

# camerawork delhi

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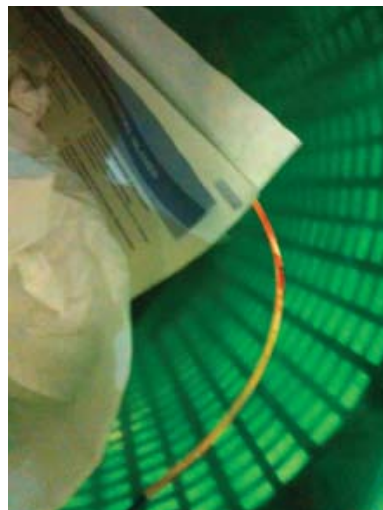
"Ah (a sigh) #3", 2009, found photograph on canvas on board, candles, hot glue, screws, ht. 90" x w. 96" © Anita Dube

"If photography can reveal to us not only Truth but Beauty, it is certainly unnecessary to explain further an affection for it..." Robert Adams, 1976





LabAid\_Dhaka\_Mar19



LabAid\_Dhaka\_CentrallineRemoved\_Mar21

# Kingdom

by Naeem Mohaiemen



DhakaAirport\_Apr23

Partheeb pointed at the Lowepro bag, “Ore baba, new camera? *Amader bhat marben to.*” I rearranged my face into a wan smile. “*Bhai*, why should I steal your *bhat*. I’m not an agency photographer.” “Still when they see your gear...” and then the familiar Tri-Tone interrupted. “Yes, hello?” taking out his iPhone, a smooth client service cadence took over.

I exchanged a look with Zaid. All that techno one-downmanship and he was carrying an iPhone (\$800 unlocked from Singapore) and much better camera gear in his own bag. These are a familiar and tedious part of the Dhaka scene. Debates about equipment, a boys’ own club of tekka mara. Mixed in with some faux class-warfare (“you probably don’t take the bus very often”). Beating his chest about the struggle to buy a 5D. In exchange, what? Affirmative action? Southern Eye quota? Please...

I remembered this exchange later, much later. My back jammed against the bathroom door so nurses couldn’t walk in. Holding up a CT scan to the bathroom light, trying to take a shot on my mobile phone, tilting the film to avoid the light. At every angle, there was a ghostly tungsten blob coming through. Competing with the white mass already in the scan (the fluid enveloping father’s lung).

If you followed my online diary over this tunnel period, you know part of the story. My father, a military doctor, became trapped in a medical nightmare. During emergency quadruple bypass surgery, doctors accidentally “nicked” his thoracic duct. Panicked at the prospect of being blamed for negligence, the staff at Lab Aid went into bunker mode. Father lay in bed insisting that the fluid they were draining (900 ml a day) was too thick to be serous. It had to be chyle, indicating a broken duct.

The family believed abba, surgeon from a time before a thicket of diagnostic tests. Facing a wall of hospital politics, which wouldn’t even allow us to make copies of test results, I went into undercover documentation mode. At night,

when nurses nodded off, I took the new results-- CTs, X-rays, blood tests-- and photographed everything on my phone (the only device I could smuggle in easily). Sometimes the ghost blob persisted, or my hands shook, or the nurse came into the room, or father called for the urinal. Ten tries to get one image.

Then a rush home to email photographs to a Doctor cousin in New York, who would consult with friends, and then call me to describe what he saw. Not your eyes, mine. Time zone differences helped. Finally, certain about the “nick”, we escaped Lab Aid Dhaka and flew to India. New hospital (with its’ own problems), new doctors, a new procedure. Video assisted thoracoscopy-- camera through a tube and perforation, because a full thoracotomy would be impossible to survive (father said, “We used to call thoracotomy the ‘bloody operation’ because there was so much blood loss”).

Every night I continued to photograph-- fluid color, machine readings, albumen bottle, albumen allergy wrist-band, wounds that split open, feet swollen from edema, tongue dried out from lasix. It was not a catharsis diary, but actually shared diagnostic. Each time photos went online, someone somewhere wrote to help. A place to stay, a wheelchair at the airport ramp, a friendly call at the FRRO office, a blood donor. Scratch that, many blood donors (thank you). A loan, a book, a sim, a call.

Months later, when abba was back home and able to do a steady walk, I took a new photo and uploaded. Zaid called me up, “It’s so grainy, what’s going on?”

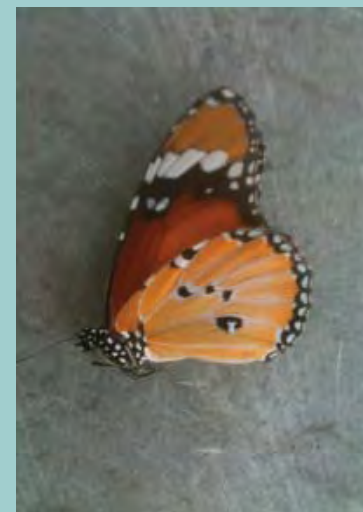
“You expect better than this on a mobile?”  
“Mobile, *ai hai koi ki...*”

He had been tracking the diary, and presuming I was on a “proper” camera the whole time. I laughed. Remember that Lowepro bag, haven’t touched it since February. Sixty days, four hospitals. The isolation of hospital stays are “little deaths”. Images were also a way to penetrate the walls, connect with people outside, mark time, be useful, ask questions, stay sane.

One afternoon, I was lying on the ground outside Apollo Delhi. The fourth hospital, I was at the end of my stamina. If I could just grab a minute of sleep, I would be alert for the evening shift... Halfway through the nap, a familiar face floated into focus. Gauri had come to visit. She talked for a long time about similar experiences.

By now, I could rattle off statistics about central lines, sepsis risk, meropenem dose. But it was nice to just listen and switch off the emergency call button. I told her I couldn’t taste food right now. I wanted to wake up.

