EMAMI ART

Kushal Ray

Portfolio



Kushal Ray's photography unfolds through a long, attentive relationship with people and the fragile worlds they inhabit. For decades, his images have lingered in places where life gathers without noise or being noticed: inside shared rooms, along streets where neighbours pause, in the gestures that bind families, strangers, and landscapes to one another. His practice is hardly about the grand but concerns itself with recognition, the moment when another life comes into focus and stays there. Ray's images are shaped by patience, proximity, and often precarity. They return repeatedly to thresholds: the doorway between interior and exterior, the pause between movement and stillness, the fragile interval between encounter and departure. In such suspended times and spaces, his work searches for the emotional textures of living be it tenderness, fatigue, care, companionship, waiting, longing, love, or loneliness.

Know more about Ray's practice





Across bodies of work made in Kolkata and beyond, the photographs move between the dialectics of intimacy and distance without abandoning either. Images of domestic life hold the density of shared time, while the travel work opens onto barren landscapes where human presence appears precarious yet enduring. The people within these frames are never merely subjects; they participate in a shared moment of looking. Underlying this approach is an ethics of humanism, one that resists urgency and instead allows duration, where the slow accumulation of trust, repeated visits, and a sustained, sensitive gaze alter the meaning of image-making. This commitment has also shaped his role within Kolkata's photographic community, where he has been an unusually generous presence, encouraging and supporting younger photographers whose practices have since travelled widely. Seen together, the work proposes that belonging is not fixed to geography or identity but emerges through encounter. The stranger, the neighbour, the distant traveller, the family member, the exhausted rickshaw-puller all appear within a continuum of recognition. These images remind us that photography, at its most attentive, does not only document life -- it makes room for it.

Intimacies
1998 - 2012

Intimacies (1998 and 2012) traces the lived constellation of a multi-generational household over fourteen years, where Kushal Ray, both convalescent and companion, photographed the slow textures of shared life. Between chores, silences, arrivals, and departures, the series attends to friendship as a daily structure rather than a declared emotion. Running parallel to his austere Himalayan journeys, these images transform the ordinary into a quiet humanist lyric, locating love in gestures barely large enough to be named..

Intimacies remains widely regarded as Kushal Ray's most recognised and influential body of work, not only within his own practice but in the history of contemporary Indian documentary photography. The project's sustained attention to a single domestic world, photographed over years rather than visits, transformed it from a photographic series into a lived archive of moments, relationships, and the death of a beloved.

The images feel stark, bare, and exposed not because they aestheticize vulnerability, but because they arise from mutual recognition. Ray's camera does not stand outside the scene; it belongs to it. In this sense, each photograph operates at two scales simultaneously. It is an instant, a gaze, a pause, a click a body in light. But it is also an ecosystem, shaped by years of proximity, trust, and shared lives. The subject is never merely photographed; they are co-present in the making of the image, as attentive to the moment as the one who presses the shutter. Through this reciprocity, Intimacies reveals Ray not only as a documentarian of domestic life but as an image-maker for whom photography becomes a form of relation: an act of staying with, rather than looking at.

"My allegiance to ordinariness was ingrained in my childhood. I photograph not as an outsider but as someone who belongs. I tell my emotional autobiography through images of others. To do this I must be both witness and participant."



In Kushal Ray's world, Manju Chatterjee was not simply photographed, she made the seeing possible. Her presence steadied the life around the work and the work within his life. Here, the portrait holds her with the same attention she gave his life's work. He often recalls that with her death, his heart broke.

Manju Chatterjee
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Kushal's Hand on Manju's to Signify Togetherness
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



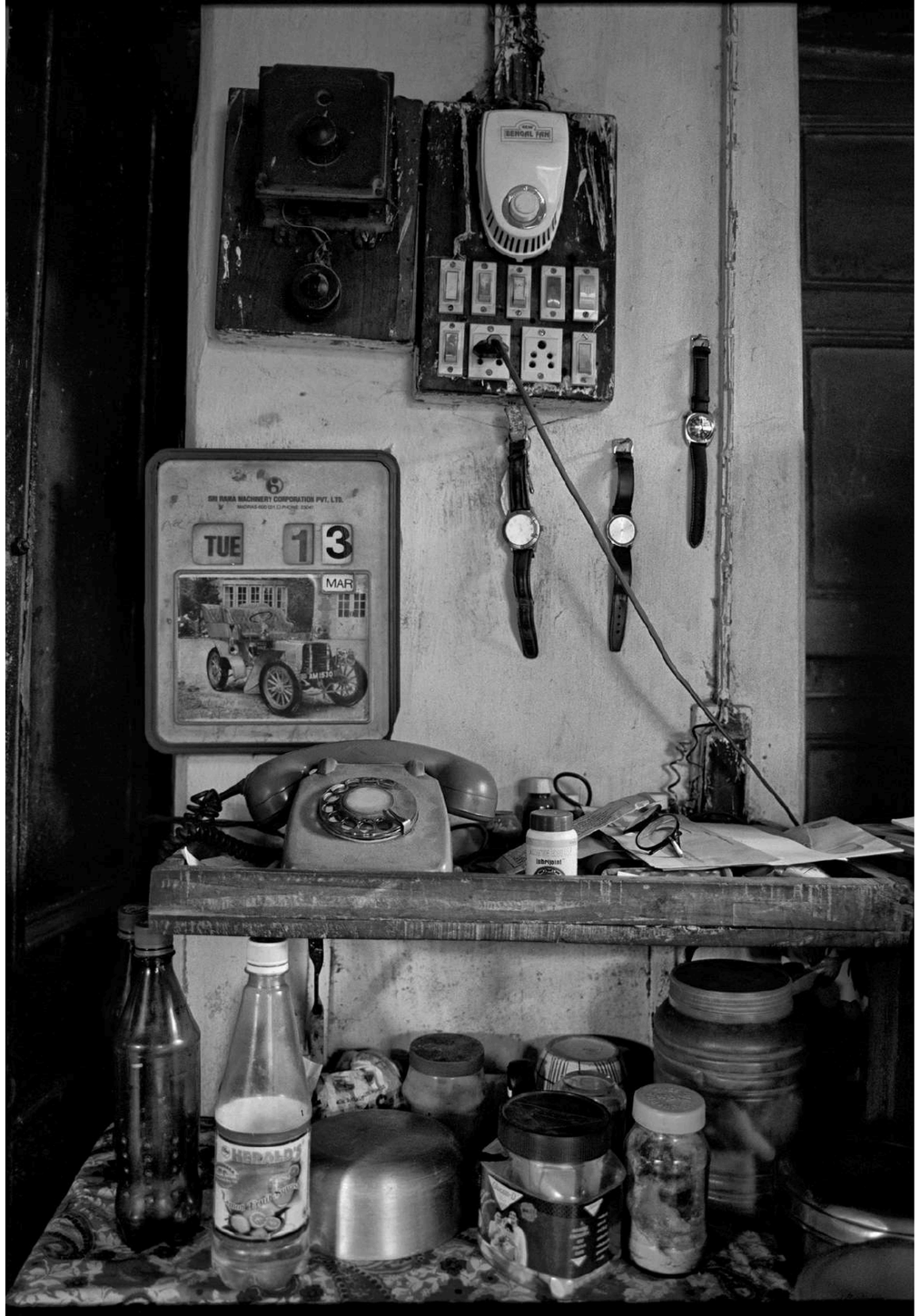
Manju and Her Small Mirror
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



