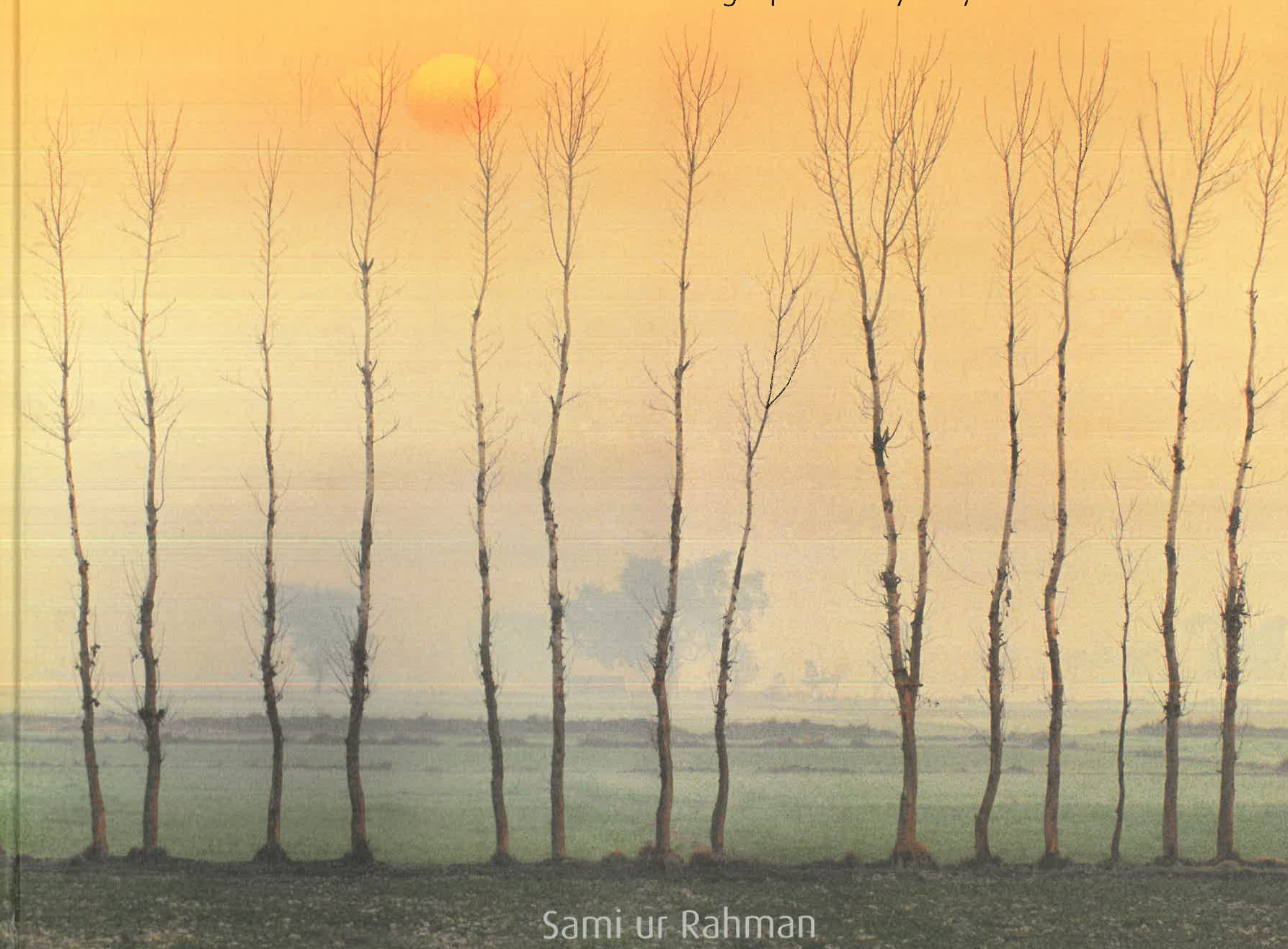


Eye of the Beholder

- A Photographic Odyssey



Sami ur Rahman

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Sami ur Rahman

President's Award for Pride of Performance
(Art Photography - 2003)

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Sami ur Rahman

President's Award for Pride of Performance
EFIAP, APSA, Ed.ISF, FPSG, PSA 5*

Design & Layout

Sami ur Rahman

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Creative Department, Adan Printers

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Photographic Art Society of Pakistan

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ROYAL TAG



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CHISHTY BROS
ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS

Dedication

The book is dedicated to my wife

Mubushra

for being caring, loving and a great source of strength

and to my children

Bilal Sami & Usman Sami

for being affectionate, supportive and wonderful friends

A word from Royal Tag

Royal Tag was founded on the principles of honesty, hard work, dedication and perseverance. We believe that Pakistanis are inherently talented and gifted individuals who through their ingenuity can find success and good fortune in almost any environment. It is this very belief that has helped us at Royal Tag consistently grow and improve over the last decade.

We also believe that the definition of success is not limited to business, sports, media or fields that are in the public limelight alone. The country is full of success stories that highlight individual achievements in numerous fields - all of which are a source of pride for Pakistan.

It is with this belief that Royal Tag has embarked on an ambitious plan to provide a platform to people from all walks of life who have made a difference to society. A platform that celebrates these achievements, that appreciates the field in which the individuals have excelled and that provides recognition where it is due.

We are proud to support our friend Mr. Sami ur Rahman in his photographic endeavors, which have brought acclaim and recognition to not only him but to the country. We wish him well in his journey and through the publication of his collected works are laying the foundation for a life long partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Tariq Mehboob', with a stylized flourish above it.

Rana Tariq Mehboob, CEO, Royal Tag

Earth Infinitum

Nature never intended bureaucrats to have feelings. It suspected that sentiment would weaken their resolve.

Few self-respecting bureaucrats would admit as Sami ur Rahman does in his introductory musings in this book to 'being mesmerised by the spectacular colours of the blossoms ... fluttering butterflies hopping daintily from one flower to another, busy bees in a mad rush to finish their morning chores, buds that leisurely awaken to the soft kiss of the morning sun'. This is the sort of response one expects from a John Keats or any other poet in the English romantic tradition, not an officer from the Pakistan Police Service.

Not surprisingly, after a 'long and arduous' period of service, Sami took early retirement from the Police. He answered the call that all of us hear but only poets heed. Sami became a 21st century poet, except that in his case the camera has become his pen, Nature his muse.