In the Delhi heat, outside the hospital, I found a dead butterfly. It felt like an omen, until I took a snap.

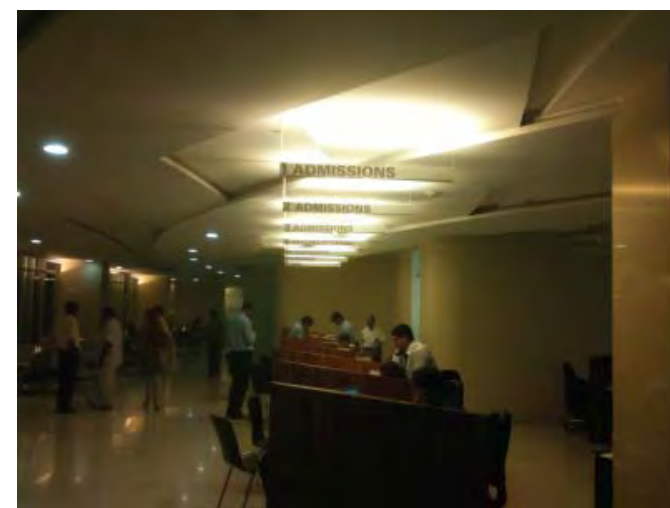


Medanta\_Gurgaon\_Apr11



Medanta\_Gurgaon\_Apr19

Naeem Mohaiemen’s projects on militarization in Bangladesh include gallery-based installations such as “My Mobile Weighs a Ton” ([mobileton.wordpress.com](http://mobileton.wordpress.com)) and the book “Between Ashes and Hope: Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism” ([drishtipat.org/dpwriters/cht](http://drishtipat.org/dpwriters/cht)). [[naeem.mohaiemen@gmail.com](mailto:naeem.mohaiemen@gmail.com)]



Medanta\_Gurgaon\_Checkin\_Mar31



GoingToApollo\_Delhi\_April 6



Medanta\_Gurgaon\_Apr19



Dhanmondi\_May24





Ayehsa Jatoi, Clothesline

## Photo Pakistan by Hammad Nasar

With the *Resemble Reassemble* exhibition at the Devi Art Foundation, Rashid Rana's following among India's 'arterati', and Bani Abidi's recent solo exhibition in Mumbai, an Indian audience may be forgiven for thinking that the photography scene in Pakistan is a bustling, booming affair.

For those seeking to generalise, a little contextual warning. Photography in Pakistan remains a medium with little local institutional support or significant collector base. In the absence of regular public exhibition programmes, commercial galleries have played an important role in supporting the nascent contemporary art scene. But until very recently, most have been reluctant to show photographs in a market that places a high premium on the uniqueness of an artwork.

This is changing slowly. Most major art schools now have functional photography departments. Pakistan's first photo-based gallery – Photospace – opened in Karachi. And the veteran photographer Arif Mahmood runs the White Star photo agency in a manner where he is developing as many photographers as photographs. But the biggest vector of change is the increased interest in photography by a new generation of visual artists. This has increased the opportunities for the display and circulation of images by photographers coming from all backgrounds. This greater visibility has resulted in the inclusion of photo-based work in recent international exhibitions, most prominently, *Where Three Dreams Cross* at London's Whitechapel Gallery and the Fotomuseum Winterthur.

I want to flag two more opportunities to get a glimpse of Pakistan's burgeoning photo-based talent. Firstly, the artist Naiza Khan is curating a large-scale exhibition at Karachi's

Mohatta Palace Museum – *The Rising Tide* – with an emphasis on the photographic. Also check out Granta's new Pakistan issue (<http://www.granta.com/Magazine/112>). It is from Green Cardamom's visual essay for Granta (*High Noon*) that I would like to end this piece, by sharing two images with you.

Ayesha Jatoi's arresting image, which almost got her arrested, is a record of a performative act of resistance. It implicates Pakistan's citizens in a state of affairs where we choose not to see that our most visible public sculptures are decommissioned war machines. As for Muhammad Zeeshan's photograph, I will not even try and compete with the pithy eloquence of novelist Hari Kunzru, who in his foreword to *High Noon*, characterises it thus: 'A wall stained with betel-spit is a modest testimony to the accretion of history, a guttural desi riposte to the vast canvases of Anselm Kiefer, with their caking of European ash and dust.'

*Hammad Nasar is a curator, writer and co-founder of the arts organisation Green Cardamom*

Muhammad Zeeshan, Cityscapes



Late on a chilly night in a village in Bengal, just after Kali Puja in 2008, I found myself in a large room full of men dressing up as women. None of these men had heard, or is likely to hear, of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. They were just as clueless about the battle being fought in Delhi then against this terrible old law. The keywords of that battle — LGBT, safe sex, rights, Constitution, democracy — would probably never figure in the conceptual horizons of these men.

Yet, the atmosphere in the room was electric with erotic possibilities, although there were no women around. The men were dressing up for the night-long gajon — a medley of playing, dancing and singing — that would start soon in the middle of the bazaar, lit up and packed with people, just outside the room. I had been allowed inside what was being called the "ladies-der ghar" because I am a man. Here, two young men and two older male actors (the oldest being the gajonlakshmi, the diva of the gajon circuit) were briskly getting ready for their appearances on stage as women. I could hear announcements outside, heralding the younger actors as the "hot heroines" of the Adi Joy Ma Kali company. They were household names in the village, where men, women and children were all eager to share with me their awe of the actors' cross-dressing talents.

In the room, the men had sat down in a circle on the mud floor in the glare of a naked bulb, each with his own little box of make-up (the sort of tin box that children take to school). After a deep drag of their bidis and a quick thakur-pranam, they started making up their faces and necks with astonishing deftness, while a wardrobe boy ran around handing them things and combed out their flowing wigs. They didn't want to be disturbed. So I shrank into a corner of the room with my camera, although they showed nothing but indifference to it.