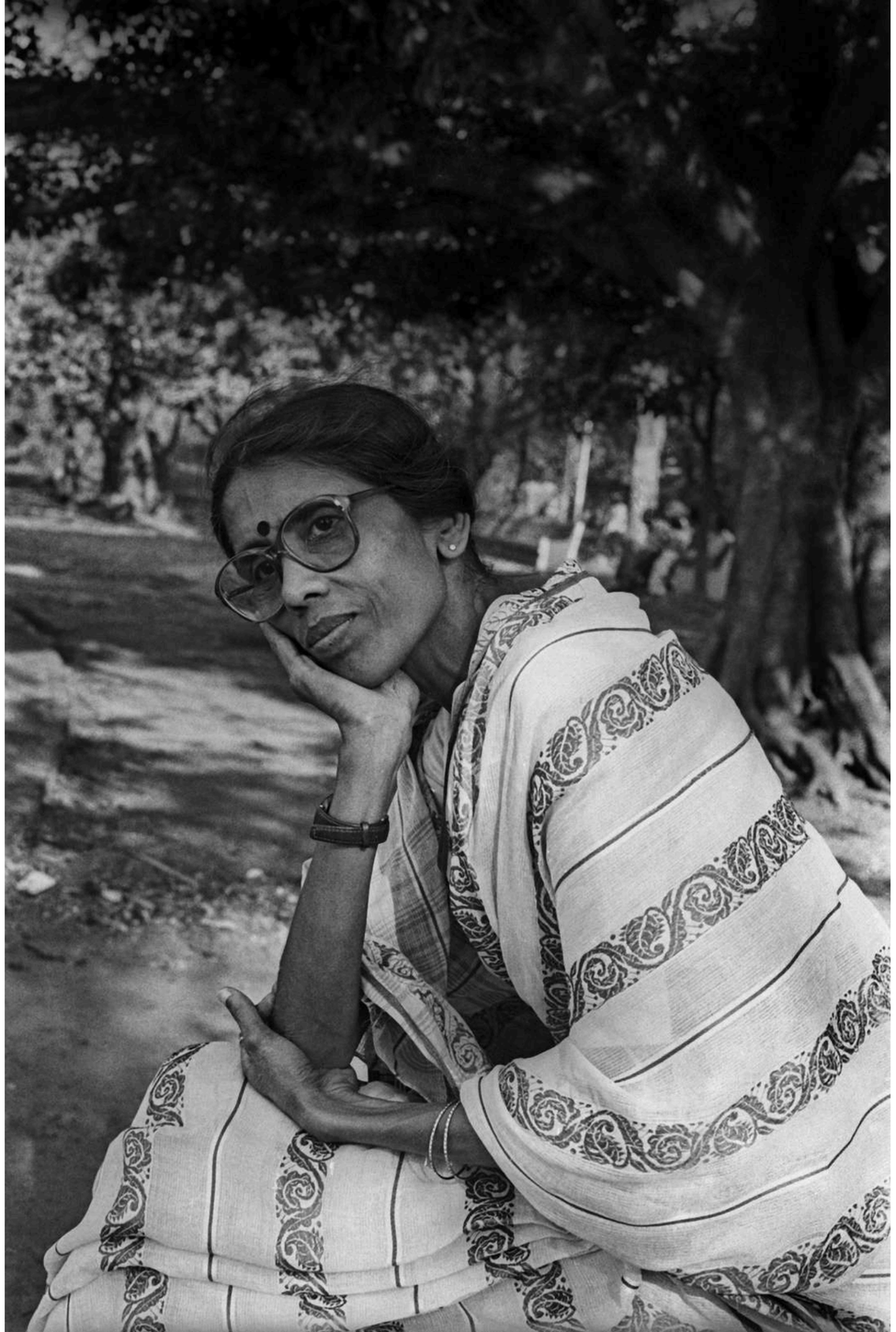
Manju's Room
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Installation view
No One Is A Stranger
Photographs by Kushal Ray
Curated by Swastik Pal
2025, Kolkata Centre for Creativity



Time Keeper
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Manju Ruminating at Rabindra Sarovar Garden
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Manju after Having Her Bath
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Manju's Room
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



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Teesta Gets Ready for a Bath
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Amal with a Photograph of His Friend
[[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]



Manju Combs Muni's Hair
[Series, Intimacies 1998-2012]







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Kushal Ray with little Teesta, Manju Chaterjee and her sister Leena



Togetherness
[Series: Intimacies, 1998-2012]

“When Manju Chatterjee passed away I strongly felt that a large part of my life had died with her death. It was so heart-wrenching. A sudden emptiness enveloped me which I couldn't believe. But I always feel that a person is never dead until we have forgotten her. Photography for me is a medium through which I try to vivify the real with my passion, emotion, empathy and love shaping my creative vision. I tried my best to keep her alive in my images.”



Intimacies

My work on an extended Bengali family in Kolkata began in 1999 and spans a decade. It is more of an effort to explore relationships and intimacies that the members enjoyed among themselves than any perceived social documentary work on a joint family system. Being very close to the family made my work, to a large extent, personal and autobiographical.

Though I do not belong to the family, I lived with the members as an insider-outsider for four years and another six years saw me as a quotidian visitor to their eighty five year old house. During my long association, I was witness to and participant in the joys, losses and finally disintegration of the Chatterjee family. To chronicle the gamut of the multi-layered manifestations of the everyday lives of the ten people of four generations living under the same roof, I had to take a long journey with my camera.

