships. The rituals begin with the Mool Sannyasi blessing the other Gajan Sannyasis. The Mool Sannyasi can be seen impersonating Lord Shiva here.



As part of this unusual ritual the Shoshan Sannyasi digs up rotting human carcasses and skulls from some nearby graveyard. Once the ritual is over the skulls and carcasses are carefully returned to the same site and covered up, this tradition has been going on for hundreds of years.

practices may be questionable the local administration chooses to turn a blind eye to them. The devotees set out in hunt of a dead body from the local burial grounds. Financial constraints or a large scale epidemic often force people to bury their relatives in the graveyards instead of cremating their bodies as per the religious rituals. These dead decaying human bodies provide the devotees who are often referred to as Shoshan Sannyasi with some of the elements central to their celebrations such as the human skull. The bodies are dug up; the skulls are chopped off and form an essential element of these celebrations. Once the celebrations are over these skulls are preserved at some secret location in the village only to be used in the future in

the same way as it has been for more than a hundred years in this remote corner of West Bengal. On some occasions decaying carcasses of young children too become an integral part of these rituals. The Shoshan Sannyasi or the devotees carry these carcasses or the skulls and parade around the village. The villagers gather all around them to catch glimpses of the Shoshan Sannyasis dancing around while carrying recently dug up human skulls and carcasses from the burial grounds. This century old tradition seems to have no adverse effect upon the villagers; even the kids seem surprisingly undeterred in the midst of such macabre rituals. In fact it is not entirely uncommon to see young children taking part in these processions



Before the rituals the devotees seek blessings so that they can control the invoked spirit and the skulls.



Children too take part in these morbid rituals. A young boy dressed in the same attire as his elder counterparts takes hold of what seems like a recently excavated carcass of a young child.



**The Shoshan Sannyasis as part of their rituals dance around the village carrying the dug up human skulls in their hands. As they dance and parade around with these skulls in their hands local people gather all around them and follow them around during such processions around the village. This rather controversial ritual has been in vogue in this particular village for more than hundred years now.**

an occasion for social interaction and entertainment, a much needed reprieve from the mundane burdens of their daily lives. Not only have the rituals, fire acts, skits and fair become the cynosure of the festival, but have also identified themselves as traditions which get followed each year faithfully. During the course of time, the primary objective of seeking divine interventions from Lord Shiva for ensuring a period of vitality and fertility has slowly faded into the background as the laughter, joyous celebrations and the brilliance of the performances put on display by the devotees slowly eclipsed the notion of appeasing the sacred forces. In other words, the festivities surrounding Gajan have not only allowed the communities from the socially decreed lower sections of people to rise to prominence, they have even in fact pushed the divine into the backstage in an attempt to celebrate the indomitable human spirit, therein lies the true celebration of Gajan.

along with their adult counterparts as Shoshan Sannyasi.

Gajan is primarily a rural Bengal festival. In direct contrast to most of the religious festivals and rituals of Bengal, Gajan is a festival primarily for the marginalised section of the Bengali-Hindu community. These people have traditionally enjoyed a much lesser privileged position in the society compared to the Brahmins. Most of these people rely on agriculture for their

livelihood, while some are barbers or live off of performing odd jobs. While Brahmins and members from other higher castes of the society do take part in the festivals the main rituals or the worships are not performed by them which again is in remarkable contrast to other Hindu religious festivals. The chief devotee or the Mool Sannyasi who again belongs to the lower sections of the society is entrusted with the responsibility of

performing the main rituals and the worships. In spite of the social complexities associated with the festival and the myriad rituals and the different manners in which they are carried out, Gajan essentially remains an occasion for celebration, mirth and revelry for a vast segment of rural population in Bengal. This is evident in the non-rigid, all-inclusive manner of the celebrations and the performing of the rituals. For the villagers the event becomes



Even in the midst of such macabre rituals which can be unsettling to the uninitiated, there is always time for a bit of fun and games. One of the Gajan Sannyasis puts one skull in the carriage box of a bicycle ridden by two local villagers.

## About the Photographer



**Kountik Mitra** born on the 5th of October 1983 is a resident of Tollygunje, Kolkata. An avid reader and movie buff his primary interest lies in documenting life all around him through the lenses of his Nikon D810. Being a management student working in a bank was an obvious choice for him instead he realized that a regular job was not his true calling. His love and passion for photography dates back to his childhood when he would be enthralled by the beautiful photographs taken by his grandfather and his father. He left his job in professional pursuit of photography. Commercial shoots take care of his finances while he dwells deeper into genres like travel, people, culture, ritual, tradition and street photography, things which he loves to photograph the most.

# The Pink Solitaires *of* Kutch

A look into the lives of two of the most iconic bird species in the state of Gujarat, whose signature pinkish appearances have become synonymous with the coasts along the Gulf of Kutch.

by  
Dilipsinh M. Chudasama



Being social creatures the greater flamingos communicate a lot among themselves and often indulge in communications like this one.

The Thar Desert in the western Indian state of Rajasthan is largely responsible for shaping a significant majority of the topography of the region. Known globally for its colossal sand dunes and its colourful native human settlement this vast ocean of hundreds of billions of sand grains and shifting sand dunes not only dominates a better part of Rajasthan particularly along the eastern border between India and Pakistan but makes its foray into the neighbouring state of Gujarat as well. Here it takes up a whole new identity and is better known as the Rann of Kutch. The desert besides taking up a new name metamorphoses into something unique, into something extraordinary. The Rann of Kutch although located in the Thar Desert bio-geographical region possesses certain features which are unique to it, features which make this region stand out in its own right instead of remaining under the shadows of the much celebrated Thar Desert. The Rann of Kutch also known as the Rann happens to be the world's largest salt desert spreading over an area of more than 30,000 square kilometres which includes the Great Rann of Kutch, the Little Rann of Kutch and the Banni grasslands. This vast expanse of seasonal salt marshes stretches into the Sindh province of India's neighbour Pakistan. The marshy terrain in most parts of the Rann can be attributed to its geographic location which is nestled between the Gulf of Kutch and the mouth of the Indus River in southern Pakistan. The Luni River

originating in Rajasthan flows through the northeast corner of the Rann. The presence of these rivers along with their tributaries which eventually merge into the waters of the Arabian Sea in the Gulf of Kutch have led to the presence of numerous creeks which form a mesh of waterways across the heart of the Rann. These creeks, embracing the Arabian Sea, are the key to the marshy terrain of the Rann. During monsoon, as the rivers and the creeks swell

with water, almost the entire landmass of the Rann stays submerged in water. These marshes, narrow creeks which have given rise to countless wetlands which brim with water during the months of monsoon and the coastal Kutch which lies along the Gulf of Kutch along the Arabian Sea provide a numerous species of wader birds and other water birds with safe havens. They come in different shapes and sizes, some are permanent dwellers in this

diverse landscape while some cover thousands of kilometres every year to spend a few months in these wetlands. The sheer abundance and diversity in the avifauna found in the wetlands of Kutch and along the coastal Kutch can be any naturalist's delight. The largescale presence of these birds has been facilitated by the lack of human presence and human activities in this region. The entire Rann of Kutch is sparsely populated, with small

scale human settlements scattered all over the region. As a result of which there is very little human interference and less human pressure upon the existing ecosystems in this region, which goes a long way in explaining why the avifauna population along with other species of animals have thrived in this vast region.



The graceful walk of greater flamingos against the setting sun paints a beautiful picture along the coasts of Kutch.

The juveniles appear different from the adults, as they mature the greyish brown appearance of their plumage makes way for the signature pinkish hue.



The beaches along the Gulf of Kutch wake up to the chirping voices of thousands of their winged residents every morning. Among them is the unmistakable presence of the greater flamingo which also happens to be the state bird of Gujarat. As the flocks start descending upon the beaches and wades into the sea waters the entire region seems to get a coat of pink. The largest and by far the most widespread species of flamingos, the greater flamingos is found across vast stretches of the Indian sub-continent, the Middle-East and southern parts of Europe. Mudflats and shallow lagoons with access to sea water happen to be the preferred habitat for this

species. These birds can be easily identified by their pinkish white plumage and the tall slender appearance. This is the largest species of flamingo, averaging 110–150 cm in height and weighing between 2–4 kg. Their preference for salt water in the vicinity of their habitat has a lot to do with the diet of this species. Their menu is typically made up of tiny fish, fish larvae, planktons, molluscs and shrimps. Their feeding mechanism too deserves a special mention. Typically these birds can be seen in flocks or colonies where an individual flock consists up to a hundred or even more individuals. They spend most of their time wading into the Arabian Sea where



The majestic walk of these beautiful birds are nothing short of a visual treat.



With the onset of dusk, greater flamingos desert these beaches to roost at some nearby wetland for the night only to return to these shores next morning.

they forage in knee deep water but as the water level begins to rise they keep on inching closer towards the shore. Unlike some other coastal regions the sea along the Gulf of Kutch is pretty calm, which allows the Flamingos to forage into knee deep or sometimes even deeper waters. These birds spend most part of their day

burying their bills or sometimes their entire head to suck up both mud or sand and food mixed in them. There is a filter like structure in their beak which separates the food from the muddy water before the liquid is expelled out. Most of their days are spent in foraging into knee deep water. With the approach of dusk, these huge

colonies of greater flamingos take off and make their way to their nearest camp site, which usually are mudflats or shallow lagoons connected by narrow creeks leading up to the sea. These birds are not nocturnal, they prefer the calm and quite of these shallows to spend the night at. As a species the male greater flamingos are

known to perform elaborate courtship displays. These elaborate displays include choreographed movements in a group, excessive preening or stretching of their necks. There is no particular breeding season for this species. They travel in pack and mating takes place approximately simultaneously in case of several mating





***(clockwise from top left)*** Greater flamingos prefer to wade into knee deep water near coastal wetlands while foraging. These birds are equally comfortable wading into sea water while foraging. Typical behaviour of a greater flamingo while foraging, they immerse their beaks in the water and a filtering mechanism in their beaks separate the planktons, algae from the water before it is expelled out. Lesser flamingos too exhibit similar behaviours when it comes to foraging and other aspects of their lives. A bunch of greater flamingos against the setting sun in Kutch.



Flocks of thousands of greater flamingos keep moving along the coasts of Kutch in search of new foraging and breeding grounds.



pairs. The female gives birth to a single egg, which appears chalky white in colour on a mound of mud and clay, which acts as the nest for the lone egg. Usually the nest is made along the bank of a lake or estuary or along the shores of the shallows or the lagoons which often happen to be the backwaters connected to the sea. The

mound of mud is hardened by the heat of the sun and turns into a sturdy structure. The concave shape of the mound at the centre provides the perfect room for the single egg which nestles seamlessly in this groove for the next 27-30 days. Both the male and female take turns incubating the egg. Once hatched, the fledging period

ranges from 65 to 90 days. Greater flamingos do not reach sexual maturity until 5 to 6 years old and are not known to breed more than once a year. A social life comes with its own set of advantages, especially when it comes to raising the chicks. The new born chicks are well attended by both the parents, even the non

-breeding individuals in the colony take turns in looking after the new born nestlings. In fact it is a common practice among the new parents to leave behind their young ones in a crèche, where a large number of fledglings are looked after by the non-breeding individuals.