Suddenly, I realized that the room was surrounded by boys and men peering in through rents in the plastic sheets that formed its walls, and some had started moving into the room. From now on, at every new stage of the actors' metamorphosis into women, there was a stepping up of tension in the room, reaching a peak when the wardrobe-boy handed around the bras and falsies. The children were shooed out; the adults came in and shut the door, eyes shining in the shadows. In

Nitin Sonawane, Tamasha Artist Anil Hankare Changes his Saree after a Performance in Mumbai.



the silence, I could hear that intimate gulping sound made by throats drying up with lust. Somehow, it felt improper to continue taking photographs.

Then, all of a sudden in that hush, someone jeered, "O bhai Brihannala!" — invoking Arjun's cross-dressed alter-ego in the Mahabharat. And the gajonlakshmi, now transformed into a resplendent Durga, looked sharply up at this man, held him in an icy stare and, with studied casualness, asked the wardrobe-boy to throw everyone out of the room. Out I went too.

For the Adi Joy Ma Kali androgynes, the night's performances were a rollercoaster ride from the Wagnerian heights of love to the pits of bawdry, with every register of melodrama, abjection and slapstick thrown in. There were adulteries, murders, rapes, miscarriages, bed-tricks and a Balloon-baba going around with a sharp pin threatening to jab well-endowed women with it. I learnt later that there were objections from most villagers, and within the company, to women being employed as actors. But this was not for moralistic reasons. Most people felt that with the entry of women, the performances would have to be chastened, for the male actors would not feel free enough to let themselves go in the ribald scenes. So, men playing women remained the more appealing and liberating option for the actors as well as the audience.

After the night's revels were over, and the marketplace was almost empty at dawn, I saw the two young actors standing against the green-room door. They had changed into men's clothes, but had kept their wigs and make-up on. Around them was an uncertain gathering of men who seemed unable to tear themselves away from their heroines. After a while, most of them cleared off, with frequent backward glances as they walked away. The two who remained went up to the actors, spoke to them briefly, and they all disappeared into the bamboo grove behind the green-room. Later, when I had got to know the gajonlakshmi a little more, he told me how they would have sex — unprotected sex — with men from the audience. But this happened only while the actors were still made up, he added with a touch of virtue in his voice, and never after they had changed back into men again.

## Changing Magic by Aveek Sen



# MEMORY BOX

(As related to Radhika Singh)

by **ANUSHA YADAV**



My grandparents and their seven sons, Shyambajar, Kolkata 1943" by Shubhodeep Das

I have no formal education in History or Social Anthropology however applying ideas from both disciplines whilst gazing at old pictures was a favourite pastime.

In 2008 I was preparing a book proposal on Indian weddings & rituals using old photographs found in family albums as well as photographing anew. To aid my search for old pictures, I initiated a Facebook group asking people to contribute family images of weddings & rituals. Against my instructions, and in retrospect to my benefit, people began posting all kinds of photographs. Each one had a riveting anecdote about their lives; families; and their various accomplishments.

It was very interesting to see how photography too had evolved. Introduced by the British, it was once only afforded and patronised by the wealthy elite of the Indian Subcontinent. Gradually, it was adopted into general society, yet only for special occasions, festivals, weddings, match making, and for honouring a deceased loved one. These unmanipulated images were a true understanding of who the depicted people were, how they chose to live and be represented.

While images in most archives are catalogued by numbers with mini captions, I decided to quote names, professions and memories, verbal or written by the family. Thus contributing to a more authentic and stronger grasp of a personal history and what we understand by it. The book got shelved, but with the FB group still active, the images and anecdotes, were beginning to unravel a history of Indian people not seen and heard before. Unlike images from a museum archive; these were personal human histories with intimacy, pride and emotion.

Applied with dates, circumstances and categories, it became evident that here lay an idea that could be used to decipher India and its past by applying dates, circumstances and categories. I reinstated and renamed the FB group into an

identity of its own as the *"Indian Memory Project."* It is now an online entity under which all images and their references are contextualised and cross-referenced to display an identifiable and easy to understand past.

IMP aims to become an informative online personal library and resource of India's pictorial and oral history. Anyone researching the Indian Subcontinent could find references through oral stories and depicted lifestyles. Until now I have invested my own time, however I am in the process of finding grants from private organisations who are interested in helping build this valuable resource without commercial interests.

Being self-funded I required a system, which functioned well and yet be inexpensive. Since Wordpress and Google spoke a fluent language with each other, I chose IMP to be a Wordpress blog. A WP blog is easy, manageable and well optimised for search. I am able to feed data to cross-reference and categorise pictures chronologically, geographically and circumstantially. Broadcasting IMP links through social networking sites has been a great tool to gain more visits.

For now people send in images with anecdotes and stories. I then edit the text, optimise the picture, tag, feed all the metadata and upload. The project however now needs to evolve into a larger archive and system that would make it a more informative experience.

IMP is most certainly is a lifelong project and I hope in time it will emerge as the intended and grand visual and oral history of India by its own people. I am also in talks to feature the project around the world as an exhibition and as books.

Bio: *Anusha Yadav is an urban documentary photographer based in Mumbai, a book designer and a photo archivist. She recently completed photographing a portrait project for Szene Salzburg, Austria.*

# Qualifying Photography as Art, or, Is Photography All It Can Be? by **CHRISTOPHER BEDFORD**

With medium specificity a *pas*se historical concern confined chiefly to the pages of art history, it may seem prosaic and anachronistic to question the position and relative validity of a single medium - photography - within the world of contemporary art. In addition, the same question may seem patently irrelevant to those who might justifiably point out that many of the most eminent, critically lauded, and well-collected artists of the twentieth century - Thomas Demand, Jeff Wall, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Cindy Sherman, and Andreas Gursky, to name a few - all use the camera as their primary instrument.