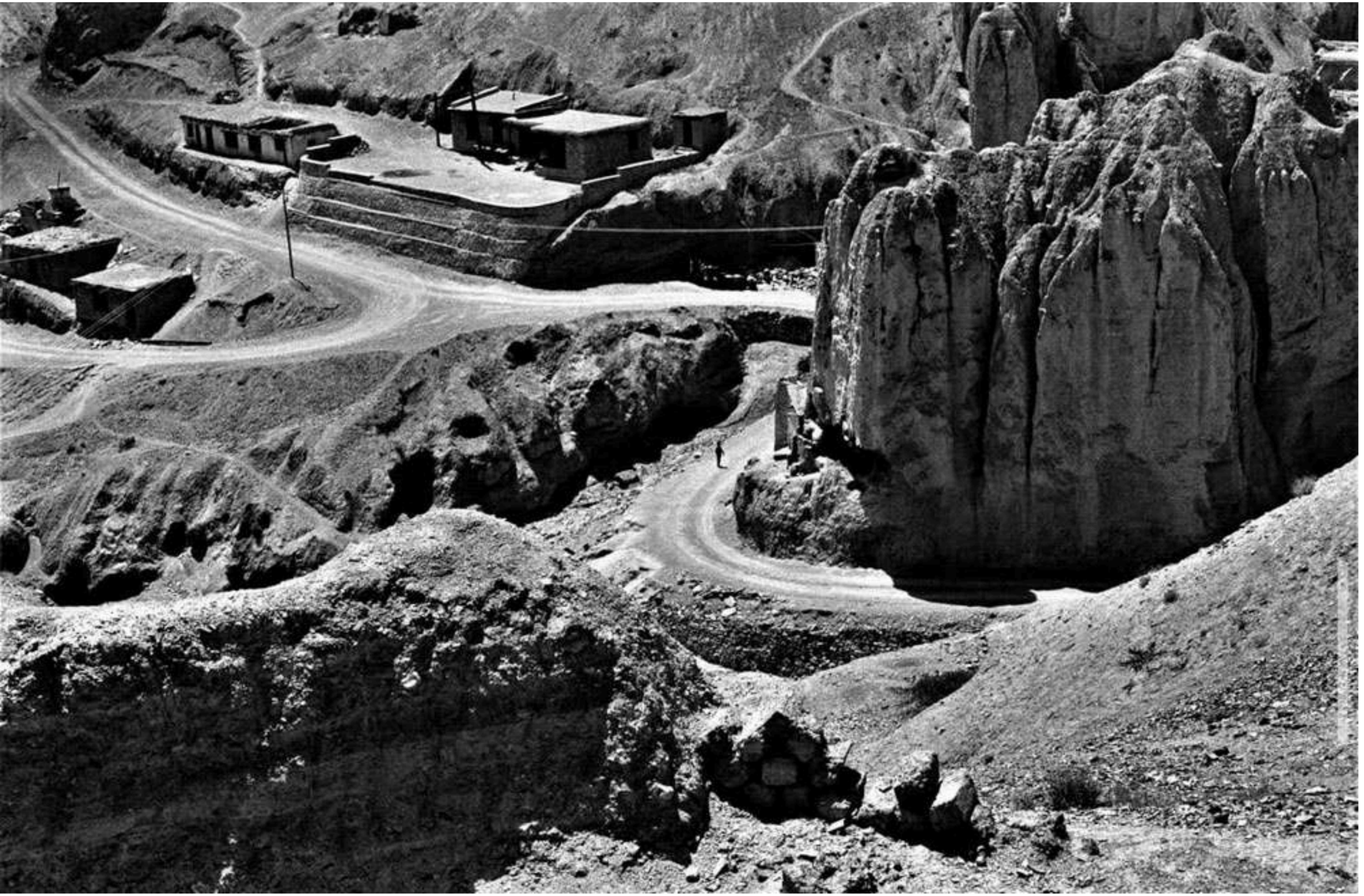
Manju Chatterjee, a college lecturer, was the backbone of the family and the virtual architect of this work. I was immensely lucky to have her in my life. She was my greatest partner in my artistic journey. This body of work culminated in my first book *Intimacies* and has been dedicated to her memory.

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Ladakh: A Syncretic Living
1987–2017

Kushal Ray's long-term engagement with Ladakh grew from travel into this epic journey of conviviality. Influenced by Robert Frank's belief that black and white holds the twin conditions of hope and despair, Ray found in Ladakh a landscape where those opposites seemed permanently intertwined in its harsh terrain, layered faiths, and resilient communities. Over three decades, the work moves between monastery, village, road, people, mountains, celebrations, and interior life, revealing Ladakh as an ordinary world that is layered and complex. The journey marked him deeply; it was here that Ray contracted tuberculosis in 1998, a reminder that the work wasn't only distant observation, it was a conviction and commitment, a certain something that was lived through the body as well as the camera.

"I did all these journeys on shoe-string budgets. After a longish journey I almost became broke. Sometimes didn't have money to get 24/25 rolls of film developed. Manju Chatterjee always came forward and paid for it."



Road to Kargil
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Korzok Landscape
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]





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No One Is A Stranger
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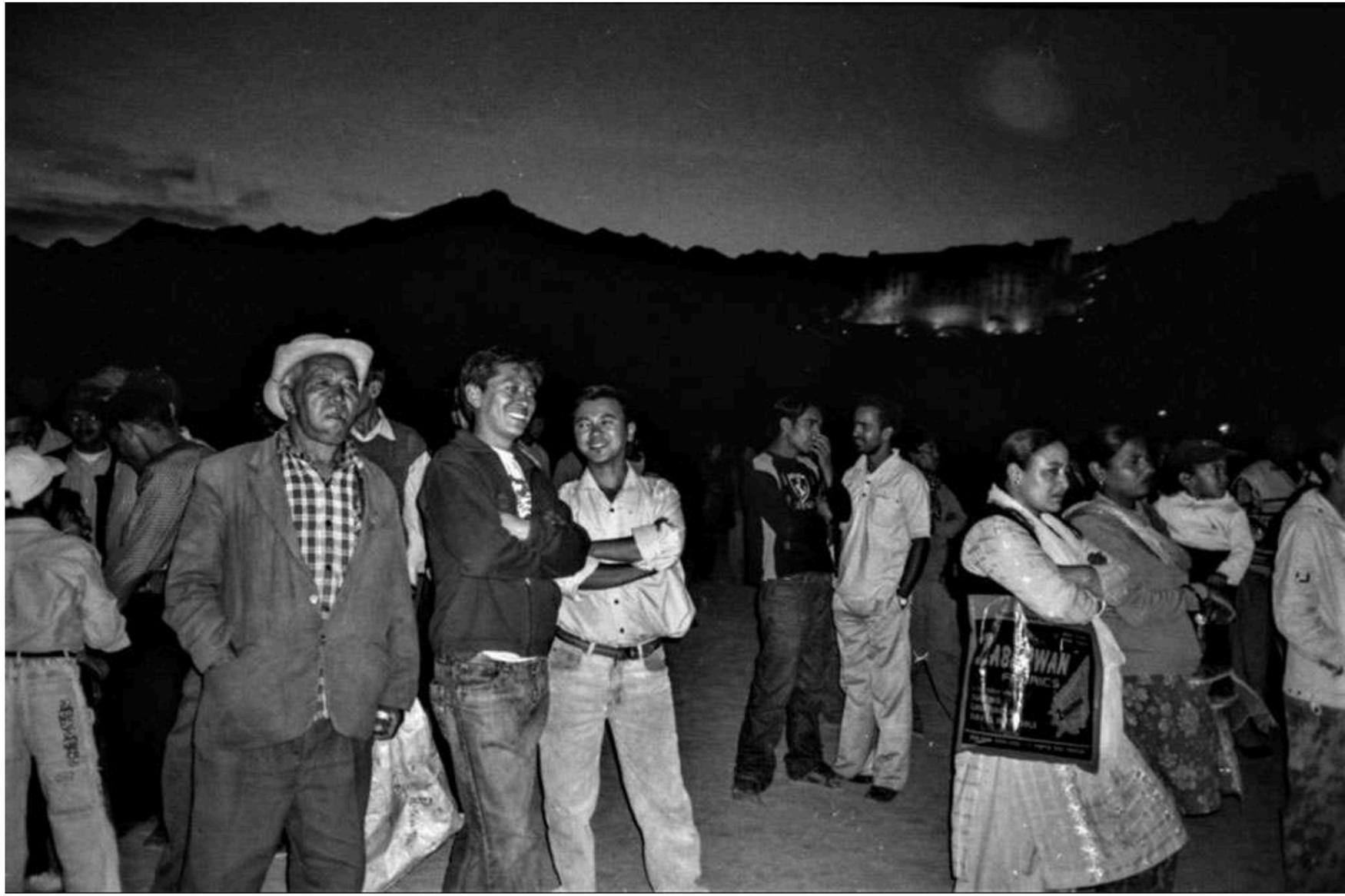
Women Wait with Flowers to Greet a Religious Leader
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Musicians Before a Performance on Independence Day
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Sarfaraz's Restaurant which was Started by His Mother in the Early Eighties
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Ladakhis Assemble at the Polo Ground in the Evening
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