The lesser flamingos too exhibit similar behavioural traits when it comes to foraging. These birds spend most of their time foraging for food in shallow wetlands which are rich in planktons, algae and small crustaceans.



Once considered a migrant the greater flamingo is thriving in Gujarat. They move in flocks of thousands from one wetland to the next along coastal Kutch in search of food and breeding grounds. With no natural predator their numbers have steadily increased across the state. It would not be an exaggeration to say the sight of

any beach along the coastal Kutch is synonymous with the presence of huge flocks of these tall slender brightly coloured birds.

While the greater flamingo by dint of being the state bird of Gujarat and its imposing presence grabs the maximum headlines, Gujarat albeit briefly becomes home to another species of flamingos, the lesser flamingo. Although a tall individual by every parameter in the bird kingdom, the lesser flamingo is the smallest of all the

species of flamingos. They measure around 80-90cm in height and 1.2-2.5 kg in weight. Apart from the difference in the dimensions, the lesser flamingos show slight difference in the colouration of their plumage and the beak has a greater presence of black in its colouration. In Gujarat the preferred breeding grounds for the lesser flamingos are found in the Rann of Kutch and in parts of Porbandar, Jamnagar and the wetlands of Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary. Despite being the most numerous among all the other species of flamingos the lesser flamingos have been classified as near threatened by the IUCN due its fast depleting population. In the state of Gujarat this disturbing trend has been observed for the past few years, with a gradual decline in the number of nesting sites as well as delays and depleting numbers during their arrivals. The Chhaya Rann, a vast stretch of wetland in the coastal city of Porbandar traditionally has been the favoured nesting ground for these birds. Spread over two square kilometres the Chhaya Rann turns into a nesting ground for almost 20,000 lesser flamingos by the end of October or early December every year.

Yet over the past few years that number has drastically dropped to 4,000-5,000 individuals. This could be attributed to the changing weather patterns which also has disrupted the cycle of arrival and nesting of the lesser flamingos along with the lack of rainfall in the region which led to the

A flock of lesser flamingos, the wetlands of Gujarat happen to be their favorite habitat. Like greater flamingos they too live in huge flocks often comprising of thousand or more individuals.

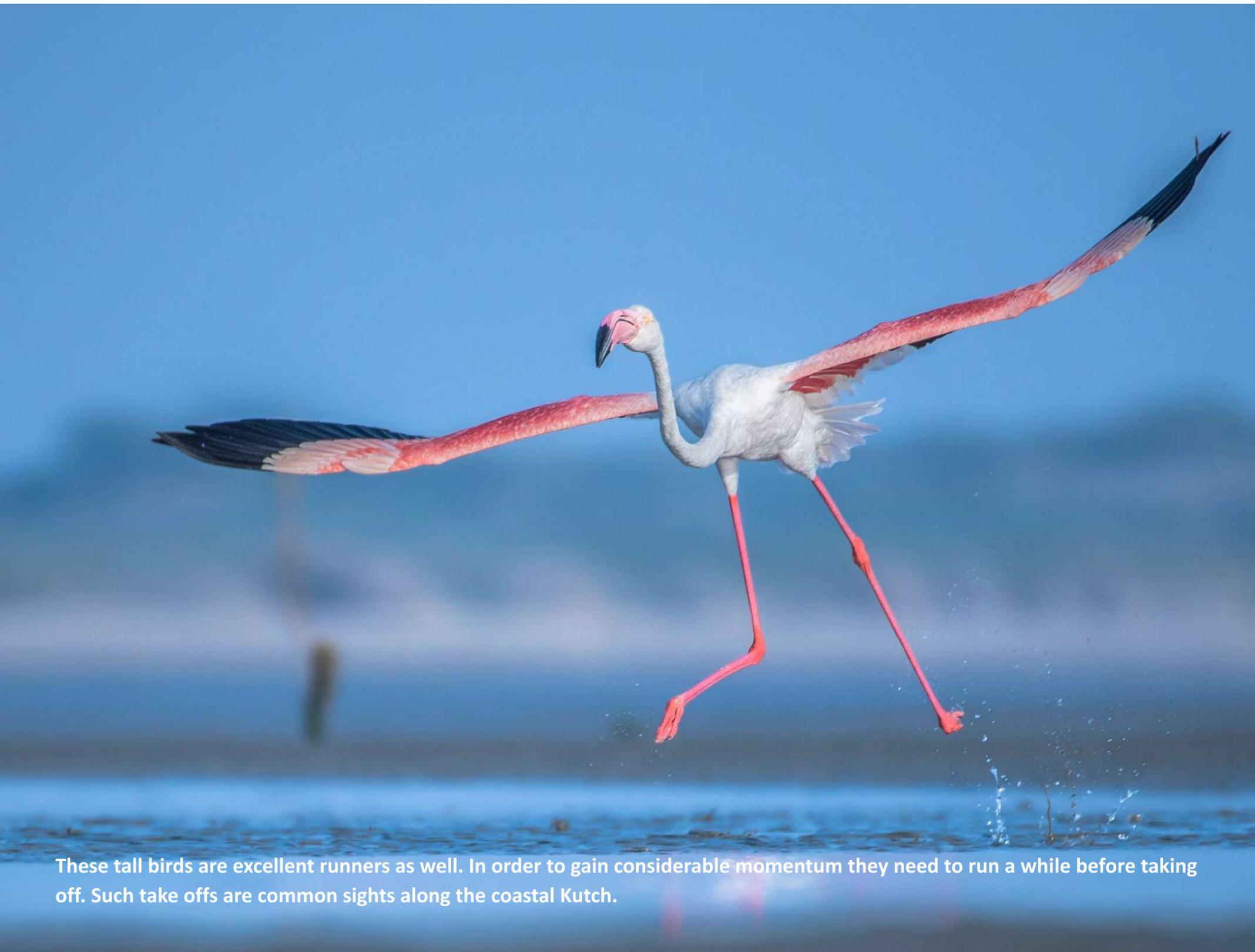


depleting water resources of the Chhaya Rann. These are some of the reasons of concern which have been raised by birdwatchers and conservationists. In days to come it will be important to preserve such natural reserves which cater to the somewhat unique demands of these birds.

Like their bigger cousins the lesser flamingos to prefer shallow waters for foraging and nesting, given the two species display almost identical behaviours in every respect.

The two iconic species which have for long dominated the birding scape of Gujarat need protection, the threats looming in the horizon yet not have assumed gigantic proportions but certainly do have the potential to take up monstrous form and severely threaten the very

existence of these species. The depleting numbers, the rapidly vanishing habitat and contaminated waters from industrial waste which often lead to bacterial infections and eventual death among these birds are the warning bells which are ringing hard, and it will be only foolish on our part to



These tall birds are excellent runners as well. In order to gain considerable momentum they need to run a while before taking off. Such take offs are common sights along the coastal Kutch.

ignore them for the time being only to wake up when it is already too late, as it has been the case with so many other species across the globe.



## About the Photographer

Dilipsinh M. Chudasama is from Mundra in Gujarat and works as an IT administrator at a manufacturing company in Mundra. A passionate wildlife photographer he has multiple publications for wildlife magazines such as Saevus Wildlife India, Wild Soujourns Magazine, Indian Birds Magazine to his credit. He is also the winner of Grand Prize for his entry in the "For Love of Travel" photo contest organised by National Geographic Traveller India. He has also won the first place in the State Level Photography Award in 2016 and the second place in the "ICICI Live Your Passion Photography Contest" in 2017-18.

More of his work is available at the following links-

NatGeo Your Shot:

<http://yourshot.nationalgeographic.com/profile/646923/>

Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/DCPhotography07>

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/dcphotography007/>

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/82708551@N04/>

The secrets that make cheetah the fastest land animal on this planet and the heavy price speed exacts from this animal and many more glimpses from the fragile lives of cheetahs.

*The  
Speed Merchant  
of Savannah* by Vinaya Mohan

Given their lightweight frames cheetahs prefer to avoid all kinds of confrontations particularly against heavyweight opponents such as the lions. This individual scans the surroundings carefully before making any move.



In the book of evolution, the two eternal rivals, the predator and the prey have been engaged in a never ending battle, which even as we speak is raging on with neither side willing to let go of their hard earned inches. In this epic saga of survival there is no ambit of a ceasefire, negotiation or treaty. As harsh as it might appear, this is nature's only way of maintaining the delicate balance which if tilted in favour of either side can wreak havoc or worse even obliterate an entire eco-system. The predator and the prey never take a day off, for both the parties it is a constant struggle for survival, one in which both spend considerable time in decoding any chinks in the armour of their rival. Evolution has equipped every creature with formidable arsenals to survive in their respective domains. The preys have devised ingenious techniques to outwit their predators, while the predators kept on refining their skills and hunting techniques to stay one step ahead of their evading preys. Even the most unassuming natural setting is a fierce battlefield where the struggle for survival pans out on a minute by minute basis. The settings change, the warring factions change, yet the basic premise of the battle remains the same, it is the eternal quest for survival. In other words evolution is a race between predator and prey, and more often than not speed means survival. Being fast certainly guarantees success, being the fastest it would most certainly appear a definitive recipe for survival, yet the curious ways of nature ensure this is

not always the case. Human beings though not engaged in a battle for survival in its most primal form as nature's other subjects, have been enthralled by speed, our obsession for speed has led to some astounding breakthroughs, we are drawn towards the fastest, lure for breaking the speed limits have drove us to embracing greater risks, not always out of necessity but out of sheer pleasure. That is exactly what speed does to our senses, it thrills us. However in the animal kingdom speed is not a vanity but an essential tool which can be the difference between life and death and no other creature is better equipped in this department than the cheetah, the fastest land animal on this planet.