Furthermore, the status of photography as art is rarely drawn into question, and the market currency of the medium is beyond dispute. But does it necessarily follow that the fundamental ontology of photography as a practice has been fully interrogated, understood, and integrated into the discourse of contemporary art, assuming its rightful place alongside traditional media such as painting, sculpture, and drawing, as well as new media such as installation and video? In other words, does photography exist as photography in art history and criticism today? and if not, why not? Is photography - and by derivation photography criticism - all it can be?

Ultimately, there is only one effective, long-term remedy for the instrumentalization of photography in the broader context of art production, and that remedy begins with the production of advanced criticism that addresses photographs with a deep awareness of both the technical conditions of photographic production, and the concomitant conceptual implications of these technical processes.

If photography is to be understood as a medium always and deliberately productive of meaning in the same sense as painting, this will require a rich and thorough understanding of the myriad decisions that precede the production of a photographic image, ranging from the conceptual and obtuse to the mundane and pragmatic. Such technical awareness is the necessary precondition for the production of art critical writing that operates with a full ontological awareness of photography as a unique medium.

Only then will an advanced and, dare I say, medium-specific discourse emerge that mines the rich territory between fact and figure, process and product, form and content, sign and signified. The development of such a self-aware critical discourse will signal photography's equal passage into the world of contemporary art, and only then will problems and questions posed (in this essay) be truly anachronistic.

Source: *"Words without Pictures"*, Alex Klein, Ed., (Photography Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art;) Aperture, New York 2010



# SKETCHES IN INDIA

by Alexander Keefe

Victorian photo buffs diligent enough to reach the back page of the May 7th, 1859 issue of the British Journal of Photography arrived there with a sense of the official state of the art, having mulled over the complexities of the latest advances in the use of wet-plate collodion; the unpredictability of the European “raspberry syrup” process; the exciting results of recent experiments in microscope photography; and an impassioned, albeit anonymous, member’s plea for the recognition of photography as an art in its own right: “photographers can think with their cameras as well as painters can with their brushes, or sculptors with their chisels. The brush or chisel is as much a machine as the camera...”

It closes with a notice concerning a certain Captain Allan N. Scott of the Madras Artillery who, the editor writes, “has sent us some most interesting stereoscopic views, taken in the Deccan.” Included is a note from Scott, “an early member of our Society,” who writes “I have about 200 negatives of most interesting subjects; they were taken with Bolton’s collodion, and developed according to the suggestions of Mr. Barnes in the ‘ Photographic Journal,’ p. 218, 1858... I hope you will do me the kindness to offer to exchange with any member of the Society for similar

numbers of their pictures, so that I may see what progress photography is making in England.”

The images that Captain Scott refers to were published four years later by the pioneering London publisher (and conchologist) Lovell Reeve, in a book titled Sketches in India: taken at Hyderabad and Secunderabad in the Madras Presidency. The handsomely produced album consists of a set of 100 numbered “half stereos”--i.e. single images rather than “full” stereoscopic pairs which had been the more common format in the 1850s--each one mounted as a single albumen print on an embossed page. It sold for 3 pound 3 shilling, and could also be purchased as a box of stereoscopic slides. This last detail is telling; the images in the book circulated initially as part of an amateurs’ trading network, and then in book form, but they traveled in other ways as well: the stereoscopic slides could be used for private viewings at home, or as the basis for illustrated public lectures by performers on the proto-cinematic slideshow circuit.

Even in the book the images aren’t silent: each one is faced by an explanatory text by the popular British travel writer (and historian of the Royal Society) Charles Richard Weld.

Mummers During the Mabomedan festibal of the Mohurrum (the tiger)

The Mohurrum is a celebrated mourning festival, held annually in remembrance of the first Mussulman martyrs, Hassein and Hossein, the two sons of Fatima and Ali, from whom the entire race of Syuds have sprung. Hassein was poisoned by an emissary of the usurping Caliph, and Hossein, the last victim of the descendants of the prophet’s family, underwent a cruel death, after most severe sufferings, on the tenth day of the Arabian month Mohurrum. It is the anniversary of this catastrophe that is strictly solemnized. Mahomedans are divided into two distinct sects, called the Sheehas and the Soonies. The former believe Ali ad his descendants to be the lawful successors of Mahomed, whereas the latter are persuaded that the Caliphs, Abubekr, Omer , etc, are the only successors worthy of credit. Hence, quarrels and animosities are avenged during the Mohurrum. The festival begins on the first day of the new moon, and lasts for ten days. Representations of the mausoleum erected over the remains of Hossein, made of



The Dead Tiger

Though photographers are of the most part a set of bold, impudent fellows, poking their bright-eyed cameras into all places, public or private, we much doubt whether the most determined has had the cool pluck to plant his camera at the exciting moment when a royal Bengal tiger was about to either kill or be killed. A photograph of the savage beast just as it was about to make its last spring would be a very interesting picture, much more so, we must admit, than that of the dead tiger here represented.



Of it we have really nothing more to say than that it is the one hundred and fifth tiger shot by the gentleman standing over the prostrate beast. Tigers are pretty abundant round Secunderabad, and thus any griff eager to distinguish himself may without anydifficulty have the opportunity of facing a tiger. The usual means employed is to fasten a bullock in a tiger haunt, and when the tiger is reported to have killed it, the sportsman ascends a tree and waits until the tiger returns to finish eating the unfortunate animal, when, if he be fortunate, he will probably bag the royal game.