Who is not familiar with John Keats's famous line: 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever'? But can you recall the next lines? 'Its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness.'

Sami's photographs are his endorsement of Keats's assertion that 'the poetry of the earth is never dead'. Every page of this spectacular folio of photographs is a challenge to mortality. Sami has caught brilliantly the limitless shades of earth, the fickle colours of the sea, the fluidity of river currents, the instinctive movement of animals, the myriad faces of man, some as weather-beaten as the ancient forts their ancestors had once toiled to build.

Today, divorced from his career but wedded to his passion, Sami has become one of the icons of Pakistan's applied arts scene. But icons themselves once needed role models. For Sami, that role model was the Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh. Seeing Sami's portraits is to be reminded of the psychologist lurking in every successful portraitist. Yousuf Karsh obtained the unforgettable war-time photograph of Winston Churchill (then prime minister) by impudently plucking the cigar from his subject's mouth. The resulting pout became an image of history, no less famous than

Mona Lisa's smile. Sami has been kinder to his sitters. He conveys their strength, their vulnerability, their moments of introspection, and at times but very gently and tactfully their vanity.

Photography is a matter both of the right timing and the right time. Many of Sami's compositions – especially the farm ones of animals returning at the end of a long hot day out on pasture – are the product of patient observation. The photographs of the Taj Mahal are an effable example of patience in adversity, a lesson learned the hard way by both Sami and his Indian counterpart Raghu Rai whose photographs of the Taj can be regarded as the equivalent to the Japanese artist Hokusai's 's Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji – the immovable mountain seen by peripatetic humans.

'Scenery is fine', to quote again the fecund John Keats, 'but human nature is finer.' It would be invidious to single out a single photograph from this volume that would symbolize, like that photograph of Churchill did for Karsh, Sami's talent as a photographer. Yet, if pressed, one would have to choose the portrait Sami made of an anonymous devotee at the shrine of Channan Pir (see Page 47). The bearded, turbanned man looks unflinchingly into the lens of Sami's camera, and through the sitter's eyes one sees horizons of passive, uncomplaining experience.

In the notes to his portrait of the Urdu novelist Abdullah Hussain (page 26), Sami quotes Henri Cartier Bresson: 'As time passes and you look at portraits, the people come back to you like a silent echo. A photograph is the vestige of a face, a face in transit. Photography has something to do with death.' Given time, which thing doesn't?

It is Sami ur Rahman's supreme achievement as an observant and responsive photographer, that he imbues each of his photographs with the vitality of life, and ensures that, through these pages, everything he depicts will never 'pass into nothingness'.

F.S. AIJAZUDDIN
Author, Art Historian
3 November, 2016

Views & Reviews

It is an odyssey indeed: a colorful and adventurous journey spanning a vast geographical expanse. One had heard of keen-eyed policemen but Sami adds a different dimension to a keen eye. He shoots, indeed, but not with a gun. His is the eye behind his lens. From behind the camera he shoots to capture a truly diverse variety of images: landscapes and portraits, architecture and animals, water and earth. Thereby he has produced an amazingly rich bouquet of photographs contained in "A Photographic Odyssey."

The bright colors, the stunning play with light, sun, sand, froth, smoke and dust is unique to the spread in the book. The landscapes are thrilling: shimmering sands, glistening waves, tormented skies and streaks of light penetrating through darker surroundings. Contrasts, both pictorial and thematic, are highlighted. Solid static structures are juxtaposed against living objects in motion. Compositions of the eternally still and the perennially moving take the viewer at once in and out of history: the former deep in time, the latter at once back to the here and now. Nothing except depictions of tombs are entirely still and bereft of motion.

Looming large in the background the Derawar Fort frames a foreground with columns of majestically moving camels. The stagnant pockmarked sands of the river Ravi are trampled by herds of buffalos, their jet black bodies shining in an angled sun, slovenly returning to their nocturnal abode. The watery beaches of Karachi are the scene of people and animals in motion, even as the froth ebbs and flows. Railway stations and staircases are, in any case, static structures. Sami adds life to these static structures through the donkey cart in front of the unmoving Samma Satta Railway Station, and a host of keen visitors to the Vatican emphasize its majestic staircase. Sami's goats, buffalos and birds are all on their own journeys. Even the vast and barren expanse of the Thar Desert is livened by women in spectacular colors pulling water from a local well. The contrasts are between the ancient and the contemporary, the light and the dust, the bright and the mellow.

Even Sami's portraits are not static or in just two dimensions. They have a sincere depth in that they capture the mood and bring out the inner feeling: the joy of one, the pensive thoughtfulness of another, the contentment of a third, the infective smile of a fourth. And then there are the award-winning old and wrinkled faces telling it all in their lines while Sami's lens reads their mood and the not-quite-fretful thoughts of those portrayed. Therein his photographs present that essential third dimension which camera lenses are, in general, not capable of.

Typically, the only truly static images are those of the tombs. The Taj is featured in at least three images each from a different perspective and at a different time of day. The varying conditions of light bring out, as if, its different moods. In bringing these out Sami adds to the mystique of

that beautiful monument. Conservation of the decayed Tomb of Bibi Jawindi at Uch Sharif is said to be underway but Sami has already conserved for the future in blazing open-air colours.

Altogether this is a most valuable and engaging work. The "Odyssey" is a very significant contribution not only to the technical field of photography but also as a set of novel interpretations of all the varied subjects focused upon.

Senator Aitzaz Ahsan,
Former Federal Minister for Interior
Author - 'The Indus Saga'

Once again Sami ur Rahman has gifted us a collection of his photographic works. His works are stunning. His involvement with all that is life touches us moves us. His fascination becomes our fascination. From the ordinary to the ornate, it's always the same emotion. Sometimes he is into buffaloes getting into or out of water through sands that remind us of moonscapes. Camels march by desert citadels in their usual conceit. Goats, sheep, cows, birds and other God's creatures are captured in motion by his lens. There is the picture of a melancholy horse pondering its sad fate on the sands of Hawkes Bay. In his pictures, the breaking surf can almost be heard. The sand and salt is not hard to smell. And there are boats galore; some with a lonely oarsman sailing into the infinite ocean.