The cheetah, a member of the cat family is built for speed; every inch of its body has been carefully fine-tuned and crafted by thousands of years of evolution to scorch the earth of the African Savannah as it darts across it in pursuit of its prey. With an ability to clock a speed of more than 60 kilometres per hour within 3 seconds and a recorded maximum speed of almost 110 kilometres per hour this speed demon of the natural world puts its superlative skills to one and one use only, to bring down its prey. Blessed with such remarkable abilities it would certainly appear there is no way for its preys to outrun a cheetah and life in the savannah would be a walk in the park for the cheetah; however that is far from the truth. In a

curious irony of fate, the cheetah's biggest strength more often than not turns out to be its biggest weakness, spelling doom for this creature in more ways than one. Big cats all over the world are robust animals with strong and powerful jaws and sharp retractable claws capable of inflicting skull crushing blows to most creatures on the face of this planet. The notable exception is the cheetah. One look at this animal and it becomes obvious

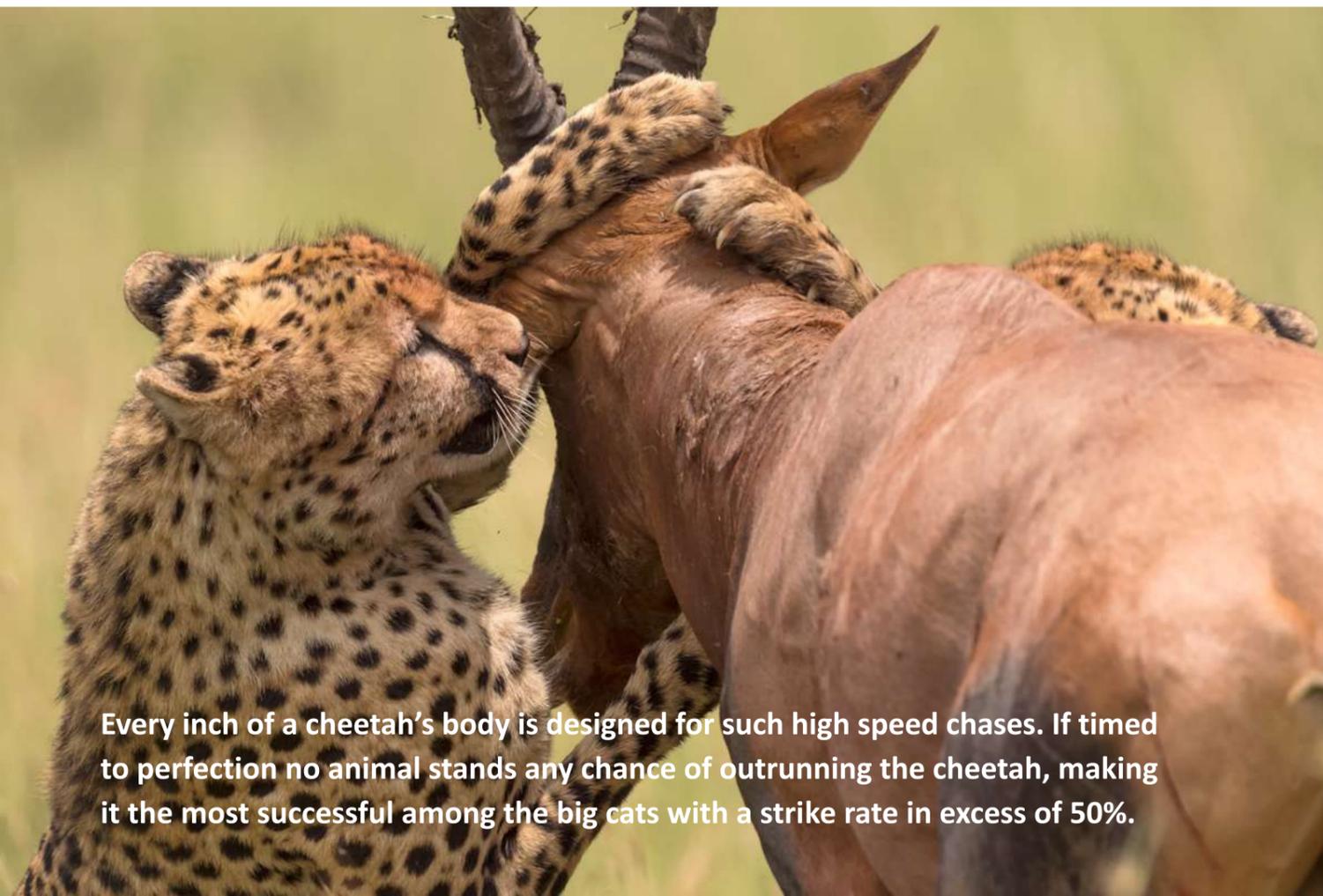
evolution was willing to make all the compromises in order to devise its own speed merchant on land. A heavy frame like the ones carried around by a tiger or a lion or even a jaguar is not capable of generating such speed without the expense of an insanely large amount of energy. This meant the cheetah had to do without the muscular structure and the strong bone structure of its heavyweight cousins. Also unlike other big cats a cheetah's claws are

not retractable, they are at the best semi retractable, and this allows the cheetah to maintain a firm grip on the ground while pulling off incredibly high speed manoeuvres in pursuit of its evading prey. As a result of which the claws undergo significant wear and tear and coupled with the slenderness of their forelimbs meant the cheetah is not perfectly capable of bringing down their prey by digging their claws into them, a technique quite often

observed in larger cat species such as the lion, tiger, leopard, jaguars, puma among others. The cheetah's slim, lithe build along with its narrow shoulders also narrows down its prey base significantly. While the lion and the leopard, two of its cousins with whom the cheetah shares the savannah real estate regularly bring down preys much heavier and larger than their stature, the cheetah most of the time has to be content with smaller and lighter



Fresh from an afternoon nap this individual is possibly gearing up for a high octane chase across these fields.



Every inch of a cheetah's body is designed for such high speed chases. If timed to perfection no animal stands any chance of outrunning the cheetah, making it the most successful among the big cats with a strike rate in excess of 50%.

weight ungulates. Yet the cheetah never felt the need to compromise on its abilities to generate such darting pace across the savannah. The reason is obvious from the unprecedented predatory success rate that the cheetah enjoys in the grasslands of savannah. Compared to a lone lion which succeeds in bringing down its prey once in about six attempts the cheetah boasts of a success rate of over 50 percent. Quite naturally the question arises, what are the factors which contributed towards the making cheetah the fastest land animal on the planet. The answer lies in about everything a cheetah is made of. This remarkable animal is tailor-made for speed literally from the tip of its nose down to its tail with the sole purpose of accelerating at a remarkable rate. A wide range of factors determine an animal's speed, including environment, predation, body type and more. Every one of these factors has come together in perfect synergy to create nature's finest sprinting machine that the cheetah is. In relation to its body the cheetah has the smallest head among all the cat species and the aerodynamic design of its skull aides the cheetah to cut through air with the ease of a bullet. A massive chest which houses a huge heart and lungs are instrumental for pumping fuel to the muscles while the cheetah sprints at such pace. The long and light legs of the cheetah are equipped with extended Achilles tendon for shock absorption. Performing sharp manoeuvres at the incredible speed at which the cheetah

operates can be a tricky proposition and a moment's imbalance can lead to broken limbs even death. This is where the long and heavy tail of the cheetah comes into play. The tail of a cheetah acts like the rudder of a boat enabling the cheetah to make those sharp turns when in pursuit of its preys while maintaining the much needed balance. The amazing speed at which the cheetah cuts through the grasslands of the savannah can be attributed to the long strides which this animal takes, which are facilitated by the strong muscles along the spine of the cheetah. Flexing its spine like a coiled spring the cheetah's body flies airborne through a distance of almost five times the length of its body. Speed ensured the cheetah's survival during the course of evolution but it came with a huge trade off. Cheetahs have left the other cats far behind in terms of raw speed but speed itself has robbed the cheetah of abilities which the other big cats boast of. The cost of speed was a lightweight frame, which means the cheetah is no match for the larger predators in the savannah. More than 90% of cheetah cubs don't even make it to the second year of their lives. While they are young and slow young cheetah cubs are easy targets for lions, leopards, hyenas even wild dogs. Despite the mother cheetahs best efforts she is no match against a hyena or a lion and could easily lose her life in trying to protect her babies. To keep their cubs safe cheetah mothers usually keep moving their



**Almost 90% of cheetah cubs do not make it past the first year of their lives. The hyenas and lions repeatedly hunt them down to reduce the fierce competition for prey while others fall prey to diseases. Smaller populations restricted to narrow corridors in the wild lead to a lack of genetic diversity which often leads to cubs born with genetic disorders and diseases.**

babies from one place to other, rarely spending more than two consecutive nights at the same place. The only way a cheetah mother can ensure the survival of her cubs is by evading other predators. The same lightweight frame also means the cheetah doesn't really excel when it squares off against other predators. Despite enjoying a success rate of over 50, the cheetah on most occasions ends up losing its hard earned meals to the hyenas or lions even leopards. To counter some of these problems the cheetah has developed a few tricks on their own. Life in the brutally competitive environment of the African savannah can be a punishing affair, to make things slightly easier male cheetahs often form a coalition, where 2-3 male cheetahs often brothers team up and spend their lives together. This small group will live and hunt together for life and usually claims a large area or range which may overlap several female territories. Strength in numbers ensures greater security, higher kill rate and effective defence of their territories from any intruding males.

Females however do lead a solitary life and don't enjoy the perks of a family life. The females come in contact with males only during the mating season. High mortality rate among cheetah cubs has probably made the cheetah the most reproductive cat. After a gestation period of 90-95 days a female cheetah gives birth to a litter of 3-5 cubs. The male cheetah does not participate in the rearing of the

Male cheetahs often form a coalition and spend the rest of their lives together. The members of the coalition are usually related by birth however often unrelated males are granted a place in the coalition. A coalition as big as this one could very well be a result of unrelated males joining forces with the brothers.



cubs. The mother may leave the cubs for as long as 48 hours in order to hunt for enough food to sustain her in a lactating state. If the food supply is too scarce the mother may abandon the cubs, so as to maintain her way of life. Also if the litter is lost within the first few weeks the female comes into oestrus in the next few days. If this is not the case the mother will return and move the cubs from one location to another to better hide the smell of her young from predators. Sometimes the mother will even wait until night falls to return to her cubs, so that she is not as easily followed.