Dribing out an Ebil Spirit

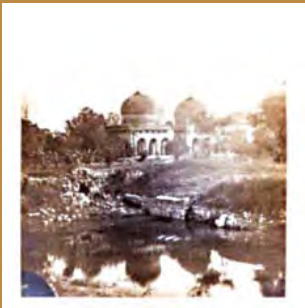
The poor old woman with dishevelled hair has got “something the matter with her,” and has in consequence sent for the astrologer, who is seen in the pictures exercising his calling. The Seated figure in the background is a Cowherd. So-called “Drivers-out of Evil Spirits” are very common throughout India, and the belief in the “possession” of Persons, temporarily or permanently, by evil spirits of various degrees, is universal, both among Hindoos and Mahomedans of all parts of India, more especially the lower orders.

The interactions between image and text are often fascinating: conventionally “picturesque” subjects--ruins in landscapes, for example--generally receive little more than an identifying caption. Human subjects, on the other hand, seem to require far more comment, with one of the longest captions accompanying a remarkable image titled “Mummers during the Mahomedan festival of the Mohurrum (the Tiger).”

The book’s sequencing is important as well: it opens with scenes of elegant decrepitude at Golconda’s tombs and temples and then shifts meaningfully to crisp celebrations of British architectural modernity, and vicarious glimpses of the tourist sights of Hyderabad. Scenes from “English life in India” follow, but the second half of the book is taken up entirely by “sketches of native character”--a sign of the troubled times and the increasing use of photography as an ethnographic tool by the colonial state. Scott gives us a survey of Indian types--with a particular interest in “Hindoo dancing girls,” snake charmers, religious exotica and the performing arts--that foreshadows and presages the fruits of Lord Canning’s assiduous patronage of photography: the monumental and totalizing eight-volume People of India series (1868-1875).

There is a beauty in some of these images and a humanity (all too human, perhaps) that I think is absent from much of the more overtly ethnographic photography that followed close on Scott and his contemporaries’ heels. But his photography--much like that of his fellow members in the Madras Photographic Society, Captains Robert Gill and Linnaeus Tripe--speaks in several different tongues: at times he echoes the conventional compositional techniques of the traveling professional painters of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, at others the candid enthusiasms of the amateur’s album, and at still others the all-seeing prosthetic eye of the nervous Raj.

Part “sketch-book,” part popular entertainment, part proto-documentary travelogue and part encyclopedia, its conflicted loyalties mark a liminal position at a formative stage of British photography in India, with one foot in the popular picturesque tradition, and another in the state-sponsored objectivist camp that was already beginning to “think with its cameras,” producing a vast archive of often chilling “scientific” photographic imagery, questions of art dutifully sidelined, silenced for now.



Tombs of the ancient Kings of Golconda

These tombs, like that represented in the preceding view, are surrounded by orange, mango, and Palmyra-trees. The domes, it will be observed are fluted







# SUNIL JANAH:

## A World in Black and White (Part 2)

by **RAM RAHMAN**

He opened a studio and started doing commercial work in Calcutta. This is also the period in which he began to photograph dancers, becoming one of the important documenters of the dance revival. He was approached by Ragini Devi because of his reputation, and became a dance photographer. Balasaraswati, Shanta Rao, Indrani Rahman and Ritha Devi were all photographed by him, and his extended work on Shanta Rao is a remarkable record of a legendary dancer, in the days before any filmed records of these performers existed. This is one aspect of his work little known to those outside the dance community. Janah had already developed an interest in photographing the ordinary people and life he saw around him as he travelled on his political assignments, and would remain behind to do portraits and [document] living and working habits.

This maturing vision of the photograph as a 'human document' led him to another major project along with the anthropologist Verrier Elwin -- documenting the tribals of India. This had already started under United Nations assignments for Unesco. Covering almost all the major tribes and regions, this collection is unique in its innocent appreciation of a tradition and a people who were then less overwhelmed by the pressures of the economic scene and by the weight of outside demands of

an exploding population on their unspoilt environments. Janah's tribal pictures have an obvious delight in the discovery of an innocent and open lifestyle, deeply rooted in the rhythms of nature and geography. They revel in the simple activities of daily life and document the rituals, shrines and dances of these societies. Janah didn't bring an anthropological background to this project -- he didn't record the myths, didn't collect the art -- he simply reacted with his camera. The scale and scope of this document is truly remarkable.

Photographing temple sculpture had become another focus during Janah's travels. This developed from a personal interest in art and history. Many of the pictures which made temples like those at Konarak and Bhubaneswar famous were shot by Sunil Janah, picked up by Marg magazine and other publishers and extensively published without adequate credit. Again, these images became icons and were the images through which an entire generation of Indians discovered their artistic heritage. In this lack of credit and remuneration, Janah also embodies the exploited and underpaid photographer, a condition which became rampant in India, and which has been a primary reason for the shaky development of the profession there.



Sunil Janah / Steel smelting shop, Tata Iron and Steel Company, Jamshedpur, Bihar, India.

Sunil Janah / Men leaving their village to walk to a relief centre for food in the district of Rayalseema (in what is now Andhra Pradesh), southern India.



The fifties in Calcutta saw Janah getting an increasing number of industrial assignments in the coal mines, tea gardens, the Damodar valley project and other areas of the newly industrialising nation. Janah had become one of the major industrial photographers of the period and brought his full technical and artistic vision to this new area, producing another remarkable historical document. Only a handful of these pictures have been seen by the wider public and most of them sit as contacts with his negatives in Delhi. Janah has regularly exhibited -- his Bengal famine pictures were hung in the museum in Calcutta in 1946 or '47, and he has always had a preference for large 20 x 24 inch prints, which he printed himself or had printed under his supervision.