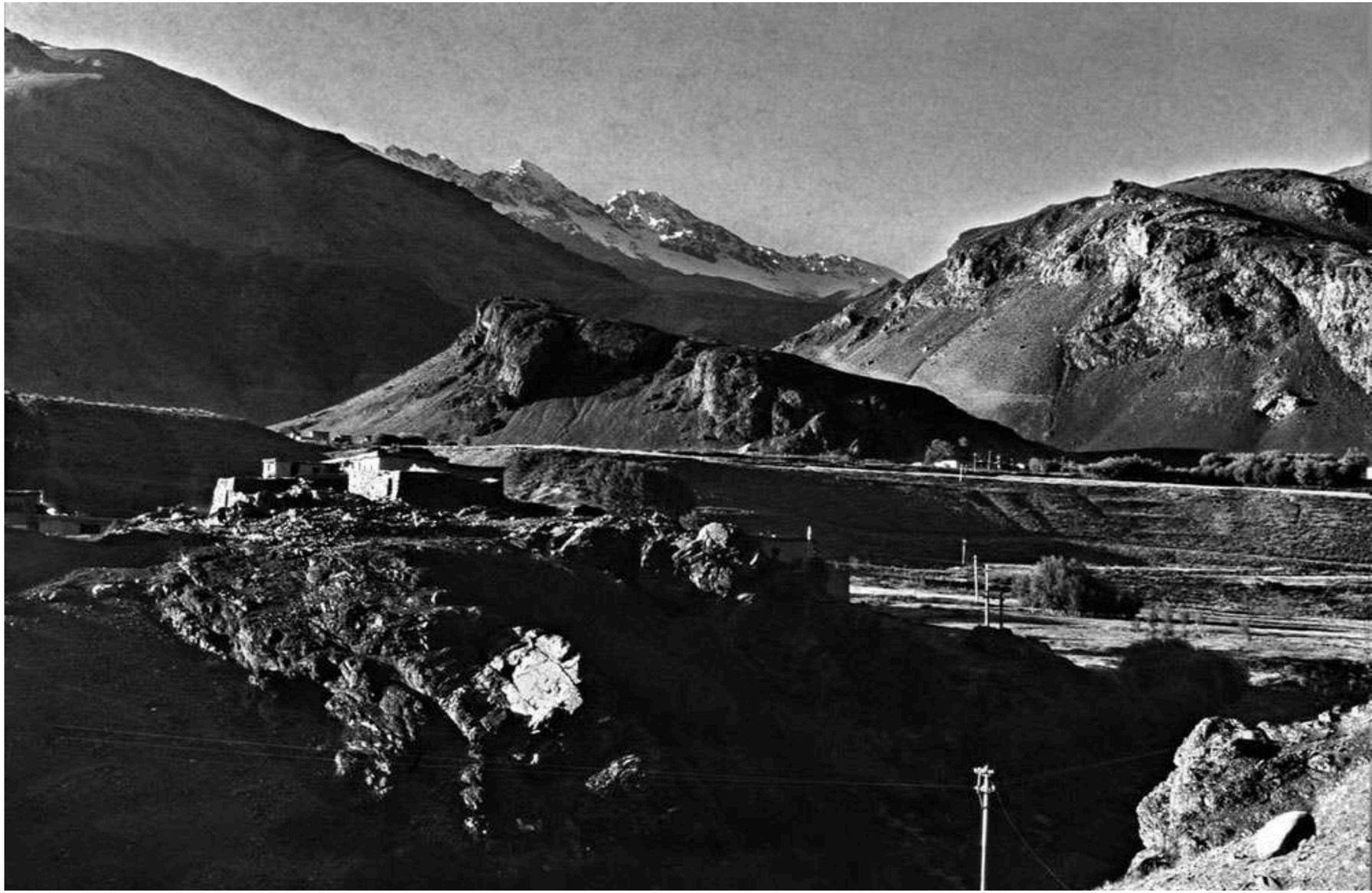


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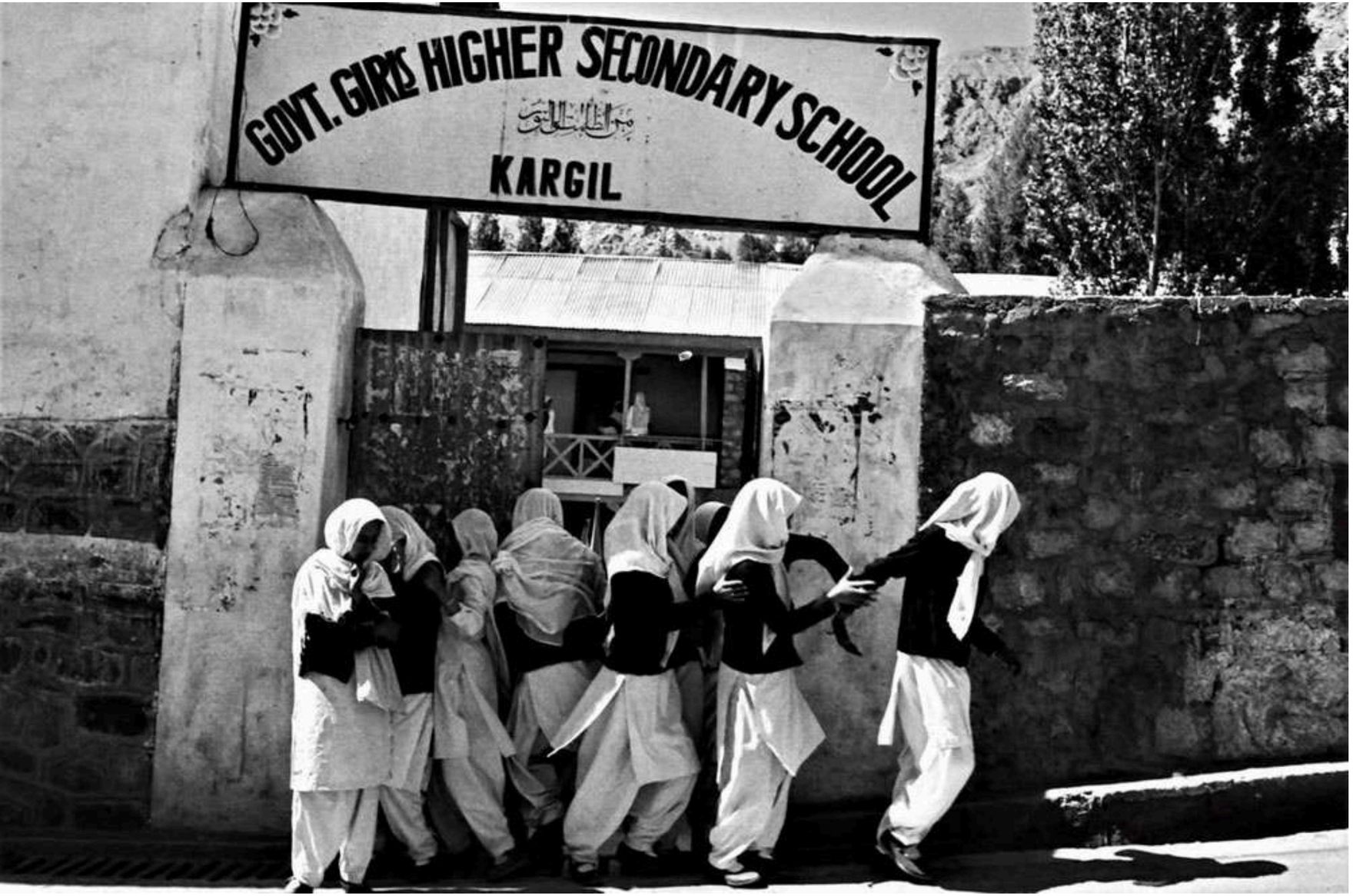


Dolma's students get into a frivolous mood during their rehearsal for an Independence Day show.

Dolma's Students at a Practice Session
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Landscape, Drass
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Kargil School Girls
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



A Place Close to Dolma's House
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]



Dolma's father Tashi Namgail (1922-2014). He used to run a modest guest house for budget travelers in Leh, and the donkeys were employed to lug drinking water cans. He was also an accomplished damyan player. Damyan is a Ladakhi string instrument.

Tashi Namgail with His Donkeys
[Series: Ladakh: A Syncretic Living, 1987-2017]

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"I see photography as a unique adventure to discover how I am placed with the people I like and love. My aim is to give the viewer the feeling that I am trying to convey an experience I have felt profoundly."

Kushal Ray



Rabari Women Series
1993 - 2006

Made during Ray's travels across the country, this series reflects a photographer learning to see through movement. He acknowledges Robert Frank as an early touchstone, valuing his honesty and faith in the unspectacular. These photographs hold the restlessness of the journey while already leaning toward

"Devout Hindu and 'custodian of animals ' the Rabari community of Kutch is the cynosure among the numerous tribes India has. It's women in gorgeous black embroidered with finesse and turbaned men in resplendent white, both wearing indigenous ornaments, mark their presence with rare elan and grace in their daily life, showing admirable resilience in a desert land. Though living in poverty, they can teach the best of fashion designers a lesson or two."

Rabari women carrying water vessels pass through a sunlit settlement, their silhouettes etched against whitewashed walls. Ray's photograph frames daily labour as movement and structure, where the body becomes the site where landscape, necessity, and tradition converge.



The Weight of Water
[Series: Rabari Women, 1993 - 2006]