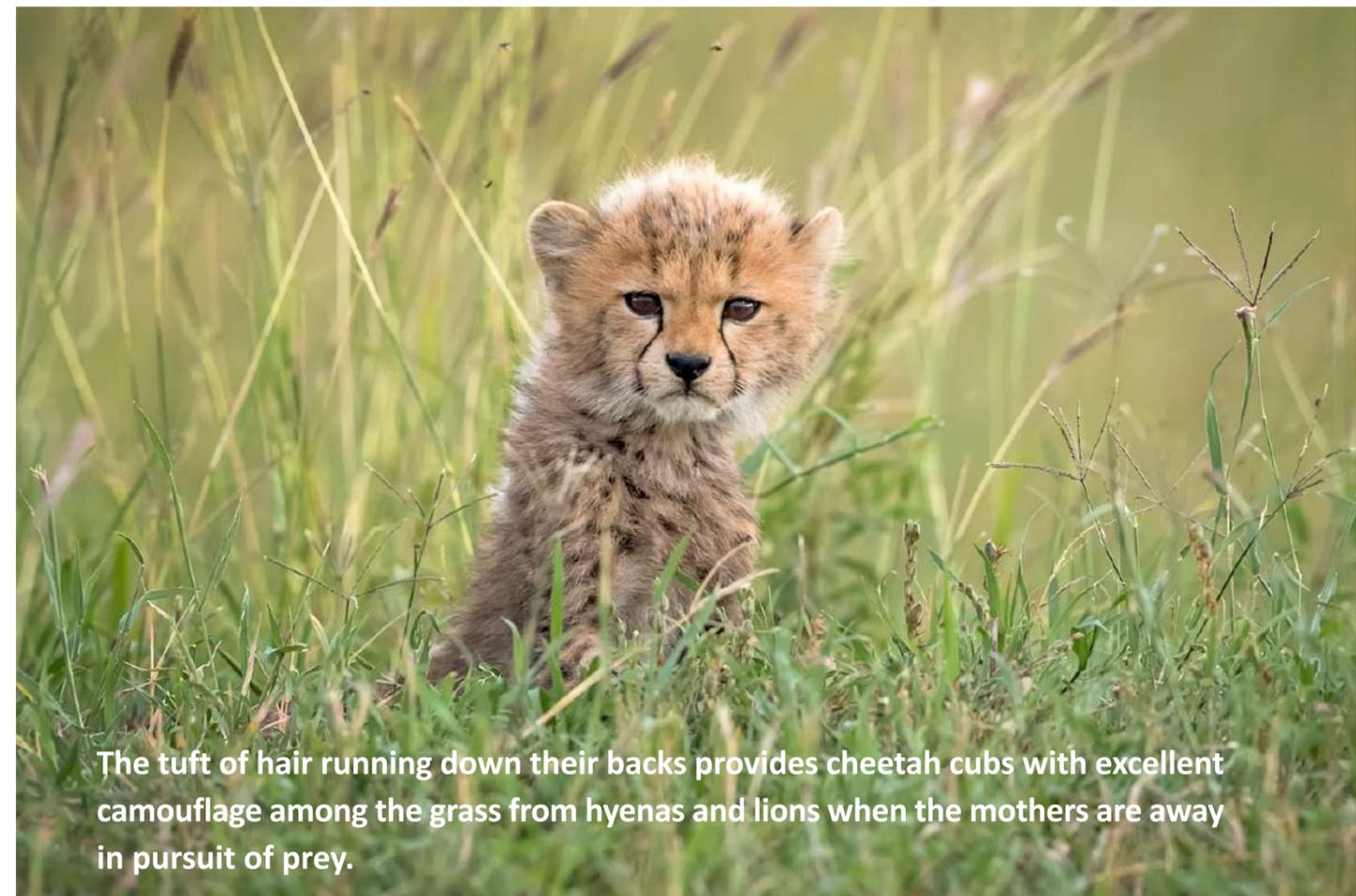
Cubs are born with a mantle of fur running from the back of the neck down to the rump. This aids the cubs in camouflaging in the high grass while they follow their mother from one location to the other and also in hiding effectively in the cover of grass when the mother is away. This clever disguise helps in camouflaging the kittens in the high grass while they are following their mother. This mane like feature begins to disappear at the age of 3 months, but still remains visible at 2 years of age. A new born cub appears medium grey in colour which gradually evolves into the adult colours by the age of 4 months. Once the cubs are 5 months or older they start venturing out a lot more and start practicing the vital skills of stalking, pouncing, sharpening their claws through playful fights and wrestling with their siblings. As they grow older, they closely follow

their mothers during hunts and learn the vital skills needed to bring down preys by watching their mothers in the act. In spite of the mothers' best efforts a vast majority of cubs don't make it beyond the first year of their lives. Cheetah cubs are easy pickings for lions, jackals, birds of prey and hyenas when the mother is away. The lack of genetic diversity also contributes significantly towards the high mortality rate among cheetah cubs. Most cubs are born with weak immune system and often falls prey to various diseases and illnesses. Young cheetahs part ways with their mothers any time between the ages of 15-24 months. Females separate from their brothers once they attain sexual maturity for a solitary life while the brothers usually form a coalition and set about in establishing a territory of their own far away from their mother's territory. Young females often stay closer to home and their territories often overlap with the territory of the mother.

The fastest land animal on the planet is fast heading towards something it would not want to chase; the cheetah already on the brink of extinction is rapidly heading towards extinction. Since ancient times cheetahs have been hunted indiscriminately for its pelt, which was often worn by kings and royalties as a badge of wealth and stature. Cheetahs were a popular choice for kings and nobles as pets too and were kept in large numbers during medieval times. They would often accompany the

kings and nobles in their hunting expeditions and were used to bring down fast moving animals. All of these factors led to a dramatic decrease in the numbers of wild cheetahs. But most recently, human excess is probably the one major factor dramatically pushing the cheetah towards extinction. As human populations increase other species are "squeezed out" - their living space becomes more limited as does their food supply. Many animals feel the pinch and are at great risk of disappearing forever. In 1900 there were only about 100,000 cheetahs left worldwide - present estimates place their number at 7-8 thousand with about 1/10 of those living in captivity. Namibia has the largest population of wild cheetah - about 2500.

Smaller populations exist in Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania while other countries have even fewer. According to the study, more than half the world's surviving cheetahs live in one population that ranges across six countries in southern Africa. Cheetah populations in Asia have been the worst hit. Once widespread across the Middle East and India fewer than 50 individuals remain in Iran presently. Because the cheetah is one of the widest-ranging carnivores, it roams across lands far outside protected areas. Some 77% of their habitat falls outside these parks and reserves. As a result, the animal struggles because these lands are increasingly being developed by farmers and the cheetah's prey is declining



The tuft of hair running down their backs provides cheetah cubs with excellent camouflage among the grass from hyenas and lions when the mothers are away in pursuit of prey.

Cheetah cubs stay with their mothers till the age of 2 years before venturing out on their own. The females lead a solitary life and forge a territory for themselves close to the territory of their mother while the brothers form a coalition for life and carve a niche for themselves far from the territory of their mother.



because of excessive bushmeat hunting. In Zimbabwe, the cheetah population has fallen from around 1,200 to just 170 animals in 16 years, with the main cause being major changes in land tenure. Like other large carnivores, cheetahs face habitat loss driven by conversion of wilderness areas into managed land dedicated to agriculture or livestock. People will then sometimes kill cheetahs if they perceive the animals as a threat to their livestock,

even though cheetahs rarely feed upon domesticated animals.

Some researchers suggest it might already be too late to save the cheetah from extinction in some parts of the world considering their shrinking habitat and rapidly depleting population. Yet they feel there is renewed hope for this animal. The cheetah given its wide range of habitat can be re-introduced to other parts of the

world. Such measures which are long overdue should be implemented in an orderly and scientific fashion in order to provide this animal with even a fighting chance of staging a comeback. The prospect of extinction is extremely real and staring right into the eyes of this animal. If not acted upon with a greater sense of urgency the trademark sprint of this magnificent creature in pursuit of its prey will soon become a thing of the past,



## About the Photographer

**Vinaya Mohan** a resident of Dubai for the past 22 years is burdened with a hectic work schedule. He started out by trying his hands at the basics of photography primarily to cope with the stress of his job. Soon photography took centerstage and since then he has been able to strike the perfect balance between his job and his favorite hobby which has been making him happy and content for the past 10 years. He recalls his trips to Masai Mara, Varanasi and Kamchatka as his favorites. More of his work is available at: <https://1x.com/member/vinayan>

and the natural world will lose one of its superlative being.



# The Mines of Life

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A tribute to the hardworking men and women who toil under extreme conditions and are often left at the mercy of the elements of nature to bring us precious resources like salt and sand.

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by **TEJAL MEWAR**

India ranks third in the world in terms of salt production after the United States of America and China. In India the state of Gujarat alone accounts for almost 77% of the total produce, thereby making it the largest producer of salt in the country. The state's thriving salt industry is reflected in the huge stretches of salt pans and the salt mounds which could be easily mistaken for small hills. Salt production is a thriving business across the state with areas such as the Rann of Kutch, Surat, Porbandar, Valsad, Jamnagar deserving special mentions among others. The small coastal village of Dharasana near the town of Valsad is one such location which offers an insight into Gujarat's salt industry. In

fact Dharasana's tryst with the salt of the earth dates back to the pre independence era. Dharasana was an important landmark during the Salt Satyagraha movement spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi in May, 1930. Traditionally the coastal villages in Gujarat have been producing salt since ages. Perceiving this as a threat to their economic monopoly the British officials introduced taxation on salt production and decreed sea-salt reclamation activities illegal. The ensuing sufferings and oppressions endured by the salt farmers at the hands of the British prompted Mahatma Gandhi to embark upon the 25 day long march known as the Salt March or Dandi March or Dandi Satyagraha



Scenes from the daily lives of the salt farmers in the salt fields of Dharasana.





**The unforgiving elements of nature and an overwhelming reliance on manual labour make salt harvesting one of the most difficult jobs. The workers toil hard for 7-8 hours everyday for a meagre allowance of 300 rupees or even less which barely helps them to make ends meet.**

named after the coastal village of Dandi. The iconic March led by Mahatma Gandhi in which hundreds of people joined forces turned out to be a watershed moment in India's freedom movement. After the completion of the march, Mahatma Gandhi in a token gesture of resistance against the British policies joined hands with farmers in making salt at the village of Dandi. Although popularly known as Dandi March, the journey didn't end at Dandi, instead Mahatma Gandhi continued marching towards the south along the coast. The next stage for protest was set at Dharasana thus thrusting this otherwise quiet little coastal village into the limelight and etching its name in the history of India's long struggle for independence. However Mahatma Gandhi was arrested before he could reach the Dharasana salt fields, which paved the pathway for more brutality by the police and hundreds of more such arrests. Despite the British authorities' best attempts to censor the news of police brutality on non-violent protests detailed and graphic descriptions of such cruel actions appeared in more than a thousand newspapers across the globe. The steel tipped lathis of the police rained barrages of blows on the peaceful protestors turning the ground red with the blood from the mashed skulls of hundreds of people, turning Dharasana a witness to one of darkest chapters in the history of this nation.

The workers work in groups, while some are engaged in scraping salt off of the mud flats and filling up the pans and tubs, the others carry the filled containers on their heads to the nearby mounds.



The salt fields of Dharasana today are a far cry from the bloodied grounds on that fateful day in May 1930. A lot has changed since independence with India becoming the third largest salt producer in the world, however as it was, salt farming still remains one of the most arduous job. Farmers harvest salt from October to June, till the beginning of monsoon. During the

waterlogged spells of Monsoon for three to four months these fields remain submerged in water. Departure of monsoon marks a gradual recession in water level and by mid-October the fields dry up unravelling a rich bounty of salt deposits. The farmers work tirelessly to harvest these deposits day in and day out under a blazing sun, the price of which is hefty.