His fascination with buildings takes us to the Derawar citadel and the sadly crumbling ruins of Uch Sharif. Pictures of the Taj Mahal honor the grandeur of the Mausoleum of Love. Like Venus or Aphrodite, it is seen from many sides to grasp its sensuous beauty. Its reflections in water must indeed have sent sad drops of blood to the broken heart of Emperor Shah Jehan. His lens takes us to the old railway stations, Sufi shrines and mosques. But when the moving lens turns cosmopolitan, he delights us with images from many foreign lands. This includes the 'Vatican Staircase', a picture of extraordinary composition and rendition. It's as if he is tempting us to step down and discover the Renaissance masterpieces which reside in the Vatican.

There is an underlying theme which quietly betrays his love for his land and its people. Be it rice and wheat fields, animals and birds, the wonderful people of Pakistan. Sami tells us the story with his camera. He is a deeply humane person, a quality which comes through when he studies the human face. Children are important for him. Their innocence and their mischievous eyes gladden our hearts.

The pristine beauty of Maria Faraz is juxtaposed with the aged dignity of

Mirzan Mai. Young and old, famous and the obscure; are all captured in their quintessential selves. It's as if Sami has the disquieting ability to glimpse into the souls of his subjects, but then let the cynics say what they want. What is art if it doesn't probe the inner and private recesses of the human soul?

Sami's camera searches everywhere for truth; in the trees, animals and human beings. Like a creator he breathes life into ripples of water, gusts of wind, dusty pathways, lonesome riders and oarsmen, the skies and the clouds. Sometimes its hard to tell if he is using the camera or the brush. The 'Shepherd with his young Pupil' gives us images of Constable. The 'Four Shepherds' reminds us of a stylized Ustad Allah Bux. The textured 'A Helping Hand' could well be a tapestry.

Perhaps the most haunting and somewhat disturbing photograph taken in Malakwal, Sargodha is the 'Dancing Tree'. Against glowing sunset, the bare dead tree gives us dire tidings like Salvador Dali's surrealistic 'Premonitions of War'. Flying kites and other birds of prey, do not assure us of better times. But then the golds and blues of the sky lift our spirits, and we say there is hope.

Such is the magic of Sami ur Rahman. He makes us sad with the stark and harsh realities of life. But anon, he up-lifts our spirit with love and hope. Tall magnificent trees, azure waters, rich soils, crops being harvested; life pulsating and throbbing; all celebrating the glory of creation.

Sami ur Rahman is a world recognized photographic artist and a recipient of the country's highest achievement award. Awards are bestowed upon him in many foreign lands. Deservedly. We shall follow his journey and will be there when his camera harkens.

Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali

Former Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Painter, Poet

The emergence of photography in the 19th century irrevocably altered the nature of seeing and image-making forever. Innumerable artists moved from their traditional mediums to the camera, carrying their sensibilities with them. There is no doubt Sami ur Rahman would have made this transition 175 years ago. The painter in him finds a voice in the way his eye sweeps across the vastness of nature and the man-made habitat. Although he derives pleasure from the singular human presence, enjoying the nuances of mood and character, he truly comes into his own when encountering the stuff of epics.

The interplay of human beings and the worlds they struggle to master, this is where Sami ur Rahman's true calling lies. He has a propensity for assembling the contrasts of tone and shadow, accents of color and the richness of textures he chances upon. He makes this wider canvas his own. From these images one perceives what truly moves Sami-ur-Rehman. It is his wonder at the timelessness of beauty and the

elements which serve it. Interwoven with this sense of wonder are the human beings he documents, who retain the innocence which makes this planet truly ours.

Salima Hashmi

Artist & Educationist

مصور، لکھاری، شاعر اور فوٹو گرافر

ان تمام اصناف کا ارد گرد کے ماحول سے متاثر ہو کر اپنے اسلوب میں ایک نئی دنیا تخلیق کر دیتے ہیں اور کئی دفعہ تو مستقبل کو بھی وجود بخش دیتے ہیں۔ ان کے اوزار قلم برش اور کیمرہ سے اپنے جذبات کا اظہار ان کی تخلیق ہوتی ہے۔ فوٹو گرافر کے پاس تو ایک کیمرہ ہی ہوتا ہے، جس کی آنکھ سے وہ جو کچھ دیکھتا ہے اُسے محفوظ کر لیتا ہے۔

یہ سب فن کار دیکھتے ہیں (analyze) کرتے ہیں اور پھر کاغذ، کینوس اور کیمرے کی مدد سے ایک وجود بخش دیتے ہیں جسے ہم وژن یا ادراک کے الفاظ سے بیان کرتے ہیں۔ کسی ایک شخص کی سوچ دوسرے سے نہیں ملتی یہی عمل جسے ہم Creativity یا تخلیقی عمل کہتے ہیں۔ وژن کے بغیر ایک شخص کرافٹ مین تو بن جاتا ہے لیکن فن کار نہیں، میں نے کئی لوگوں کو دیکھا ہے جو بہت اچھے فوٹو گرافر تھے یا ہیں ان کی تصویروں میں مہارت کی تمام خوبیاں ہیں لیکن وہ خوبیاں نہیں جو دوسروں سے الگ کر دیتی ہوں۔ سمیع صاحب کی تصویروں کا میں بہت عرصے سے معترف ہوں۔ میاں مجید (مرحوم) میرے اُستاد اور دوست تھے، کئی دفعہ تصویروں کو سامنے رکھ کر دیکھتے اور ان میں نئی نئی خوبیاں دیکھتے۔ میاں صاحب کے ارد گرد مصور، ڈیزائنر اور آرکیٹیکٹ تھے جس سے اُن کا دیکھنے کا انداز دوسروں سے مختلف تھا۔ سمیع صاحب کا تعلق پولیس سے ہے جس میں تجسس اور کھوجنے کا مادہ بہت زیادہ ہے اور مختلف ادوار سے گذرتے ہوئے ان کی انسانی چہروں کے خدوخال، خیالات اور جذبات کو سمجھنے کی ایک خوبصورت آمیزش پیدا ہو گئی ہے جس کی وجہ سے وہ دوسروں سے الگ نظر آتے ہیں، جو کہ ان کے Visionary ہونے کا ثبوت ہے۔ چہرہ ہی نہیں بلکہ ماحول کو دیکھنے کا انداز بھی مختلف ہے۔ سمیع اپنی مٹی سے جدا نہیں ہو سکتے جہاں لوگ صبح و شام اپنے جانوروں کو چرانے کیلئے لے جاتے ہیں تو سورج کی بڑھتی اور غروب ہوتی شعاؤں کے ساتھ پانی میں عکس انتہائی خوبصورت ذہن اور آنکھوں کی تخلیق ہوتی ہے۔