In this photograph, Ray approaches the women of the Rabari community through form and presence. The bodies become architectural, the garments become planes of light and shadow, and the single visible face anchors the image in an act of mutual recognition. As in much of his work, the photograph is not about documenting a community but imagistic essence of an encounter.

Silent Assembly
[Series: Rabari Women, 1993 - 2006]

A line of women and children carrying water traces the settlement's narrow lane, turning a routine task into a visible chain of generational knowledge. Ray's photograph situates labour not as hardship alone, but as the everyday rhythm through which communities sustain itself.



The Water Path
[Series: Rabari Women, 1993 - 2006]



On a settlement veranda, men work, a woman moves past, and a goat lingers nearby. Ray's photograph turns the threshold of the house into a social stage, where domestic life unfolds through small, simultaneous acts rather than a single focal event.

Rabari Household Scene
[Series: Rabari Women, 1993 - 2006]

Once on a Train
2010 - Ongoing

In Ray's railway photographs, the train becomes less a vehicle than a passing world. Compartments fill with gestures, glances, routines, and brief moments that become large through these images. He doesn't seek for drama, rather, he lives in small continuities that travel with people wherever they go.

"I have always been fascinated by Indian Railways for its awesome multifaceted services. My childhood memories of train travels mingle with those of my youth and middle age. It's like a vast novel; you are it's reader as well as a character, who contributes his or her might towards the writing of the unending novel. As an independent photographer I wanted to travel all over India and experience and understand my country. Indian Railways have me the opportunity. I travelled alone extensively mostly in non AC sleeper class for my different photography projects. I got to know people and then as the journey ended the memories of acquaintances began to fade... I believe I owe these people enough. In all probability, I shall never have a chance to meet them again, but have the satisfaction of having their photos taken to remember them."



In the cramped corridor of the carriage, a child brushes their teeth with solemn concentration, turning travel into something briefly like home. Ray removes pretenses and lies and manages to capture the quietness of clutter, the singularity of personhood in a crowd.