Living in Delhi in the sixties, Janah invested in a huge exhibition of very large prints of his work hung in the Rabindra Bhavan. In this endeavour, too, he embodies the problems any number of photographers have faced in this country. The exhibition was a huge financial loss, and it was sent to a number of Eastern European countries as a cultural exchange event. On its return to India, it was seized by the Indian customs on some duty technicality. By the time Janah managed to get it released, the entire set had rotted in the rain as the carton had been left in the open for months. Later, when moving to London where his doctor wife had a new job, he ran into trouble with the Indian customs again over the bare-breasted women in his tribal photographs. In fact his tribal pictures have consistently invited a typical censure from the Victorian prudery we adopted with even more enthusiasm than the

British, who bequeathed it to us. Similarly, the books on Shanta Rao and the tribals were published years after they were conceived and completed because of various problems with the publishers. Obviously not having a business sense, he has understandably developed a bitterness to those aspects of dealing with the real world.

In London, Janah has continued shooting in colour, though his failing eyesight has hampered both this and the printing of his earlier work. Most of his work has not been seen by the younger generation of photographers in India, simply because it is not accessible. Photography in India has still not developed a serious critical tradition and the huge body of work by Sunil Janah is literally a treasure trove waiting to see the full light of day. While the art world here is still involved in petty questions of whether photography is an art or not, Janah is a figure who had resolved these issues even as he started out, bringing a clear intellectual vision to his work.

He had also realised the breadth of photography -- and to see all his work as a unified whole would be a revelation of an artist who was actively engaged with the historic moment -- and who represents that moment of the discovery and imaginative awakening of the arts, politics and society of a new India.

(Cont'd from Camerawork 6, edited from an article in Seminar, March 1995)



# The Silence of PHOTOGRAPHY TOBIAS HITSCH

With the support of Pro Helvetia, the Swiss arts council, photographer Tobias Hitsch has been working on different projects in Kolkata, Varanasi and Kashmir for three month earlier this year. As we are exposed to increasing noise pollution in a fast-paced world, in this essay he explores the quality of silence within photography, from the act of creation to what we can appreciate as viewers.

“Last autumn I was travelling from Austria to Switzerland by railjet. I’ll explain what that is. It could have been a beautiful trip through valleys scattered with golden leaves and over snow-tipped mountain passes, if only one could clearly see them. The railjet is Austria’s new high speed train, so they say, often running late, with big stickers covering its windows and therefore the view and with passenger announcements at every stop and in between. As the name suggests, this train wants to be a jet, and indeed the ad shows it standing next to an aircraft. If you decide to read a book, instead of trying to enjoy the through-the-sticker-views, punishment will reach you through your ears. A lady’s voice – or is it a robot? – tells you, in several languages of course, not only about the pale cheese sandwiches and expensive espresso you could buy, but also about the more than eighty screens you can’t avoid looking at. The flickering information is about the train’s current speed, it’s position on a downscaled map and the fact that it’s late. But where are the golden leaves? Did I see the eagle, the capricorn, did I talk to any fellow travellers? Or was I busy looking at the info screen while listening to the robot-lady while ordering a chocolate bar while messaging my shrink?

Nowadays, images come seldom alone. Multimedia here, multimedia there. The louder you are, the better they can hear you. A taxi driver in Kolkata would tell you the same thing about his car’s horn. He, of course, is right. But for the rest of us? Have we forgotten to appreciate silence? The violinist Yehudi Menuhin once said: “Who really wants to take up sound in all its dimensions, must have learned silence. Silence as a real substance, not as the absence of noise. This real silence is clarity, but never colourlessness, is rhythm, is the foundation of all thought, everything of lasting creative value grows out of it. Everything that lives and lasts arises out of silence.”

In a theatre play it is often the silent break that rises the tension, not the dialogue. Could we maybe discover our own meaning of a photograph – or the meaning of any other form of art – could we maybe appreciate it best in silence? If we think of it, a photograph is created in complete silence. The moment the shutter opens to let light pass to the celluloid or the sensor, no



Sky



Earth  
Night



# portfolio

sound, no noise is needed to make it happen. This doesn’t mean there can’t be any noise. While working in India, I was confronted with crowds of children begging for a snapshot on a daily bases. Always agreeing to it as a principle, there was one thing I enjoyed about it. As they where posing, grouping and regrouping in front of the camera, they would usually make quite a bit of noise – giggling, shouting and fighting for the best place, in their view the centre. As we where coming closer to the moment of exposure, I asked them to be silent. And they always where, it always worked that photography can be completely silent. The moment it was over, noise re-erupted and they wanted more, “just one more, uncle, please.” But their excitement always peaked during this short moment of silence. Maybe they felt the same little sensation I can feel when looking at a non-moving image in silence I really like.”



Sky





After a long search for an archive to house her life's work, earlier this year, 97 year old Homai Vyarawalla gave her entire collection on permanent loan to the Alkazi Collection of Photography. In August various organizations pooled resources to make possible a comprehensive exhibition of her work at the NGMA.

This retrospective emerges out of my thirteen year journey with this extraordinary woman who was India's first woman press photographer. Through it, I have sought to map the significant moments of Homai Vyarawalla's repertoire by including her well-known political photographs along with others of urban life and culture that have not circulated as widely. My attempt was to frame the images within a larger cultural history of photography and draw attention to their circulation in public and private domains. In addition to her cameras, the exhibition also displays letters and other memorabilia that speak of alliances and friendships forged through photography.

Often meant for a fleeting glimpse in the newspaper, these press photographs became visual archives of the future. Some of Vyarawalla's images chronicling the defining moments of India's Independence acquired an iconic status and are now integral to a Nationalist version of history. According to this version, some people led and others followed. As important people dominated photographs, ordinary citizens frequently found themselves relegated to the margins. The exhibition seeks to foreground this absence by reinserting images of the 'crowds' along with iconic portraits of leaders and events.