دیکھنے میں تو تمام مناظر عام لوگوں کیلئے ایک جیسے ہی ہوتے ہیں مگر ایک حساس آنکھ سے اسے دیکھنا اور محفوظ کر لینا ہی اصل مہارت ہے، کنویں سے پانی نکالتی خواتین، بچے کا پانی پر پاؤں مارنا، سردیوں کی ٹھٹھرتی صبح، ڈھلتے سورج کے ساتھ واپسی، بچے کی پرتجسس آنکھیں، تاج محل کو سامنے سے تو بہت ہی دیکھتے ہیں لیکن دریا کی دوسری طرف سے غروب آفتاب کے ساتھ اور ہی منظر ہے۔ سوچنے والے چہرے، بھینسوں کی پانی میں بل چل ایک منفرد تصویر، غرض ہر تصویر ایک نئے انداز اور نئی سوچ کی غمازی کرتی ہے، یہی سمیع ہے۔

With the Eye of the Beholder

(پروفیسر سعید اختر)

ستارہ امتیاز صدارتی تمغہ برائے حسن کارکردگی

Introduction

I have often wondered about the role chance plays in our lives. Is it not a coincidence that we are born in a certain family, are fated to follow the religious faith of our parents, are genetically designed to be dull or bright, physically athletic or frail, idealists or pragmatic? Likewise pleasant or tragic incidents can profoundly impact our present or future lives. A winning lottery ticket can transform an entire life while an erroneous decision at a crucial moment can make us repent forever. Aren't we thus victims of chance and at the mercy of events over which we have little or no control? So was it predetermined that I would be a police officer and a photographer at the same time? Admittedly both vocations need a different mindset and sensitivity (or lack thereof). How well I coped with this paradox, only others can tell. But whatever it was, I relished each moment of my life immensely without regret even though the ride was at times bumpy and rough.

Taking to photography was purely accidental quite like what Robert Frost described in his poem 'The Road Not Taken':

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

So was it destiny that introduced me to the world of photography, shall always remain a mystery. But the difference it made to my life was significant. My romance with the camera began while I was still at school. I cannot remember its model or the person who gifted it to me, but it soon became a great source of joy when both dull textbooks and restrictions at home, brought long spells of dejection. Like most children, I too hated going to school. I was convinced that no child could possibly like - much less memorize chemical formulas, remember dates of historical happenings or understand the complex laws of physics. It was therefore nothing

short of a miracle that I kept surviving the onslaught of exams. My camera provided solace as I kept taking amateurish pictures of friends and relatives I could prevail on to pose for me. Spending on film rolls, processing, and printing must have made a significant dent into my meagre pocket money. There was nobody I could turn to for advice, much less proper lessons in photography. Every click therefore was, metaphorically speaking, a shot in the dark. The few photos that came out good were thus a great source of joy.

Like most parents mine too wanted me to become a doctor as literature, the arts, sports and extracurricular activities were considered a frivolous pastime. Much as I feared, hopes for a medical profession, met an unceremonious end at the college exams. As a fall-back option, I enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts Degree at Murray College, Sialkot. Destiny works in mysterious ways as ironically both Literature and several years' later photography went on to redeem my otherwise vague ambitions. In 1970, I graduated from Punjab University, Lahore with a



Receiving the President's Award for Pride of Performance from General Pervez Musharraf, the President of Pakistan on March 23, 2003.



Oslo, Norway (2004) - H.E. Shahbaz (late), Pakistan's Ambassador to Norway, inaugurating my photographic exhibition at City Hall, Oslo.

Master's Degree in English Literature. The next three years were spent on teaching stints at Sadiq Public School and Sadiq Egerton College, both in Bahawalpur. In 1973, I appeared for the Civil Services Exam and on qualifying, was allocated to the Police group. It was around those feel-good-factor days that I met Mubushra Wahid. We got married two years later while I was posted as ASP Havelian in the now renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. Her companionship brought both comfort and stability to life from the trials and tribulations I had faced till then.

Somewhere between numerous postings and send-off's, I was presented with a camera. Although it was an elementary model - mostly used by beginners, it was enough to reawaken a slumbering passion that helped kick-start several photographic excursions. Whenever we got a few days off, Mubushra and our son Bilal, - then a toddler, would take off in our small jalopy, quite often, to far off unfamiliar destinations. Whereas the artistic output of that period can at best be described as pedestrian, travelling, meeting and observing people, enjoying nature's awesome pristine beauty was a reward in itself. However, unconsciously, these experiences must have contributed towards the development of some artistic awareness and understanding in me.

Life in the police department was never a walk in the park. I felt the demanding journey was more like a canoe-ride-in-the-rapids. The realization that it would be a persistent affair was very disconcerting. I therefore decided to step back and reassess my

future. This resulted in several marathon sessions with family and close friends. Reaching consensus on the question of calling it quits proved uncomplicated, as Mubushra and especially my sons Bilal and Usman were never too enamoured with a civil service career anyway. (No wonder Bilal has gone on to become a Film Producer, Director & Screenwriter and Usman, an Architect with a Master's degree in Conservation of Cultural Heritage) Frequent transfers resulting in displacements, adverse effect on schooling, health anxieties sneaking up with passing years were all taking a toll on our family life. I was thus given the green light quite readily. So after twenty eight years when I finally opted for a nine-year-early retirement my friends were bemused. They thought I had taken leave of my senses - wanting to give up everything for something as 'commonplace' as photography. The authority and privileges that come with senior positions are intoxicating stuff, and their concern was, therefore, understandable. The umbilical cord with the past had to be severed because the fear of an indefinite future could pull me back. It was a difficult decision, but at age 51, I still possessed vitality, passion and perhaps foolhardiness, to take it.

Undeterred by the eventual outcome of adopting photography as a profession, I took the decision with the belief that it would at least spare me the avoidable pressures that accompany police assignments. But more importantly, I wanted to be my own man: at peace with myself and at liberty to do what pleased my heart. I



New Delhi, India (2005) - Mr. Umesh Mehta (Gen. Secy., IIPC) welcoming PASP members. L - R myself, Chief Guest Mr. Kapoor, Gul Gulrajani, President IIPC, Mubushra Sami and Saleem Khawar. Mr. O.P. Sharma in the background.

wanted to be free to travel, paint, photograph and do everything that life might permit me to do. And I am glad to have followed the dictates of my heart. Had I not made that choice then, I would certainly have regretted it today.