Making a Home in Motion
[Series: Once in a Train]

A woman pauses, a man looks back, others sit absorbed in their own directions. The image gathers these small, uncoordinated gestures into a composition of shared presence. The railway carriage appears here as something beyond passage, more akin to a temporary social world, held together for the duration of the journey.



Passengers
[Series: Once in a Train]

Chinese community in Calcutta
2016 - Ongoing

This long-term project on Kolkata's Chinese community unfolds through friendship. Ray's sustained relationship with Haiying Chang and Yuin Nan opens a way of photographing that privileges duration, trust, and time spent together. The images move between streets, encounters, and homes, tracing how community persists beyond nostalgia as a presence embedded into the texture of the city.

"My friendship since 2016 with Haiying Chang, a retired dentist and his wife Yuin Nan, in Kolkata's Old Chinatown, has taught me to see life in a new light... Mr. Chang had to wind up his dental clinic in 2008 when a road accident rendered him physically challenged. Since then the couple had been completely dependent on the remittances sent by their off-springs. But they never thought of leaving Kolkata to live with their daughter or sons."



A woman crosses the market holding trays of eggs, her movement threading through the dense fabric of Old Chinatown's street life. The photograph situates the Chinese community not as historical residue but as present-tense labour, embedded in the everyday commerce of the neighbourhood. Ray's framing emphasises continuity and community.

Woman with Egg Trays in Street Market
[Series: Chinese Community in Calcutta, 2016 - Ongoing]

An elderly man occupies the foreground while the neighbourhood continues behind him, men talking, a scooter passing, shops shut or half-open. The image holds multiple temporalities at once: the individual life marked by age, and threads of the city's many histories.



Foreground, Background, Time
[Series: Chinese Community in Calcutta, 2016 - Ongoing]



Two old men greet each other in the open street, their gesture momentarily arresting the flow of the market. The photograph renders recognition itself as an event, a small yet sustaining affirmation of shared time, shared place, and shared survival. In Ray's work, such encounters function as social memory: fleeting, informal, yet foundational to the endurance of community.

Morning Encounter
[Series: Chinese Community in Calcutta, 2016 - Ongoing]

Inside their dimly lit room, Haiying Chang lies resting while Yuin Nan sits beside him, the space holding the density of their lives shared together. The photograph carries the emotional arc of their story, exception yet non-exceptional. The image speaks of migration, loss, resilience, companionship, and rest. Ray's intimacy with the couple allows the image to exists as relation and not just observation.

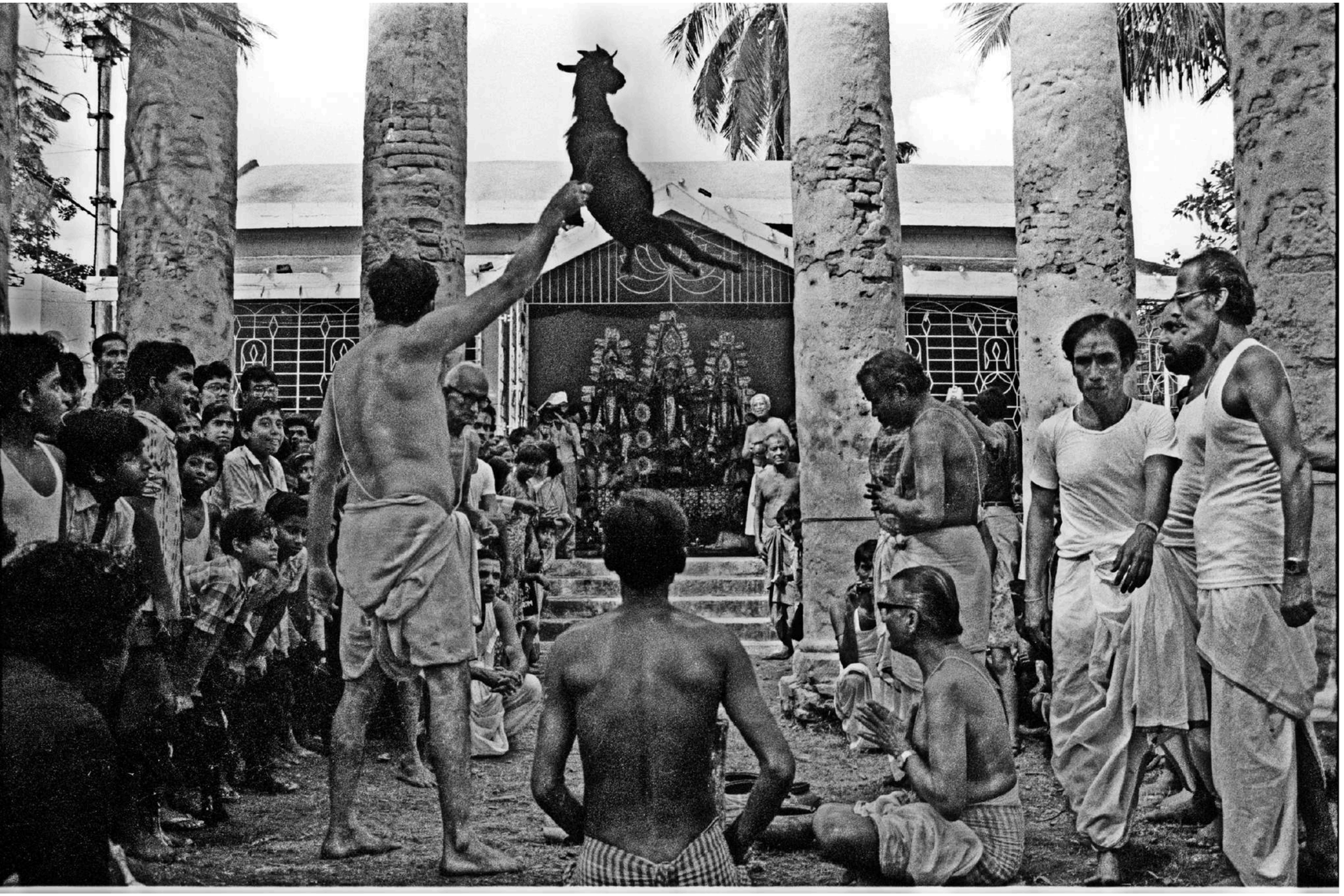


Twilight Room
[Series: Chinese Community in Calcutta, 2016 - Ongoing]

শহরনামা
1990–1993

শহরনামা is Kushal Ray's seeing, the city's account of itself kept by a man who turned his flânery into discipline. Formed by a decade in the city's newsrooms as a sports journalist, close to the machinery of the image and increasingly unwilling to serve it, Ray set his salary down in 1991 and gave the years to the street instead. He worked a single Nikon FM with a 35mm lens held near the reach of the unaided eye, and refused the motor drive that lets a photographer take a scene by volume and choose later. He borrowed his film. He rationed the money for paper and developer. A whole image, its light and its geometry and its one passing gesture, had to be seen and settled in the mind before a frame was spent on it. Almost nothing here was taken by chance.