Another cluster of images are those of the photographer herself. These offer insights into the life of a woman who was pioneering because she chose an unconventional profession. Vyarawalla's attempt to lead an ordinary life was transformed through the extraordinary circumstances of history. While she shot official histories as they unfolded, she also chronicled the lives of people like herself. The former found permanent place in collective memory while the latter lie scattered in the personal archives of those who were photographed by her. The exhibition features one such image from the family collection of Uma Chakravarti. In this picture, her mother poses at a function to showcase women of 'South India'. Besides drawing attention to a key agenda of the Nehruvian era, that of 'unity in diversity', the photograph bears physical traces of more everyday family histories- Chakravarti's sister Shakuntala had cut herself out of the photograph! Images like these from Vyarawalla's 'missing archive' would circulate through different registers telling other cultural histories of her times. Like all exhibitions, this too is only partial. But it hopes to start a journey of many new discoveries about the life and times of Homai Vyarawalla.

*Sabeena Gadihoke is Associate Professor at the AJK MCRC, Jamia University and author of a book on Homai Vyarawalla.*



# HOMAI VYARAWALLA- A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

by Sabeena Gadihoke



Sabeena Gadihoke, Homai Vyarawalla autographing a print of herself on a rainy afternoon at the National Gallery of Modern Art. September 1st 2010



Unknown Photographer, Homai Vyarawalla with colleagues photographing Mrs Gandhi at a photo session in the late 1960s



I am not a big fan of coffee. My fascination for The Indian Coffee House is more to do with the 'space' that it cultivates. Over the last many years I have found myself pulled towards these old institutions, harbors of an old world charm that is rapidly fading with the spread of their modern, sanitized, globalized equivalents.

I have felt the need to capture the intimacy such places breed, borne off vibes that customers share with staff, well acquainted with each other on account of years of patronage and the ease that it exudes amidst a state of general neglect and dereliction. More than just a cheap cup of coffee, *The Indian Coffee House* has afforded a public space for people to chat, discuss politics, sports or just sit and procrastinate for decades.

My photographs attempt to encapsulate the essence of this endangered organism as it were, made up of characteristically high ceilings, sparse halls, teeming with members of the 'lost tribe', the original coffee-drinkers, who sipped their brew before a cup became a cuppa and the establishment became world-class.



All Photographs Shot in Bangalore

# THE INDIAN COFFEE HOUSE by Ishan Tankha





# ALAIN WILLAUME

## in Conversation with Gauri Gill

**G. Who are the people in the photographs?**

A. They all are inhabitants of a North Italian town called Reggio Emilia, which is famous for producing a great cheese (the Parmiggiano Reggiano) and for hosting one of the biggest proportion in Italy of foreign nationals. The town has a very active politics of integration.

The district where the city lies is also famous for having been ruled by the Left parties for almost 50 years and is still considered as a politically “red” region, a rather original position as North Italy is now mainly Right regionalist and xenophobic oriented.

**G. And why the title La Part Commune (The Common Part)? You imply a shared humanity among these people - they are seated mostly in their kitchens, which look somewhat similar, and they have all just finished eating. This somehow equalizes them. Yet there are so many individual details and particularities..what did you intend with this work?**

A. In your question and your comment lie exactly the answer about the title: The Common Part is related to the “shared humanity among these people” and to the fact that they are all in a similar situation and, above all, in the same “mental space”. As you rightly say, you can see a great social disparity in the setting, the objects, the gestures, etc. My project was to create a situation, which would allow my subjects to “escape” from this very mundane environment. So I needed to invent an “intimate event” which would take them out of the reality by following their temporarily flying mind.

**G. Every one of your subjects is ignoring you, or the camera; many are looking away, and the mood is contemplative, even sombre. The plates are empty. There is something painterly, also a theatrical feeling to the work, in the significance of a gesture or the turn of a gaze.. and there is a stillness in the air. So a moment that could be very simple or banal even seems almost weighty.**

A. At the end of the meal, I asked each member of the families to distance themselves from the reality and to seek inner concentration. The rest of the family was asked to

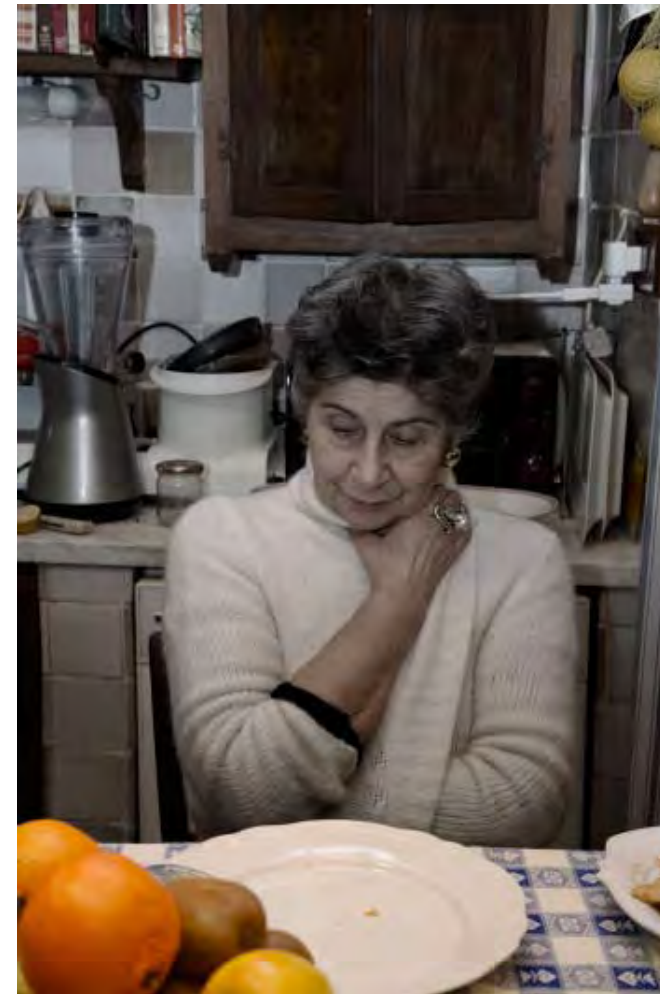


Blanca F

leave the kitchen or the dining room and to wait for their turn to come back and sit at their respective place around the table. To bring them all in a similar state of mind (though I'll never know where their thoughts have flown off) has been for me very moving. And I think, for them too: after the shooting session, most of them were very impressed by this sudden moment of silence, quietness. They told me that they have lived something very intimate and very... unexpected. And despite the fact that a complete stranger was standing there, in the very core of their home, with his camera and tripod and flashlight.