Exposure to such harsh and scorching conditions leads to a number of ailments which often manifests in the form of multiple lesions on the skin, severe eye problems owing to intense reflections off the whitish surfaces of salt deposits and salt mounds and in some cases even tuberculosis. The conditions worsen during the summer months which also happen to

be the peak season for salt harvesting with temperatures soaring to the higher forties. During this time, they generally start working in the morning by 8 and work till late afternoon. Time is of paramount significance for the farmers since they need to wrap things up before the onset of monsoon and shift the piles of salt and cover them up from the impending heavy

A worker fills up her aluminum pan with a pile of salt before carrying it on her head to the nearby mound.



unforgiving form on a day to day basis to eke out a life which often is devoid of the bare minimum comforts. Often their efforts, their sacrifices, the pain they go through go unnoticed. The privilege we enjoy, manipulates us into taking most things for granted, while the lives of these people plunge into further obscurity. There can be no denying we as a society have turned a blind eye towards these human beings, their voices have remained unheard. If only we can make a pledge to hear these voices and embrace their stories and contribute in our own ways, together we can bring about significant changes to the lives of these people.

spells of rain. While the elements of nature exact a heavy price from the farmers the bare minimum infrastructure they are equipped with doesn't do them any favour either. Most of them either work barefoot or in slippers which do little to protect them from the scorching earth under their feet. Most of the work including lifting the salt piles and other laborious jobs are

done manually. The farmers carry wet salt in aluminum tubs on their heads. It requires herculean efforts from these hardworking people to carry such heavy loads on their heads under such extreme energy sapping conditions. Despite such back breaking efforts most of these people barely make enough to make ends meet. The workers are paid on an hourly basis with the going

rate being rupees 60 to 70 per hour. On an average on any given day these workers earn around 300 rupees per day, meagre returns for such extreme hard work. During the harvest season they set up makeshift shanties which become their only refuge.

These hard working human beings challenge nature in its rawest and most

**R**iverbeds are seemingly endless treasure troves of natural resources. The bounty they offer come in various forms. In the fast growing economic sphere of India, where iconic megastructures and modern day skyscrapers are jostling for space in the cities' skylines the demand for robust construction material is surging with every

passing day. The rivers across the country hide in their depths and on their banks the supplies to these never ending demands. Sand, which forms the bulwark of almost every construction activity, is yet another precious resource which river beds offer to us. Sand mining from river beds is an industry in itself, employing thousands of

people across the country. The Tapi River bank in the city of Surat in Gujarat too is a hotbed for such activities. This story takes a look into the lives of those people responsible for excavating this much needed natural resource from the bed of Tapi River.

The sand workers come from some of the remotest areas of Gujarat as well as several other states who come all the way from far-off places in search of a better livelihood. They set up their camps along the bank of the river. The camps are usually humble set ups, often lacking the basic amenities and necessary access to basic



A typical campsite for the sand mine workers along the bank of Tapi River. The workers dig up sand from the banks of the river and fill up these trucks waiting to carry the sand to a nearby processing plant. The makeshift shanties turn into shelters for these workers during their stay here.



Snippets from the daily lives of sand mine workers along the banks of Tapi River.





The women are burdened with the added responsibilities of taking care of household chores and looking after the children especially the young ones. One such worker takes a break from her work as she attends to her young son.

infrastructure. These shanties made of cheap materials barely hold out against the elements of nature. Yet the workers and their entire families including young children often spend more than a year at a stretch in these makeshift set ups. The job of mining sand and transferring it is a laborious and physically demanding job, since most of the tasks are carried out

manually. Men and women both take equal part in these tasks. The workers with the help of their spades and shovels dig loose sand from the river bed and fill up the metal pans which are then carried by other set of workers from the banks to the trucks parked nearby waiting to transport sand to some nearby facility. Both the tasks of mining sand and carrying the wet sand

filled pans on their heads to the trucks are physically demanding and an eight to nine hour workday is bound to push the physical abilities of the human body to its very limit. Although primarily strength based job, the workforce comprises of a healthy representation of both the genders, in equal proportion. Women workers, while doing this tough job, demonstrate

tremendous physical strength and breaking all gender stereotypes reiterate that they are certainly at par with the men in every department. In addition to that, the women workers take up the added responsibility of performing various household chores such as cooking, looking after the kids. Like it is with any other job, time is of essence here. A team of 7-8 workers load up an entire truck within just half an hour. They take a much needed break before they start with another truck loading. Women workers use this time to look after their children or spend time with them.

The children growing up in these camps seem far removed from the modern day electronic world. Completely oblivious to the presence of smartphones or laptops and the myriad offerings of the digital world, the children make the most of whatever little comes their way. The sandy pits or the river banks thus turn into fierce battleground for a game of football, or an intense contest of kabaddi or any other traditional outdoor sport. It is quite amazing how these young people along with their parents in spite of not having access to the modern day luxuries or facilities go about their daily lives in such content manner. Yet there can be no denying a lot more needs to be done, collectively, on part of the civil society as well as the authorities to provide these hardworking people with better lives. Many aspects of their lives need to be looked into and looked after starting from



**This lady in between her work shifts manages to squeeze time out to prepare the afternoon meal.**



**Life in these makeshift camps is not easy, especially for the young children, who are often deprived of any access to the basic infrastructure including education. Yet somehow they seem to make the most of whatever little comes their way, the kids can be often seen indulging in various outdoor games where the heaps of sand turn into their playground. The mothers keep an eye on them while attending to the household chores such as preparing meals in their makeshift kitchens.**

policies involving better payments, better living conditions, quick access to better infrastructure and most importantly the children growing up in this environment should not be deprived of their basic rights including education. There can be no quick fix solution to these problems plaguing their lives, it will require meticulous and methodical planning and at the same time precise and prompt implementation, and the responsibilities lie with all of us. The toil, sweat and blood of these resilient individuals ensure our comforts, our safety, the time is ripe for all of us to express our gratitude to these amazing human beings.



A family of sand workers in one of the camp sites along the banks of River Tapi.



The quiet, unassuming and hardship laden lives of these people unfold in these makeshift camps along the banks of the river year after year. There has been little or no change in the lives of these people, who still live off meagre earnings and often struggle to make ends meet. The conditions in which they live in and work are far from ideal. It truly is a shame that people who provide us with the basic materials for our dream homes themselves struggle to keep the roof on top of them intact.



## About the Photographer

Tejal Mewar is a government officer involved in exports promotion of textiles in Gujarat, India. For her photography started out as a hobby in 2014. She likes capturing candid moments on streets, the people and their daily lives. She is

also interested in nature and fine art photography. Some of her works have been recognized at the national and international level. Her photographs have been showcased a number of times and published worldwide. By her own

admission photography has brought about a lot of changes in her life and attitude. Photography has boosted her self-confidence, nurtured patience and brought about a lot of positivity in her life. In conclusion she adds- "Camera is a

wondrous tool that you may freeze beautiful moments of life with. And I am so glad I learned this."

# Wild *Gurudongmar*

The story of Gurudongmar Lake and the amazing creatures who brave some of the brutal elements of nature everyday and call this harsh landscape their home.

by Pratik Humnabadkar

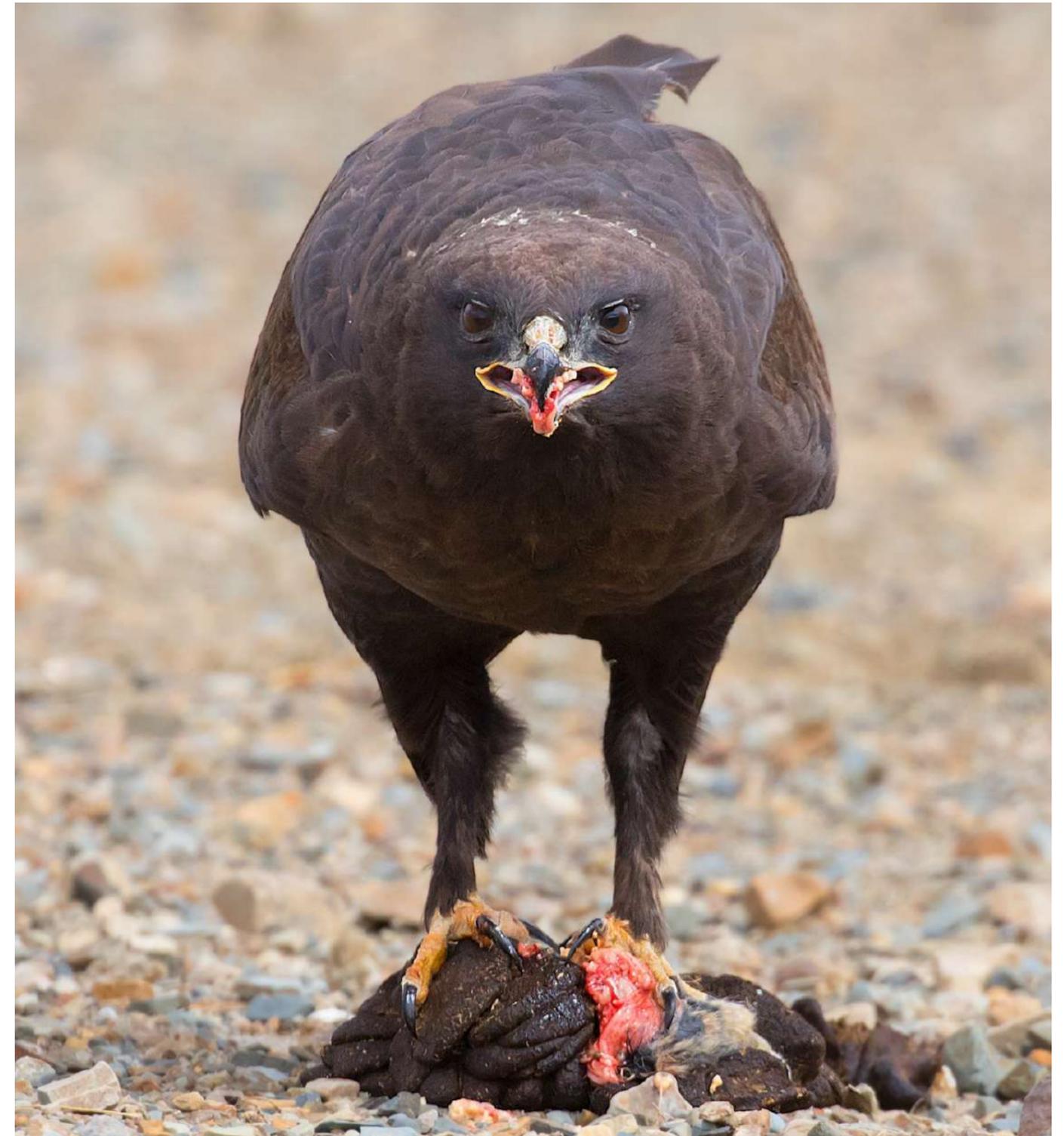


Sikkim, the mighty Himalayas' very own, its beloved is truly a special place, an almost heavenly abode where century old monasteries perched on mountain tops overlook beautiful hamlets nestled in the laps of the Himalayas, where the landscape transforms dramatically with the changing seasons, a place where natural beauty still lies unadulterated in every nook and corner. This darling of the Himalayas has for generations lured people from all over the world into its magical realms, those who fell prey to this hypnotic charm consider it to be one of finest and the most magical experiences of their lives.