The last sixteen years, since retirement, have been something of a mixed bag. There have been testing times, periods of despair and even a sense of loss - occasionally. But it was the overwhelming feeling of relief and freedom that provided a stimulus for pursuing activities that I had always yearned for.

In 1999, Mubushra started Sami's Photography and Art Gallery in Gulberg, Lahore - a commercial venture. Being inexperienced with running a business, it failed to perform well despite our best efforts. As a last resort we moved to a new venue in the Defence market where too the studio could only survive till 2003. When the project started eating into our savings we decided to pull down the shutters for good. What followed was a total collapse - we sold most items for a pittance, threw away items nobody wanted and brought home the remaining studio pieces with which we had so painstakingly furnished the gallery. And with that we also bid our last adieu to all our business expectations and enterprises.

The goddess of photography, if there is one, has been very generous by granting my photographic work appreciation both



PASP delegation at Governor's House Bangalore. 2005 (Front Row, L - R). Fauzia Qureshi, Nusrat Siddique, Mubushra Sami, Mr. T. N. Chaturvedi, Governor, Sumbal Awan. (Back Row) Saleem Khawar, myself, Bilal Sami, Gul Gulrajani, Aftab Ahmed and Nayyer Reza.



Book Launch of 'Beyond Light & Shade' 2008 at Royal Palm Golf & Country Club, Lahore From L - R. Khawaja Pervaiz Saeed, Shahid Zaidi, Mian Ijaz ul Hassan, Asghar Nadeem Syed and F. S. Aijazuddin.

nationally and internationally. Apart from receiving several International awards and distinctions, I was fortunate for being invited to several countries for exhibitions.

In November 1999, Jehanzeb Sefi an Art Director of Global Arts London, visited my Studio and invited me to hold a solo exhibition at the Walthamstow Forest Centre Art Gallery in East London in April 2000. The comments recorded in the Visitor's Book would make any Pakistani proud of his land, art and heritage.

The President's Award for Pride of Performance for Art Photography was conferred on me on March 23, 2003. The Government of Punjab also graciously appointed me to the Board of Governors, Lahore Arts Council in 2004.

In January 2004 I met Mr. Khalid Salimi, CEO of Horisont - a cultural organisation in Oslo, Norway. Familiar with my photographic work, he invited me for a solo exhibition in the Town Hall Gallery, Oslo during the 'International Mela' in June 2004. Pakistan's Ambassador to Norway, H.E. Shahbaz (late) inaugurated the Exhibition. One of the highlights of the Mela was a spellbinding qawali performance by Mian Sherdad in an old church in downtown Oslo.

India International Photographic Council invited us in 2005 and later in 2007 and made excellent arrangements for exhibitions of

Pakistani photographers in Bangalore, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Indore, Lucknow, Moradabad and Varanasi.

In early 2011, I was contacted by Dr Naveed Anwar on behalf of Pakistan's Ambassador, H.E. Sohail Mahmood, for participation in "Pakistan - Thailand: Culture and Arts through the Lens" photography exhibition. The event was in commemoration of 60th Anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Exhibition was held in the exquisite Siam Paragon Plaza, Bangkok. The magnificent event was a tribute to the vision and diplomatic panache of Ambassador Sohail Mahmood. The efficient organization of the Exhibition, hospitality offered and the warmth received at the Embassy was par excellence.

The time since 2008 has decidedly been the most fruitful in my life. The production of seven coffee-table pictorial books can be regarded as a reasonable harvest. In 2007 Gen. Khalid Maqbool, then Governor of Punjab, invited me to a meeting and expressed his desire for the production of an outstanding publication on the Governor's House. I felt he owed a debt of gratitude to the Iconic monument for having remained its longest-serving resident. My admiration for the General's initiative notwithstanding, history shall always remember him for being the first Resident since Lt. Col. Sir Henry Montgomery (1849) for producing the only significant coffee-table publication on the Grand Building!



Mian Ijaz ul Hassan, a renowned Painter inaugurating our National Exhibition at Alhamra Art Gallery, Lahore. Distinguished photographers include Sh. Aamir, Razaq Vance, Aftab Ahmad, M. R. Owaisi, M. Saeed Rao & myself.



Bangkok, Thailand (2012) – PASP members with H. E. Sohail Mahmood, Ambassador at Pakistan Embassy. Prominent are Dr. Naveed Anwar, Mrs. Sohail Mahmood, Mr. Sohail Mahmood, myself, Mubushra Sami and Nayyer Reza. (Back row) Yasir Nisar

Mrs. Yasmeen Lari, a distinguished author, architect and a heritage conservationist graciously agreed to associate herself with this project. Considering its impressive layout and very well researched text, we got two more coffee-table book assignments i.e. Pakistan Railways (2010) and Governor's House, Quetta (2012).

In early 2011 friends Parvez Qureshi (PQ) and Fauzia Qureshi discussed with me the possibilities of photographing about 50 shrines/monuments in Multan for Fauzia's upcoming book, titled 'Mutan: The Spiritual Legacy'. The prospect excited me since I had left Multan – the city of my birth, in 1966 after completing school. The undertaking turned out to be a pilgrimage of sorts as I revisited my ancestral graveyard, wandered about in the streets where I had spent my childhood days and visited my old school. The meticulously crafted remarkable book is a tribute to Fauzia's talent and tenacity.

The last three years have been exclusively dedicated towards the promotion of photography and providing a platform to the talented young photo-artists for exhibiting their work. As a result my Society i.e. Photographic Art Society of Pakistan held two National Exhibitions and produced two books i.e. 'Yearbook 2016' and 'Creative Monochrome' showcasing the artistic creations of these youngsters.

*E*very morning I sit by the window and do what I have seldom done before. While sipping my regular three mugs of tea, casually glance through the morning paper quite content with just reading the headlines. I then turn my attention to the flower beds outside in the garden with almost a child's fascination. The seedlings that I planted have grown into young healthy plants only in a matter of days. Some have started bearing flowers which I count with much delight. Mubushra, who is an accomplished artist, is equally mesmerized by the spectacular colors of the blossoms and tonal variations on each petal. I watch the fluttering butterflies hopping daintily from one flower to another, busy bees in a mad rush to finish their morning chores, buds that leisurely awaken to the soft kiss of the morning sun and then suddenly bloom into dazzling multicolored flowers while the leaves sway nonchalantly in the cool morning breeze. I watch the clouds gently floating by and the eagles effortlessly gliding against the canvas of a deep blue sky. And then quite unconsciously I start humming my favorite Louis Armstrong melody:

*I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom, for me and you
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world
Yes, I think to myself, what a wonderful world*

It is indeed a blessing to be faring well amongst loved ones but what shall remain a regret, is the realization of not having done even half the things I wanted to do – learn to sing and dance, travel to distant lands, become a painter and a better photographer. But I have eventually and sadly realized that most of it shall only remain an obscure dream. Therefore I have started relishing each moment of life for who knows when this carnival would slowly fade into the sunset. A charming friend, Dr.Noaman Qureshi once advised, 'Sami, at our age don't expect others to pamper you, so pamper yourself! Indulge like there's no tomorrow. Just be happy!'