I hope that the images reflect this estrangement. I wish to lead the viewer to an unusual, maybe unquiet confrontation. I was looking for a strong contrast between the empty plates, the daily background on one side and the gaze, the intensity and the detachment of the subjects portrayed on the other side. The portraits are aimed to take us to the crossroads between two worlds: the privacy of an intimate ritual and the boundaries of an inner landscape.

**G. I wondered why this particular time. Is anyone actually saying grace or is that simply imagined..I think there is**



Vittoria M



**always an attempt on our part to attribute meaning based on familiar acts or rituals.**

A. I do not think that they are saying grace. But this accident - a complete stranger appearing in the middle of your intimacy and asks you to sit, alone, in front of your empty plate - created a sudden “empty” space in their mind: so they had to invent a way to fuel / to fill this inner space with somehow adapted thoughts. Knowing this now, what do you think about the state of mind of these people and what can you read on their faces?

**G. Well the moment of silence is at the end of the meal, and with an empty plate, rather than at the start, so that's unexpected. It's hard for me to read feeling into the peoples' faces, emptied as they are of expression. There is a kind of refusal of revelation.**

A. Silence is central to my work. For me, how to represent it has been a topic for many years. All the more so because it is, in our society, an “endangered species”.



Bruno R

This is also one of the reasons I like your work so much. Silence often “means” an intense moment. When an unexpected moment of silence happens during a conversation between several people, one might feel embarrassed as if some very intimate secret was suddenly made public; one says then in French “An angel is passing around”.

I photographed at the end of the meal because it was one possible moment for me to ask to the subjects to come to a halt. This linked me to the idea of the “empty plate”: a kind of warning, like a modern version of Vanitas.

**G. That's very interesting. I quote from Wikipedia – “In the arts, vanitas is a type of symbolic work of art especially associated with Northern European still life painting in Flanders and the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though also common in other places and periods. The word is Latin, meaning “emptiness” and loosely translated corresponds to the meaninglessness of earthly life and the transient nature of vanity.”**



## Info

Camerawork Delhi is supported by Pro Helvetia – Swiss Arts Council which initiates, supports and presents projects that reflect the multicultural character of Switzerland and South Asia."

swiss arts council

# prohelvetia

**Design** Vivek Sahni Design © 2010 • www.viveksahnidesign.com

**Co-editors** Gauri Gill, Sunil Gupta, assisted by Lucida

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## ANGKOR PHOTO FESTIVAL, CAMBODIA 6TH EDITION- 20th TO 27th NOVEMBER 2010

"If you have to be a soldier, you have to prove yourself mentally and physically all the time. You are not a man or a woman anymore." Reflects a 19 year old Border Security Armed Force Recruit in the barracks.

**Curator:** Yumi Goto

**Artist:** Poulomi Basu



Ulla von Brandenburg, Around, 2005. Super 16 film transferred on 16 mm, B&W, without sound. 2'44 in loop

## "LIGHT DRIFTS"

**Curator:** Eve Lemesle

**Artist:** Ulla Von Brandenburg (Germany)

**Date:** 3rd November to 1st December

**Venue:** Matthieu Foss Gallery, Hanraj Damodar Building, Goa Street, Ballard estate, Mumbai

Rohini Devasher (India), Gauri Gill (India), Adad Hannah (Canada), Evariste Richer (France), Ulla Von Brandenburg (Germany), WPMG aka Philip Griffiths (Brazil-UK), Jérôme Zonder (France), Dur&Severe (France).

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## TRANSPORTRAITS: WOMEN AND MOBILITY IN THE CITY.

An exhibition by Jagori

Curated by Gauri Gill.

**Date:** 22nd-24th November 2010

**Venue:** Alliance Francaise Gallery

Including the artists Amruta Patil, Priya Sen, Ruhani Kaur and Uzma Mohsin; and the collectives Blank Noise and Lucida, in collaboration with the young people of Madanpur Khadar; and a wide selection of entries from the public - photographs as well as testimonies and drawings, contributed by professionals as well as lay people. The exhibit will travel to schools and colleges later.

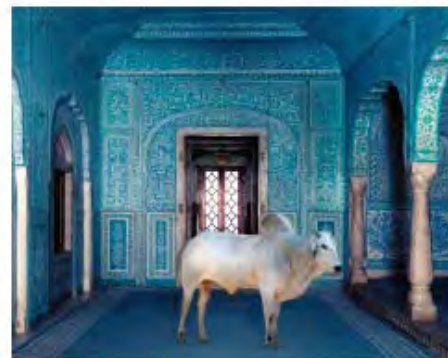


Delhi Metro, Ram Rehman.

Before the roll call at bootcamp, a Punjab, India. September 2009



VIVEK SAHNI DESIGN



The-Gatekeeper, Zanana, Samode-Palace

## TASVEER IN ASSOCIATION WITH GANJAM PRESENT

Transmigrations, an exhibition of photographs by Karen Knorr

**Dates:** 8 October to 30 November 2010

**Venue:** Sua House, 26/1 Kasturba Cross Road, Bangalore 560001, India.

# Shows