Among the countless places of interest in the state and sites of natural beauty, Gurudongmar Lake deserves a special mention. Located at an altitude of almost 18,000 feet Gurudongmar Lake happens to be one of the highest lakes in the world. Located in the northern part of Sikkim the lake is 190 kilometres away from Gangtok, the capital city of the state. It lies in the north side of the Khangchengyao Range surrounded on all sides by snow clad mountains that tower above everything else in the vicinity as ever so vigilant sentinels of the lake. The lake barely a few kilometres away from the Chinese-Tibetan border is a place of great religious significance for the local people too. Locals believe the water of the lake possesses magical powers of healing and blessing couples with the gift of children. According to legend Guru Padmasambhava, a spiritual

leader for the Tibetan people blessed a portion of this lake so that it doesn't freeze even during winters thereby providing fresh drinking water to the villagers. This legend has greatly contributed towards the sacred identity which Gurudongmar Lake has developed. There is another narrative, albeit contentious, which suggests Guru Nanak Dev Ji too passed through this lake during his return from Tibet and he too blessed these deep waters. Despite the scepticism regarding the authenticity of these narratives there can be no denying the lake and its waters hold a very special place among the hearts of the local people and they revere these waters.

The picturesque settings, the mythical aura surrounding its waters and a feeling of deep reverence among the locals have elevated the Gurudongmar Lake to iconic status which brings to its fold thousands of tourists from all over the world each year. Surprisingly there is another largely lesser explored aspect of Gurudongmar Lake. The lake and its surrounding have carefully preserved these little secrets in their mountainous realms all this while, a surprisingly rich bounty of wildlife. At a casual first glance the rocky terrain leading up to the lake and the one which largely dominates the topography of this region seems inhospitable. However a closer look begins to reveal the wide range of creatures which have made these almost barren mountain slopes their homes for centuries now. The terrain of this region resembles



**The upland buzzard is a bird of prey residing at higher elevations. These raptors feed on small mammals, smaller birds and insects. They frequently feed on the pika which are widespread in this region. Strong and sharp reflexes and an excellent vision help these birds of prey to spot and track their prey from great heights at which they keep hovering in search of a potential meal on the ground or in the air.**



The little owl is a small bird with a flat head, a plump, compact body and a short tail. At Gurudongmar they can be found perched on top of the houses abandoned by shepherds. They can be often seen perched on top of piles of yak dung like here. Their spotted appearance helps them to camouflage exceedingly well with the surroundings.



The robin accentor is a native to the high altitude mountainous regions. Both the sexes are similar in appearance and have the slender sharply pointed beak typical of an insect-eating bird.

The white rumped snow finch is a member of the sparrow family and a rarity in this region. It feeds mainly on small seeds and insects. While in flight due to its colouration it appears like a bright white dot. These birds can be often found among flocks of larks.





The snow pigeon is another high altitude resident which can be found in this region. They prefer the rocky cliffs of the mountains for roosting.

that of a quintessential cold desert, with the entire region receiving very little rainfall. As a result of this the region is devoid of vegetation, small scrubs are found scattered all over the place but the lack of any dense or large scale vegetation is obvious at one glance. The lake, fed by glaciers, is located to the north of the Kangchengyao range, in a high plateau

area connected with the Tibetan Plateau. It provides one of the source for streams which join the Tso Lahmu and then form the source of the Teesta River. The lake remains completely frozen in the winter months, from November to Mid-May, during the summer months the lake and the narrow streams emerging out of it provide the essential supply of drinking

water to this region's wildlife. The place is a haven for some of the unique and stand-out high altitude species found on this planet. A variety of birds have carved a niche for themselves in this rocky domain. The commonly found species include the excellent hunter, the upland buzzard. Known to be resident of high altitude zones the upland buzzard blessed

with its tremendous eyesight like most birds of prey has the uncanny knack of picking up the smallest of its prey in the rocky crevices of the mountains while it soars high above in the sky. The little owl too appears perfectly at home in this environment, they prefer abandoned yak sheds or homes of the shepherd for shelters. The finches namely the white-rumped snowfinch and Brandt's mountain finch, members of the sparrow family have developed mechanisms which enable them to thrive in this cold and dry climate. The Brandt's mountain finch can be more commonly found than its cousins. These birds can often be found in large flocks with each flock consisting of 90-100 individuals. These birds share this habitat with some of their relatives such as the plain mountain-finch, the rufous necked finch.

In spite of the rich avifauna this region successfully piques the interest of naturalists for some of the rarest and most unique mammals which are found in these rocky slopes. These mountains have been home to the ever so elusive Tibetan wolf for hundreds of centuries now. The Tibetan wolf is a subspecies of the gray wolf. It is found in northern and north-eastern parts of India. The Tibetan wolf lives in high altitude mountainous regions and almost never ventures into the low lying human settlements down the slopes of these mountains. Yet reports of conflicts with humans emerge when the wolves attack

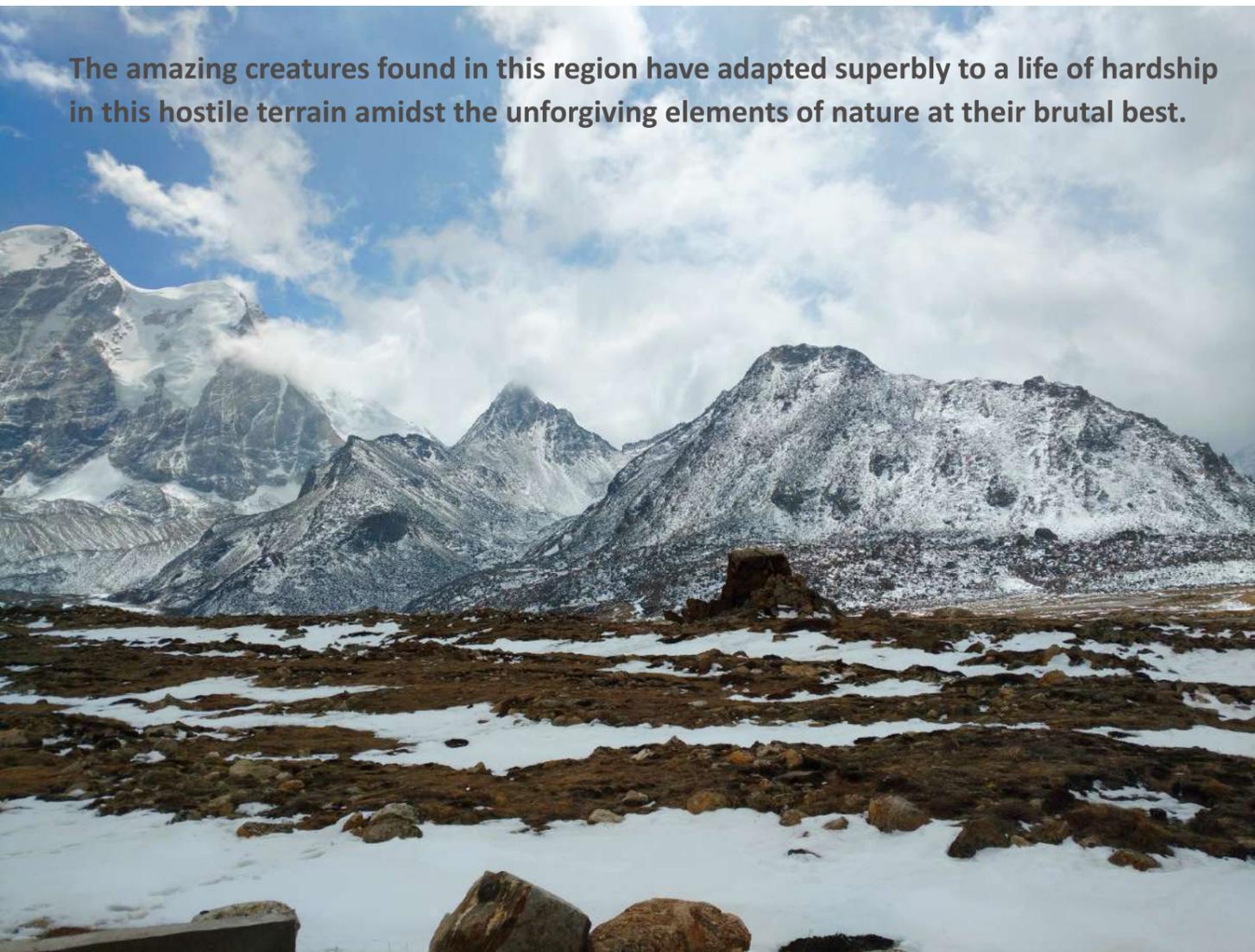
their livestock while they are out grazing particularly during winter months when the greener pastures deplete often restricting them to smaller pockets and the intense weather conditions force the wolves along with other animals to climb down the slopes to a lesser altitude. These wolves hunt either during the day or at night, either in a pack or alone. Their diet consists of deer, blue sheep, and any other large animal they can catch. But when food is hard to come by particularly during the winter months, they rely on smaller animals such as mice, squirrels, other smaller rodents and the widespread pika.

The Tibetan sand fox or the Tibetan fox

is another widespread mammal found in these rugged mountains. The cold desert of Gurudongmar provides the perfect habitat for these endemic foxes. Tibetan foxes are small and compact, with soft, dense coats and conspicuously narrow muzzles and bushy tails. Their short stout limbs help them in maintaining their balance while climbing up or down these rocky rugged terrains. They primarily feed on pika, marmots and other rodents however don't let go of an opportunity to scavenge on a deserted or unattended carcass of a larger animal.

The Tibetan gazelle is another species endemic to the Tibetan plateau. These

**The amazing creatures found in this region have adapted superbly to a life of hardship in this hostile terrain amidst the unforgiving elements of nature at their brutal best.**



**Frozen Gurudongmar Lake during winter.**



relatively small antelopes prefer these high altitude slopes of mountains where they can be usually found in small herds unlike other antelopes. This could be attributed to the scattered vegetation in the form of small scrubs in this region. It is believed a small population of these antelopes is scattered around this region in the northern reaches of Sikkim.

A region with such a plethora of wild species is bound to attract hordes of naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts from all over the world. The best way to document the behaviour of any wild species in its natural habitat is through scientific documentation and it goes without saying photographic evidence

by far plays the biggest role in that documentation. However the hostile attitude of the elements of nature which dominate this region towards us rather delicate human beings, pose significant challenges for any such documentation. The politically tensed equation between India and China and the bad blood flowing in this relationship over issues related to Tibet do not make things any easier either.

The entire region is under the watchful eyes of the Indian Army, which means people outside of the army establishment are granted entry to this region with appropriate paperwork only for a few hours. The fickle nature of this region's

The Tibetan Wolf a sub-species of the gray wolf is the apex predator in this region. Although some reports of snow leopard sighting surfaced in 2016 a healthy population of snow leopards is yet to be ascertained. The Tibetan wolf can be either a social animal as well as lead a solitary existence.