Be it the elusive 'moment of truth' of Karsh or the 'decisive moment' of Cartier-Bresson, the creative act of capturing an image is always a source of 'great physical and intellectual joy' for an artist. One can actually feel a tingling sense of elation when faced with a breathtaking image and recording it then becomes obligatory. This must surely be the moment when 'one's head,



Mubushra and myself on the occasion of Usman Sami's marriage in 2015.

one's eye and one's heart are on the same axis'. It is this feeling of supreme fulfillment that has kept me hooked on to photography all these years.

Oh how much I wish this voyage of photography had started earlier! The plaintive cry from the heart is more of a yearning to have done more and better than appearing to be an ungrateful fool. Time is fleeting past at a frenzied pace but I believe there is an earnest desire for creating several more memorable images and publications. Ideas and images keep flashing on the backdrop of my mind that I hope one day- someday, I shall be able to transform them into striking visuals. A voice within me keeps urging me to push a bit harder. The present publication is a manifestation of that strong desire.

However attaining the dubious honour of senior citizenship can be unnerving and undeniably deflating. When agility starts to diminish and strength begins to wane, when the hairline starts to recede and memory begins to fade, it is time for some serious self-reflection.

In the immortal words of an Anonymous sage:

'We all die. The goal isn't to live forever; the goal is to create something that will.'

Writing a biography or producing a book can at best be described as a labour of love. It is a painstaking endeavor demanding both patience and devotion. Recording events correctly, recalling exact dates and locations where images were captured can be a formidable undertaking. And so is the final selection of print worthy images from a huge collection. I, therefore, owe a huge debt of gratitude for the wholehearted support of the following friends and photo-artists during the various phases of production of the book:

- **Maheen Pracha**, Freelance Editor, who generously offered her time and assistance with the script and proof-read it very meticulously
- **Jahangir Mirza**, former Inspector General of Police, Sind, a friend and colleague who was most forthright and candid with his appraisal of the text and his suggestions have resulted in a significant improvement to the manuscript.
- The contributions by the following three respected Photo-Artists, who have excelled in the field of photography, were invaluable.

Aftab Ahmed Khan SP (Retd) Pride of Performance and my mentor at photography, assisted in making final selection of images.

Nayyer Reza, a friend and multiple International Awards winning photographer, helped in making appropriate corrections to several images.

Prof Razaq Vance, a National Geographic awarded photographer offered sincere views and observations about the collection.

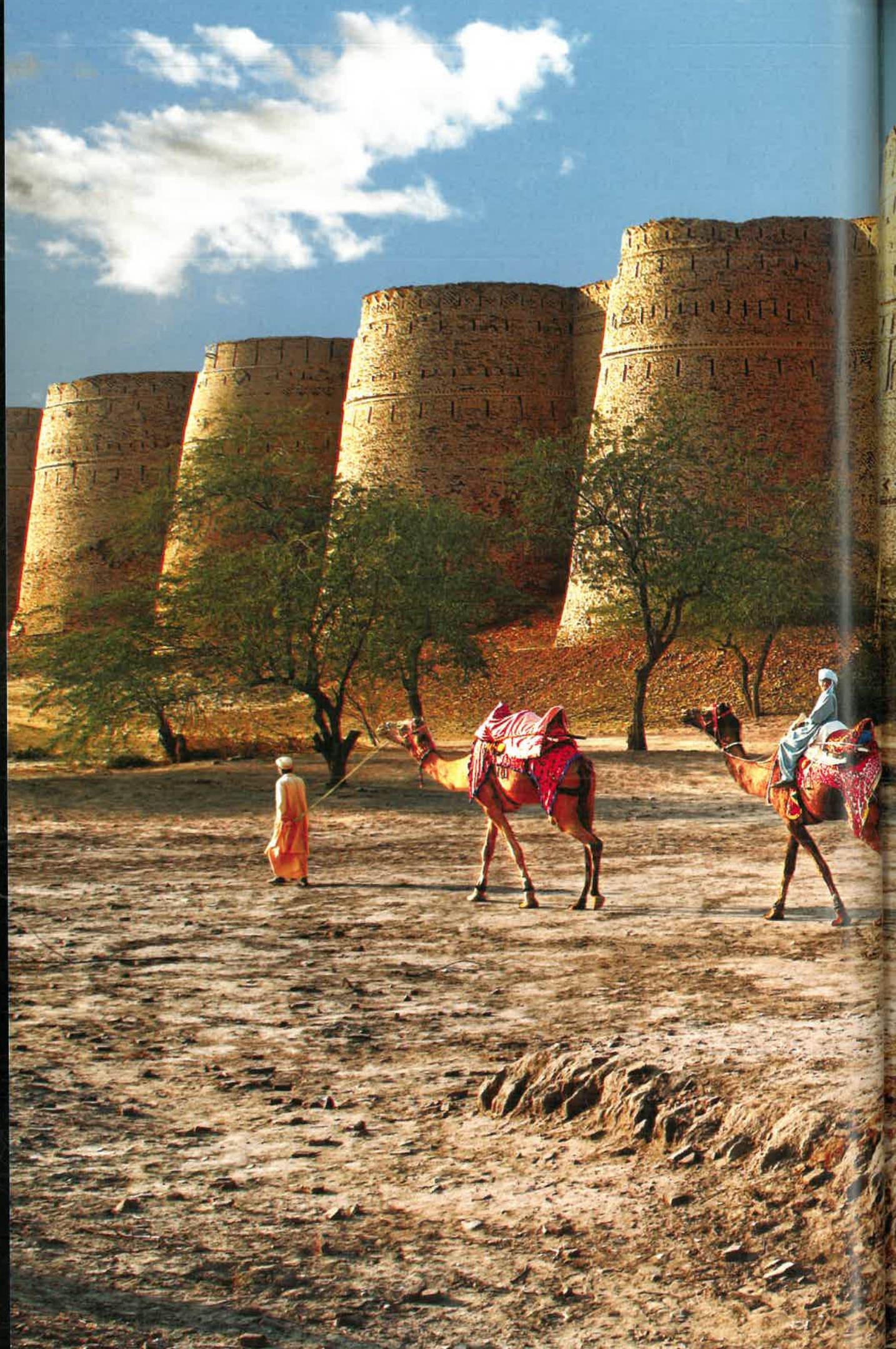
- My son **Usman Sami** who spent countless hours with computer graphics and layout of the book. Finally **Mubushra**, my wife and most ardent supporter but who never minced words while reviewing the text and selection of images. The Book title designed by her is a tribute to her art and creativity.
- The encouragement I received from such distinguished luminaries as **Senator Aitzaz Ahsan**, **Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali**, **Prof. Saeed Akhtar** and **Ms Salima Hashmi**. I am obliged that they took out time to review the manuscript and images and offered their generous comments at length.
- Last but not the least; I am hugely indebted to **Fakir Syed Aijazuddin** for his considerate guidance and subtle observations about the images and manuscript. I am humbled by the fact that he has written the foreword.