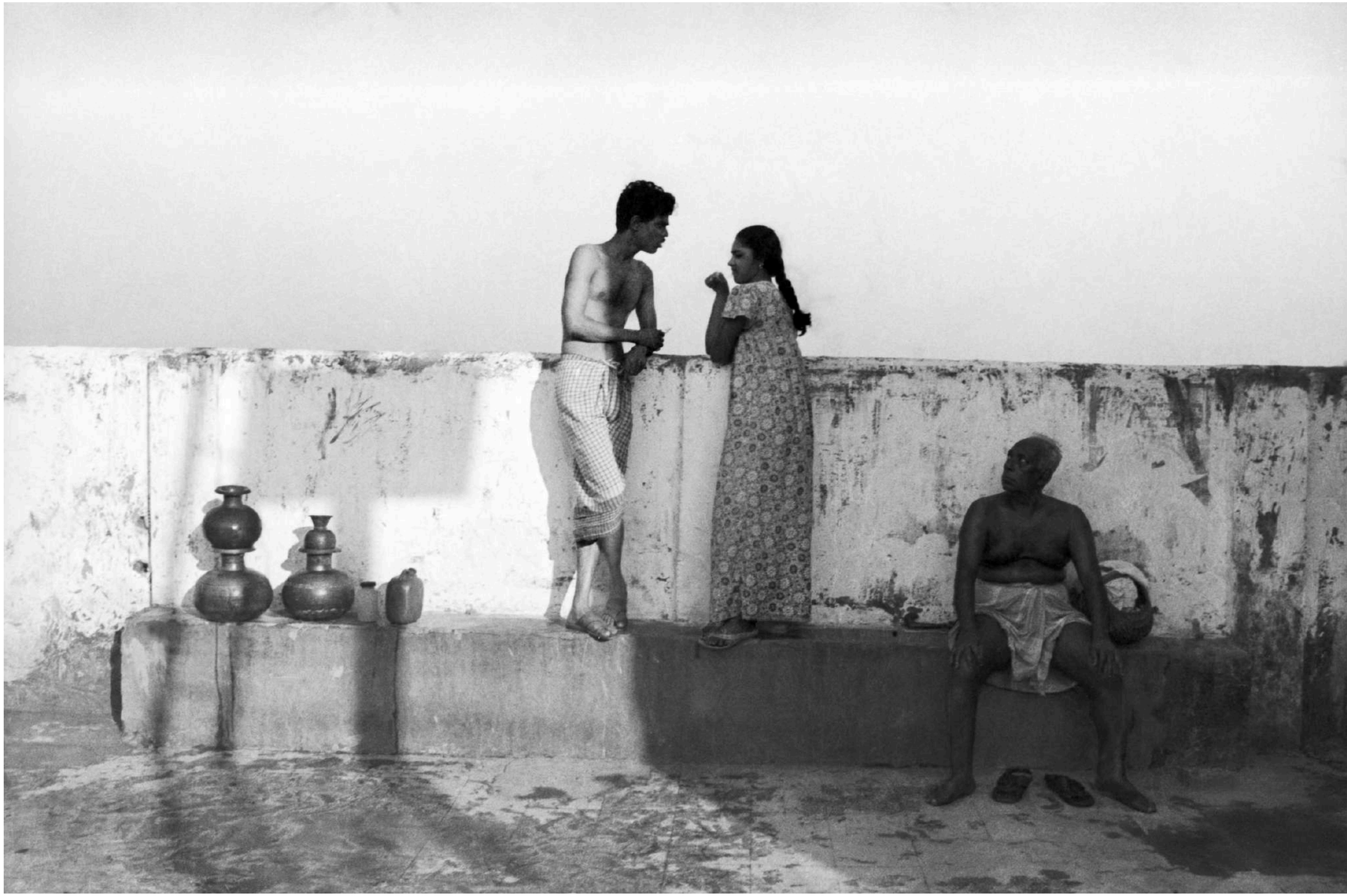
“An archive this large, made this consistently across one brief span of years, stops being a set of photographs and becomes a body of evidence about how the city actually conducted the business of being itself. For thirty years these negatives waited in the dark. What returns from them is not the city as it was, but the fact of its having been, held against the day it stopped being so. These photographs are the evidence of what remains, kept by one man on foot, and standing after the city it names has gone.”



Scene of Sacrifice
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)



First Love Letter
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)



Young Lovers and an Old Man
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)



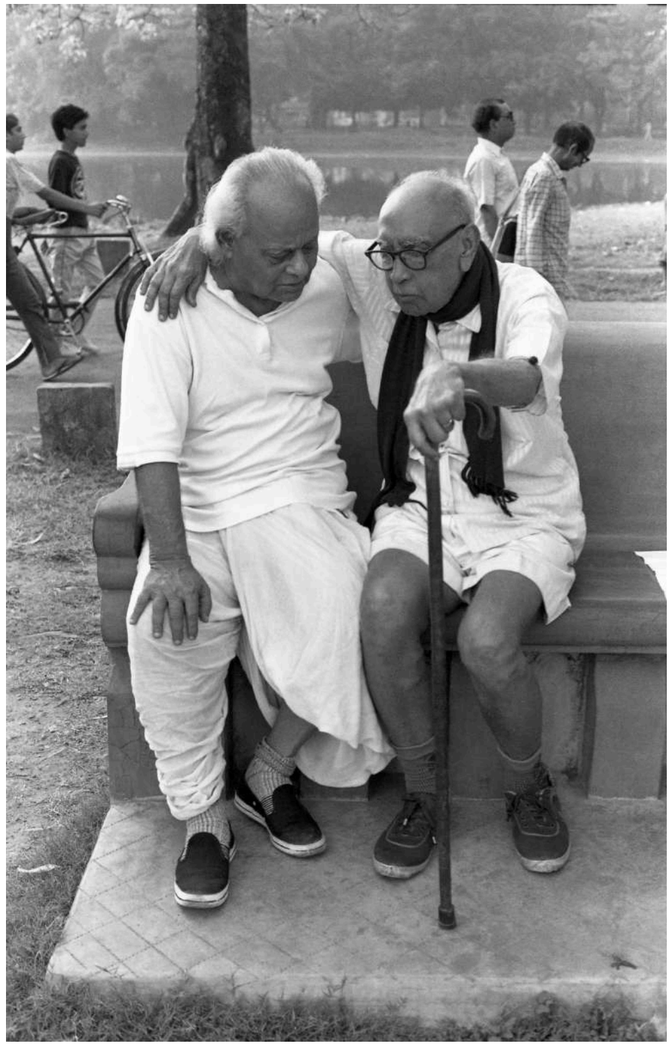
Installation view
শহরনামা / *Calcutta 1990-1993*
Emami Art, Kolkata
2026