The Tibetan gazelle also known as Goa is a rather small antelope with stout legs built for climbing up and down the rugged slopes of these mountains. Unlike other antelopes the Tibetan gazelle prefers to live in smaller herds comprising of 5-6 individuals. A small population of these animals is said to exist along the northern reaches of Sikkim.





**Pikas are small mammals which can be found in high altitude zones at an altitude of around 17,000 feet or more. Pikas construct burrows along the slopes and valleys for shelter, such burrows can be found every 5 feet at Gurudongmar. They primarily feed on grass, shrubs, twigs and moss. Pikas are found in large numbers in and around Gurudongmar earning them a permanent spot in the diet of most predators found in this region.**

climate makes things unpredictable; a bright sunny morning unlike in many other parts of the world doesn't always set the tone for the rest of the day. The early morning sunshine often makes way for heavy spells of rain or snow within a matter of hours. In winters sub-zero temperatures in the region of -10 to -15 degrees Celsius accompanied by bone chilling gusts of wind are common occurrences and the lack of oxygen in the air at such a high altitude are all but normal for this region. This region before revealing its wild gems to outsiders makes it a point to test their mettle, their grit and conviction; it in a way is nature's way of selecting the deserving one before unravelling its treasure to that person. There are no easy ways to overcome these steep obstacles. Meticulous planning and preparation is absolutely critical to achieve any kind of success. Observing wild animals in their natural domain requires a lot of patience and often means exposing oneself to the harsh and unforgiving elements of nature for hours at a stretch, a job not ideally suited for the faint hearted.

The biodiversity of this region surrounding the Gurudongmar Lake in north Sikkim is one among the many gems which the natural world holds close to its heart. This region is still a safe haven for all these species remarkably adapted to call these treacherous slopes and crevices their home. Despite the rugged appearances, the sturdy and incredibly resilient species which

inhabit these slopes, the balance of nature still remains fragile. All it takes is a little shift to affect the entire eco-system and everything that is a part of it. There is a looming fear the same might happen to this region as well with the ever increasing human activities mostly in the form of tourism developments. Natural wonders such as the Gurudongmar in all its glory and with all of its subjects is a thing of joy for all of us, we all would like to witness that magic with our own eyes, yet it becomes our duty, our obligation to do so without jeopardising the fragile nature of its eco-system. If we let our zealousness get the better of us by compromising any regards towards nature, this little piece of natural wonder will soon head towards oblivion like the fate suffered by so many before it.

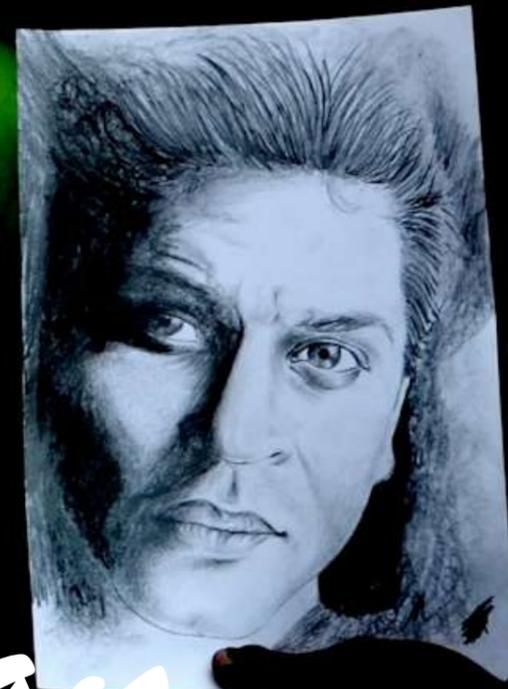
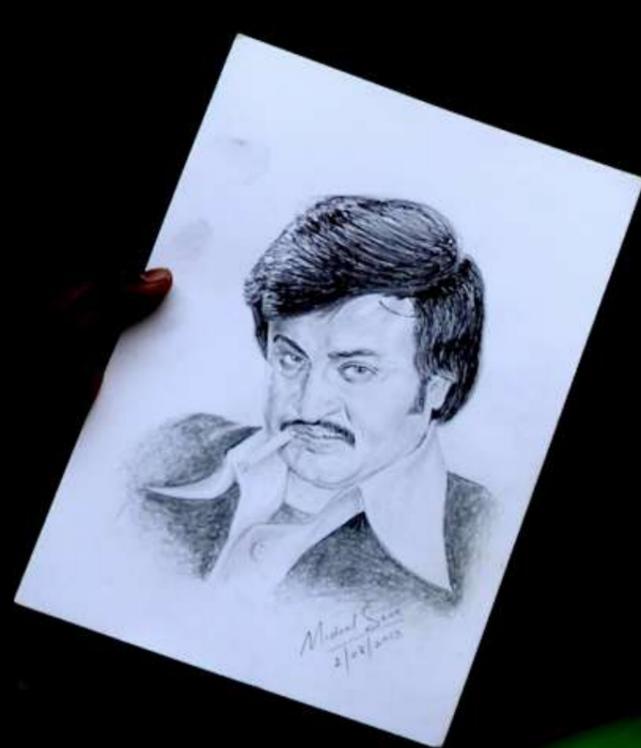


The cold desert of Gurudongmar provides the perfect habitat for the Tibetan foxes which are endemic to this region. These are small and compact animals with sturdy limbs ideally suited for this rugged terrain. The soft dense coat protects them from the extreme winter during which temperatures go down to -15 or even -20 degree Celsius. They can be easily identified by their narrow muzzles and broad head. The Tibetan fox primarily feeds on smaller mammals such as pika, marmots even smaller birds.



## About the Photographer

Pratik Humnabadkar, a Masters in Computer Application is a passionate wildlife photographer who has been pursuing his passion for wildlife photography since the past 5 years. He is currently focussed on contributing his materials to various national and international platforms. Several of his works have been published in renowned newspapers, magazines, competitions and websites. In the genre of wildlife photography he is a bit partial towards bird photography because of the unique set of challenges which comes with it. For bird photography he has travelled to different parts of India, often exposed himself to extreme conditions and even damaged his equipment while negotiating treacherous landscapes. However his passion for telling the tales from the wild keeps him going with the sole agenda of making this world a safer place for these amazing creatures all around us.



# The Leaf Man

The amazing journey of an incredible human being who defied all odds to carve an interesting title for himself in a colony in Delhi.

by Ajay Kumar

It is often said passion resides in the humblest of places, often hiding itself from the popular glare, leading the life of a recluse only to step out in the open to grab the attention of the world after years of honing. The journey is often a story of hostile adversities with the single agenda of clipping the wings of passion even before the first flight, a story of scepticism, a story of falling short despite the best efforts on countless occasions. Yet passion lives on, refusing to give up like a stubborn kid in the relentless pursuit of the ice-cream man, the kind of obsession which at times makes one look stupid, yet passion always stays unperturbed and unwavering.

The story of Michael Sam and his passion for artwork is quite similar to this. Michael Sam is a resident of the Kanak Durga Colony Sector 12 RK. Puram, New Delhi. There is nothing spectacular about the neighbourhood, the narrow by-lanes, the small balconies where clothes hung to dry jostle for space, the tiny courtyards turned cricket grounds where fiercely contested games of cricket or other sports offer the neighbourhood kids their first tryst with stardom are the common scenes which pan out in any middle-class or lower middle class neighbourhood across the cities in the country. Yet there is something, rather someone who gives this otherwise regular middle-class neighbourhood a distinct identity. And that someone is the aforementioned Michael Sam and his identity as the “Leaf Man” is something



Michael Sam displays the portrait of a baby which he made on a dried leaf. Creations such as this earned him the title of “Leaf Man” in the neighbourhood.

which the entire neighbourhood wears proudly on its mantle. The man with a burning passion for his artwork got this unique identity by dint of his unique art form. Leaves happen to be his favourite form of canvasses for showcasing his craftsmanship. Talent doesn't care much for a person's socio-economic status or

the privileges one is born with, it may elude the most privileged at the same time may make its home in the heart and mind of the least fortunate. Such has been the case with Michael Sam. His talent and burning passion for his craft almost compelled him to seek out ways to add colours to his dreams and aspirations. And

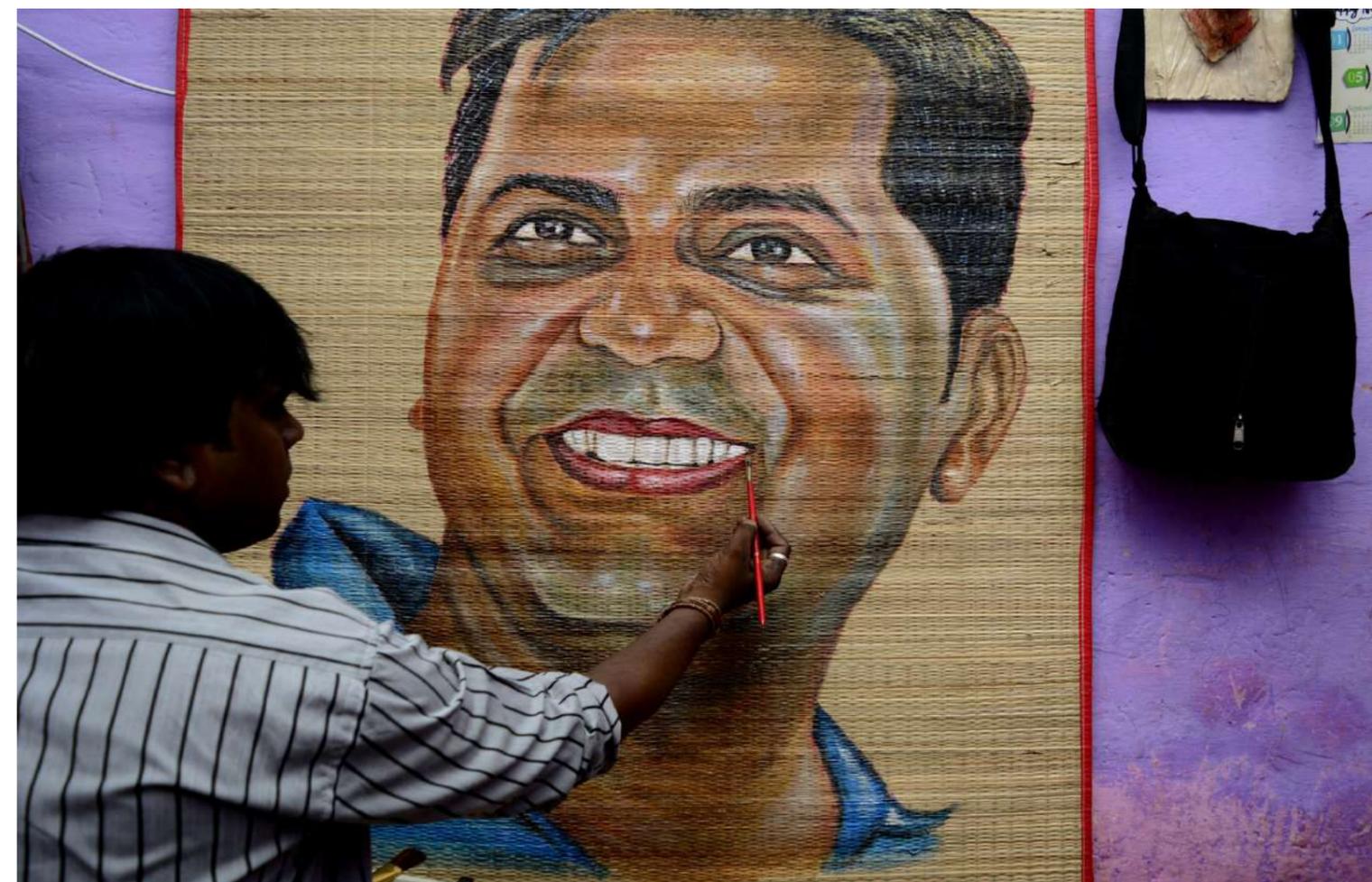
the journey was never smooth sailing. There was a time when in order to make ends meet and nurture his passion he used to work almost 24 hours a day, starting with his day job at a call-centre followed by his nocturnal stint as a security guard. Equipped with no formal education in this field of art since his humble origins never