Board of Governors, Lahore Arts Council 2008 - 11. Prominent among seated are Dr. Saleem Akhtar, Intizar Hussain S.I., Atta ul Haq Qasmi (Chairman), Nayyar Ali Dada, Ms. Rahat Naveed Masood. Back row: Muhammad Qavi Khan, Asghar Nadeem Syed, myself and Javed Iqbal (Cartoonist).

'THE CARAVAN RETURNS' - 2011
Derawar Fort, Cholistan Desert, Bahawalpur

Derawar Fort is an impressive fortress with forty bastions visible from several miles. The walls stand up thirty meters high. Built in 1733, the fort is located 45 km south of Dera Nawab and about 100 kilometers from Bahawalpur. This image is available at Getty Images and BBC Travel section has used it on its 'List of 7 Unknown Architectural Wonders of the World'.







'BOAT AND THE BIRDS' - 2014
A view from the Ravi Bridge, Lahore

A minimalist series image that is generally very challenging to photograph to which Rankin alluded: 'You have to keep pushing yourself, looking for the new, the unusual.'



'REFLECTIONS' - 2013

Green Acres, Raiwind Road, Lahore

Photography according to Galen Rowell is the art of observation but one must also realize that 'the camera sees the world differently than the human eye and sometimes the photograph can come out more powerful than what was actually observed.' Photoshop and other software have transformed the world of photography but what must be considered important is the final image regardless of how it was created.



'CARRYING LIFE'S BURDEN' - 2010

Outskirts of Mirpurkhas, Sindh

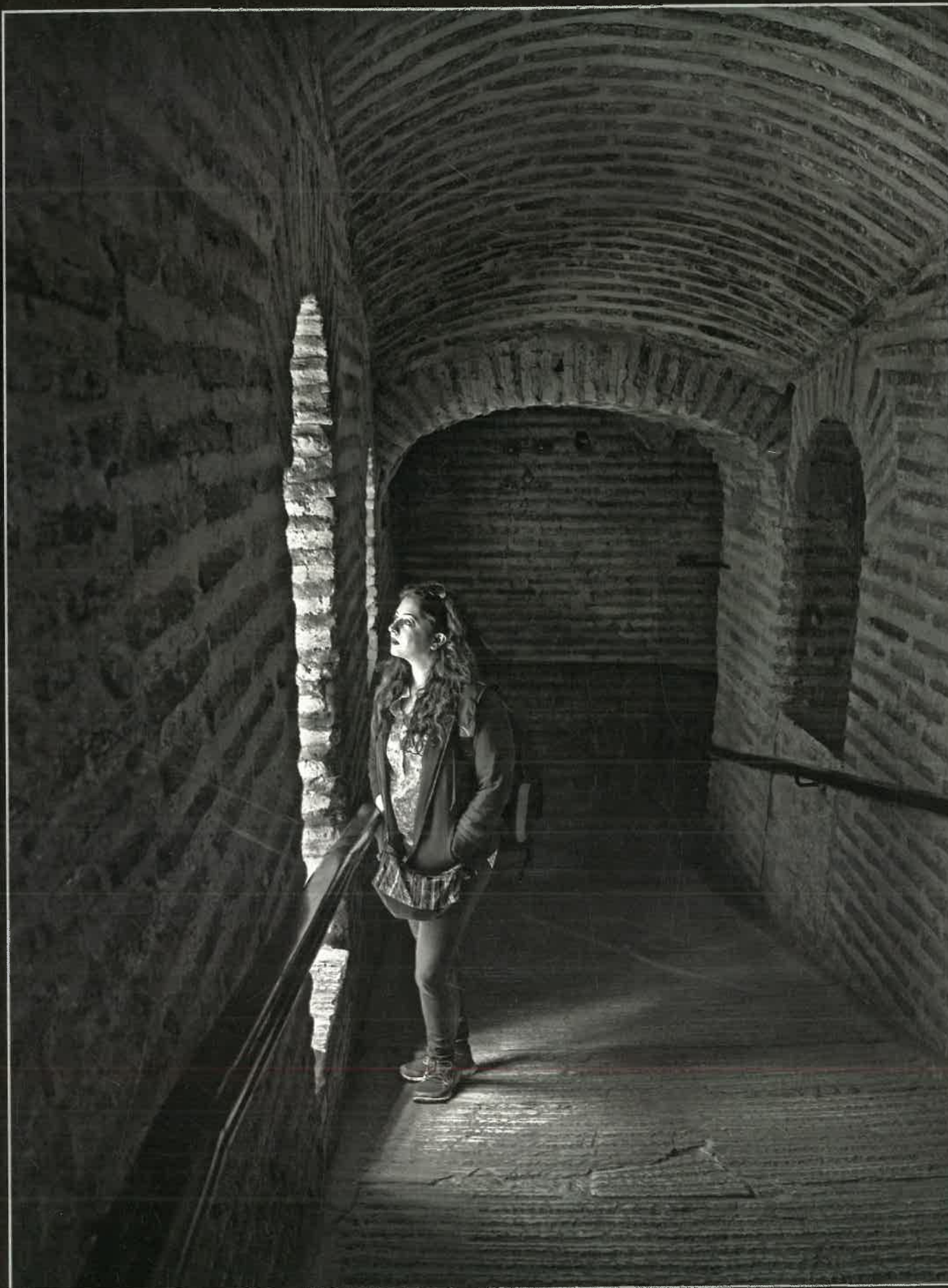
Passing through Mirpurkhas on our way to Tharparker we came across several womenfolk clad in multicolored dresses who perform all family chores. They are usually very camera shy and it is quite a challenge getting some striking images.



