

SATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Sundarbans is an archipelago of 102 islands in the delta region of West Bengal, where the rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna drain out into the Bay of Bengal. It is one of the world's largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest that supports a unique and diverse ecosystem. The delta region is also ecologically fragile and has already begun to feel the heat of global warming, with increasing cyclonic activity, rising sea- levels, and land is being lost at a faster rate than the global average. From 2001 to 2008, the region suffered net land loss of 4,400 ha (or 550 ha per year). At the same time, frequent breaches in embankments result in salt water inundation, leaving the affected land unproductive for many seasons.

The delta is home to almost 4.5 million people, who dwell on 52 of the 102 islands. The sources of livelihood here are farming, fishing, collecting crab and shrimp, and collecting honey from the mangrove forest. Living on the margins – spatial, social, economic, and political – the human inhabitants of the Sundarbans have often been invisibilised, by both state and non-state actors, in the discourse around this region. Some of the most impoverished communities reside in the villages of these islands, where not only do they struggle to survive the most severe climatic onslaught annually, in the form of cyclones, floods, salination of land and water, and rising sea levels, but have similarly suffered the state's neglect, where the population has been historically underserved. Thus, climate change and dwindling land, resources and livelihood, have pushed a lot of people to migrate to cities.

In May 2020, the super cyclone Amphan made its landfall in the delta. The super cyclone came only a few months after India went into one of the strictest COVID-19 lockdowns in the world. Those who had migrated to other parts of the country in search of better employment opportunities were forced to return to the delta, since all economic activity in other regions of the country had come to a standstill. Any possible opportunities back home had also been affected due to COVID-19 lockdown orders. While people here were already in the midst of anxiety and panic brought on by the pandemic, super cyclone Amphan took away the roof over their heads. The double impact of COVID- 19 and Amphan, which left in its wake not only destruction of life and livelihood but also the fear of disease, the people of the island remain with very little to hold onto.

For this project, I will take photographs and audio and video interviews of migrant workers who have returned, environmentalists, health workers, local administration, to see the issue of

migration at a time when the pandemic is resurging and monsoons approaching. It will be a study to capture the learning and unlearning of the common people and migrant workers from last year's experiences of surviving both Amphan and Covid. Through this work, I would like to address the following:

- Beliefs and disbeliefs about Covid19 among migrant workers who have returned to the villages, contradictions between beliefs and actual practices, physical distancing in rural workplaces.
- The situation after Amphan and the primary challenges for the local health workers, doctors and villagers.
- Individual experiences of migrant workers while returning to their villages during the country-wide lockdown.
- Acceptance of the migrant workers back in their villages.
- Present situation of the migrant workers, whether they have already returned to their prior workplaces or not? If they stayed or migrated what were the demands of the situations behind both reasons?

The purpose of this project will be to understand how migrant workers from the Sundarbans are reimagining their future, at a time of uncertain work prospects in the city because of the pandemic, as well as decreasing land and opportunities in their homeland.

PORTFOLIO

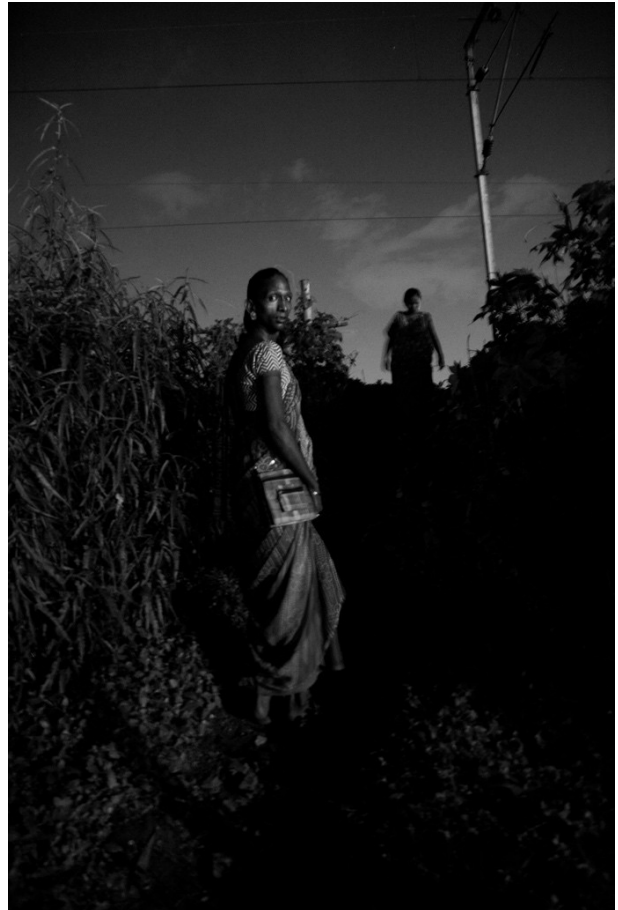
The Distant Calls

My first project, I tried to explore a significant aspect of migrant workers in the city of Kolkata. They would gather in front small telephone booths to make call to their relatives. I juxtaposed images taken during these conversations together with images of their daily lives, to build a narrative of these uprooted common people within this city.



Urban Gypsies

In 2012, I started a project called *Urban Gypsies* where I engaged myself with migrated people of Kolkata who lived on the banks of canal, under bridges, and similar fringes of this society. For two years I spent most of my time with these people and got chance take a very deeper note of their uncertain lives through my photographs.



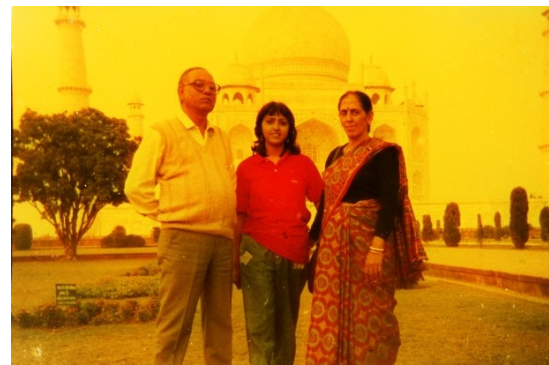
Flights of Fantasy

I also started a project on trafficked girls of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, who are rescued from different parts of the country, from brothels to domestic houses. Instead of projecting their victim story I tried to know their future plans. After interview them with the help of some NGO's I managed to take staged photographs of their dreams.



Ephemera

The beginnings of this project emerged in 2015, when I started to collect discarded photographs of others. Picked from dump yards, strips of film negatives were carefully collected and brought home. Distinctly unable to represent a modern aesthetic in themselves, these negatives, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s, found no place in the era of the digital. As the sorting ensued with a palm sized negative scanner, the illicit pleasure of peeking into the lives of others quickly turned into an unintended record of neoliberalization of the city of Kolkata, India.



PUBLISHED WORKS

<https://www.galli.in/2014/03/urban-gypsies-shuvankur-ghosh.html?189db0&189db0>

<http://kindlemag.in/author/shuvankur-ghosh/>

<http://www.enterpix.in/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Outsider.pdf>

<https://www.vogue.it/en/people-are-talking-about/vogue-arts/2014/05/fabrica-lok-sabha-#ad-image>

<http://www.sunday-guardian.com/picture-essay-25>