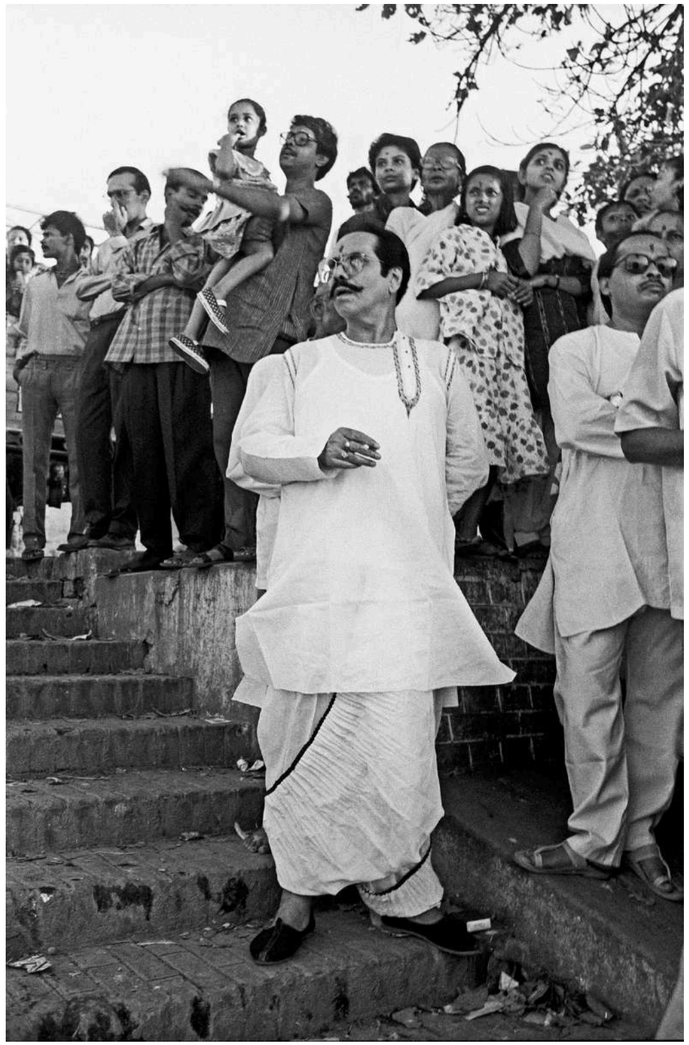


Office-goers on Chitpur Road
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)



Untitled
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)



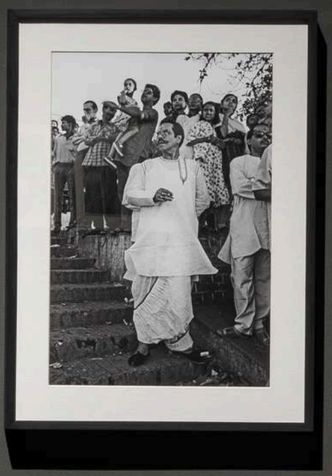




Friendships
Babu at Rajar Ghat, Baghbazar
Annapurna Puja, Sen Bari
Series: শহরনামা (1990–1993)








Installation view
শহরনামা / *Calcutta 1990-1993*
Emami Art, Kolkata
2026



Kushal Ray (b. 1960) is a journalist-turned-photographer-painter. He started his career with The Telegraph newspaper in 1982 as a sports journalist, quit journalism in 1991, and began working as an independent photographer. In 1995 he joined Arts Acre, Kolkata, taking part in many group art exhibitions while two of his solos were held at Kolkata's Academy of Fine Arts in 2001 and 2002.

Ray's solo photography exhibitions include *A Few Things to See Along the Way: Kushal Ray's Calcutta, Ladakh, and Home*, Kolkata Centre for Creativity in collaboration with Museo Camera, Gurugram (2026); শহরনামা / *Calcutta 1990-1993*, Emami Art, Kolkata (2026); *No One is a Stranger* curated by Swastik Pal at Kolkata Centre for Creativity, Kolkata (2025) – his first solo in Kolkata; a solo institutional presentation curated by Amit Chaudhuri, University of East Anglia, Norwich (2010); and *Everyday Life of an Exotic Land*, Piramal Gallery, Mumbai (1998). In 1998, he began documenting the everyday life of a joint family in Kolkata which spanned more than a decade and culminated in his book *Intimacies* published by Niyogi Books in 2012, curated by Ina Puri with an essay by author Kunal Basu.

Notable group exhibitions include *Vichitra/*विचित्र organised by Emami Art and Kolkata Centre for Creativity in collaboration with Bihar Museum, Patna (2026); *Vivartan: Fragments of Tradition and Continuity*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Kolkata (2026); *Bengal Divided* curated by Sarker Protick and Munem Wasif, Dhaka and Singapore (2017); an exhibition at the British Museum, London under the aegis of the Royal Anthropological Institute (2014) where images from *Intimacies*, the *Ladakh* series, and the portrait project *Little Cinderellas Who Grow Up to Be Sour* were screened during a public talk in the museum's main auditorium; *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, London (2009-10); the 1st Singapore International Photography Festival (2008); *Click! Contemporary Indian Photography*, Delhi (2008); and *Relative Values: Some Current Trends in Indian Photography* curated by Sunil Gupta and organised by the University of Southampton, UK (2007); among several others.

Ray was feted with a Senior Fellowship by the Ministry of Culture in 2011 for his documentation of the Indian Railways, which was published in the photobook *Once on a Train* while *Intimacies* was nominated for the Best Photobook award at Le Bal des Débutantes, Paris by Dayanita Singh in 2012. He is the first recipient of the Dignity Grant awarded by Dayanita Singh. Photographs from his early *Ladakh* series are held in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

He lives and works in Kolkata, India.

EMAMI ART

Emami Art is a prominent contemporary art gallery and cultural production space located on the ground floor of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity's Green Building. Established in 2017, it adopts a forward-looking, multi-dimensional approach that reflects South Asia's history, socio-cultural, and geo-political narratives. Emami Art operates within an inclusive framework where profitability supports sustainable resource regeneration and public service.

Committed to promoting a regional, national, and international agenda, Emami Art emphasizes community engagement, socially relevant initiatives, and institutional partnerships. With a multi-year vision for the future, it continues to be a catalyst for change, research, innovation, and inclusivity.