Apart from leaves, Michael Sam uses a wide range of materials including discarded plastic bottles or other items found in the garbage as canvass for his artwork. He often sells the finished artworks to nearby curator shops or sell them to interested customers. Many of his artworks have found a place in the shelves of many drawing rooms across the city. Those which remain unsold he keeps them for himself which can be seen adorning the walls of his apartment.

allowed him such luxury, the man armed with his dreams and a few brushes and bottles of paint, results of working those long hours at his two jobs set about fulfilling his long cherished dream of becoming an artist.

Contrary to what the title of “Leaf Man” given to him suggests his artwork is not only restricted to the surfaces of leaves, instead his excellent brush strokes often turn the average piece of junk in the form of discarded or torn clothing, plastic junk, abandoned machine parts, utensils of daily use into specimens of art. There is more to his endeavours than just creating pieces of art; he makes a deliberate attempt to spread and raise awareness with regards to protecting the environment. It all begins





**Michael Sam with his colour palate and his hard earned collection of brushes. The incredible journey of this man, from a humble origin which didn't allow him the freedom to pursue his dreams to his irrepressible conviction which led him to take up two jobs on a daily basis to support his passion is one of inspiration and grit and deserves a much wider audience, far beyond the reaches of the Kanak Durga colony of Delhi.**

with his choice of canvass; he makes a conscious attempt to scrape together non-degradable scraps of plastic garbage with the agenda of turning them into something beautiful and useful through his art. These greatly hazardous materials choking the environment get a new coat of life through his masterly brush strokes and often find their way to the shelves of a curator's shop or ends up decorating somebody's drawing room. On the odd occasion when he is unable to sell them he carefully preserves them which is evident from the countless pieces of various artworks adorning the walls of his apartment.

Michael Sam has come a long way in realising his long cherished dream, overcoming countless obstacles and hardships. There are of course much celebrated, many widely known artists, maybe Michael Sam is not one among them. But there cannot be an iota of doubt regarding his love and never ending passion. A self-made man, Michael Sam with his handwork, determination and sheer will has defied all odds and is realising his dreams every-day, one artwork at a time. Maybe that day is not far away when the "Leaf Man" of Kanak Durga Colony will come to be known as the "Leaf Man" of India, or maybe he will transcend the geographical boundaries and establish a global identity, there is no harm in dreaming, ask Michael Sam, he knows about it all too well.



Michael Sam holds up one his finished artwork.

Michael Sam with his family members and his artworks in his Kanak Durga Colony apartment.





Colours, colour palate, brushes and most importantly his burning passion are the tools which shape Michael Sam's dreams everyday.



## About the Photographer

Ajay Kumar is a graduate in B.A (History) Honours. Currently he is pursuing Diploma in Photojournalism from the esteemed Indian newspaper Punjab Kesari. Photography is not only his passion or profession, instead he considers photography to be an integral part of his life. In fact his passionate outlook towards photography becomes evident when he says that he considers the camera to be a part of his body. He makes sure, there is a story in every photograph he takes, and each of those stories should be able to tell a tale of their own.

# Burrabazar Street Holi

by Kaushik Dutta



**B**urrabazar, the trading hub in the heart of Kolkata deals with a plethora of items ranging from clothing to invitation cards for various occasions, has a deep seated association with Holi, the festival of colours celebrated with much pomp and grandeur across the whole of India. In the weeks

leading to the festival, the Burrabazar lanes line up with shops dealing with items exclusive to the festival starting from gulaal the coloured powder to the various traditional sweets whose demands surge to astronomic proportions during this time of the year. Burrabazar itself has its very

own way of ushering in the festivities. The festivities begin fairly early for the non-Bengali community of this region. A week prior to the festivities begin an idol of Radha-Krishna is brought to a nearby temple. The ceremonies go on for a week which include offering prayers to the deity

and performing various rituals. A week later, one day prior to the festival of Holi, the idol is carried back in a much celebrated procession amidst much fanfare. This procession can be an absolute delight to any bystander. The idol of Radha-Krishna is carried in a furnished vintage car and is accompanied by hundreds of people taking part in this procession. Staying true to the looming spirits of Holi, the procession is a colourful occasion, with coloured powder or gulaal sprayed in profusion along the way. Songs and dance too form an important aspect of this procession. This photo series highlights some of the glimpses from this colourful procession, encompassing the fervour and enthusiasm with which people take part in this journey.

The idol of Radha-Krishna being carried away in a vintage Rolls-Royce car from the temple as the procession rolls out.





The procession witnesses participation from people belonging to different age groups. For all these jovial faces taking part in this procession Holi arrives one day earlier. The procession passes through some of the iconic locations across the city such as the Howrah Bridge as can be seen in these photographs.



Rituals have always formed an integral part of this event as can be seen here. A person carries a saucer containing the different ingredients for a particular ritual.



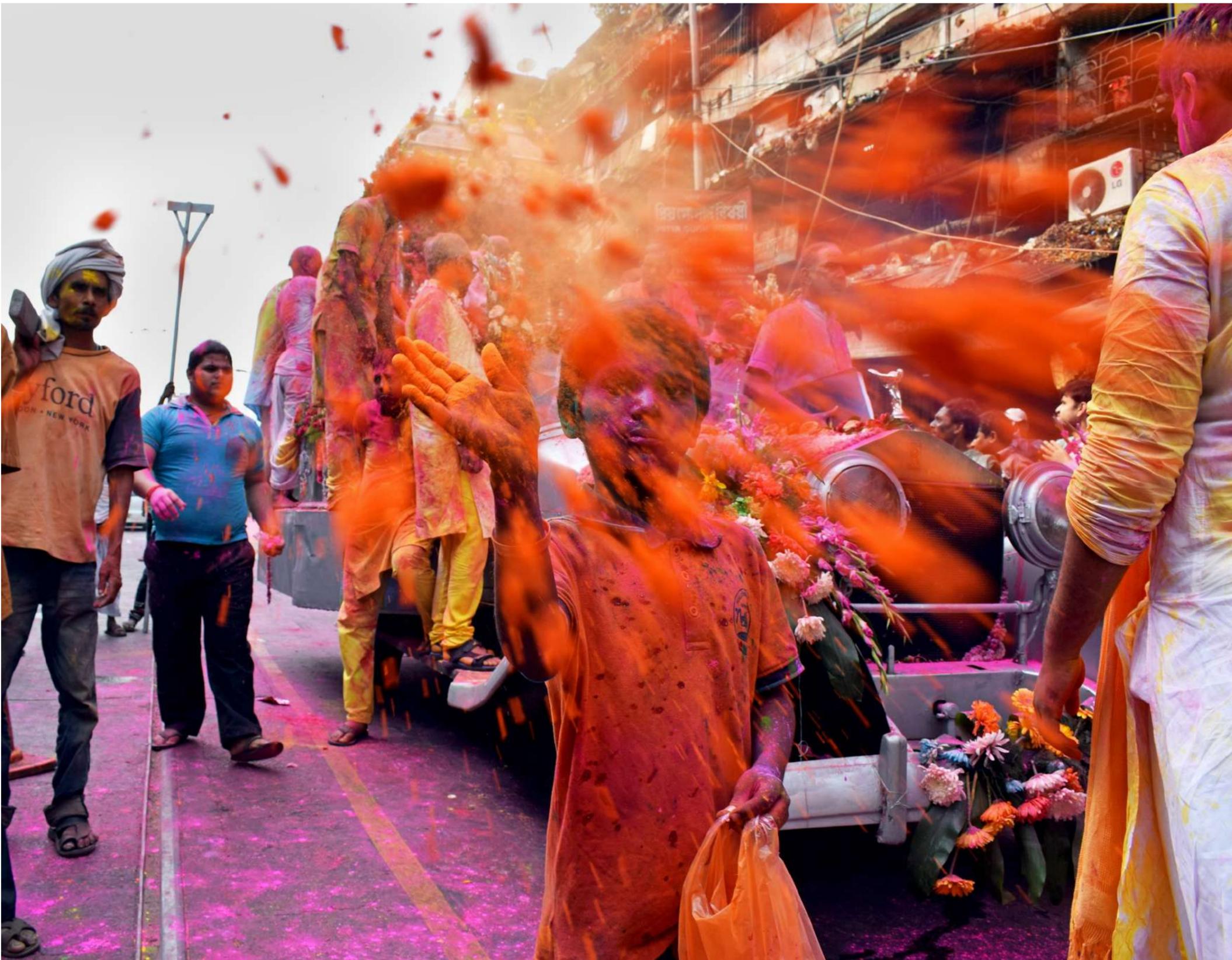
Song and dance routines form an integral part of this event making it a truly joyous occasion for everyone taking part in it.





The abundance of powdered colours particularly the colour pink is unmistakable during this procession.





The entire route taken by the procession is sprayed with gulaal, the coloured powder. Everyone taking part in this procession gets smeared in colours, this event truly sets the tone for Holi.



## About the Photographer

Kaushik Dutta, a student started his photography journey 10 months ago with a FUJI HS28 EXR which he bought with his own pocket money. Since then his love for photography has only grown. Despite not receiving much support from his family he stayed true to his love for photography and soon figured photography was like a breath of fresh air for him. Streets and their people have always captivated his attention, hence he started photographing them. These days he is focusing his energy to improve his work in the genres of street and travel photography. He closely follows the work of other eminent photographers, the likes of Mr. Raj Sarkar and Mr. Koushik Sinha Roy. Currently he is working as a photojournalist for a bengali news daily.

# Reader's Section |

Featuring the best entries made by our readers.  
Mail us at: [submission.ipa@gmail.com](mailto:submission.ipa@gmail.com)

July 2018



Photograph by  
Ajit Kumar Majhi





Photograph by  
Debarchan  
Chatterjee





Photograph by  
Mandar Shikhar Mandal



Photograph by  
Ratnadeep Mitra