'TO FETCH A PAIL OF WATER...' - 2010

A village near Umerkot, Thar Desert, Sind

One of my favorite shots was taken in a village close to Umerkot. The entire activity of women emerging from the thatched huts, fetching water from the well and retreating only took a few minutes. The synchronized movement and colorful dresses against a bland background enriched the composition and we had to act swiftly. As Yousuf Karsh describes it 'In that fleeting interval of opportunity the photographer must act or lose his prize'.

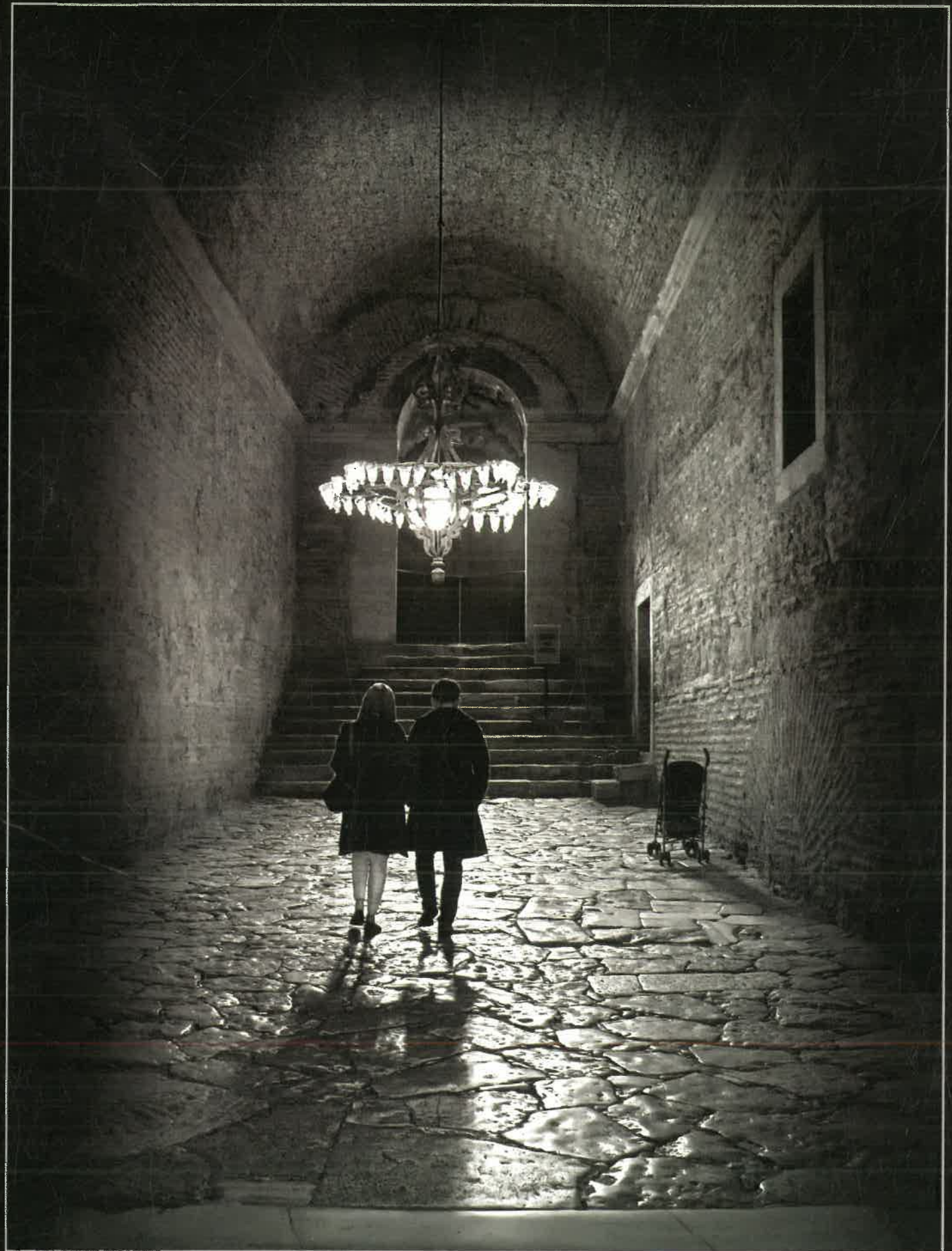


'WINDOW LIGHT' – 2016
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

Going down the ramp from the first floor of the monument, the natural texture created by the bricks all around was an added bonus for this portrait.

'VISITORS AT HAGIA SOPHIA'
2016
Istanbul, Turkey

An aura of mystery surrounds this awesome environment as the anonymous couple makes its way towards the stairs. I must have been transfixed at this spot for over half an hour until I was finally rewarded by the arrival of the smartly dressed couple.





'SHEPHERD AND HIS YOUNG PUPIL' - 2011

Chanan Pir, Yazman, Bahawalpur

I have tried my hand at experimentation with textures, multiple exposures and diverse techniques using different soft wares. Image here is a result of that endeavor.



'RETURN OF THE CARAVAN' - 2010
Derawar Fort, Bahawalpur

The Fort is a photographer's delight. I have visited the monument thrice - once as DIG/Police and twice simply as a photographer. Although the results have been quite satisfying it would still be well worth another visit. Three other photo attractions around this area make it a favoured destination - the Channan Pir Festival, Mai Jawindi Mausoleum and Choolistan Desert Jeep Rally!



'A GENTLE KICK' - 2012
Pattiya Beach, Thailand

Yousuf Karsh, the iconic portrait photographer defined the elusive "moment of truth" thus: 'The revelation ... will come in a small fraction of a second with an unconscious gesture, a gleam of the eye, a brief lifting of the mask ...' To catch that element of curiosity evident in the child's playful countenance and a keen expression of expectancy one has to be ready with the finger on the shutter.



'SAILING INTO THE SUNSET' - 2012

Netty Jetty, Kemari, Karachi

A dreamy image of a lone fisherman paddling his boat towards the precipice and an arch is created by the light streaking through dramatic clouds. The effect is further enhanced by the soft evening mist.



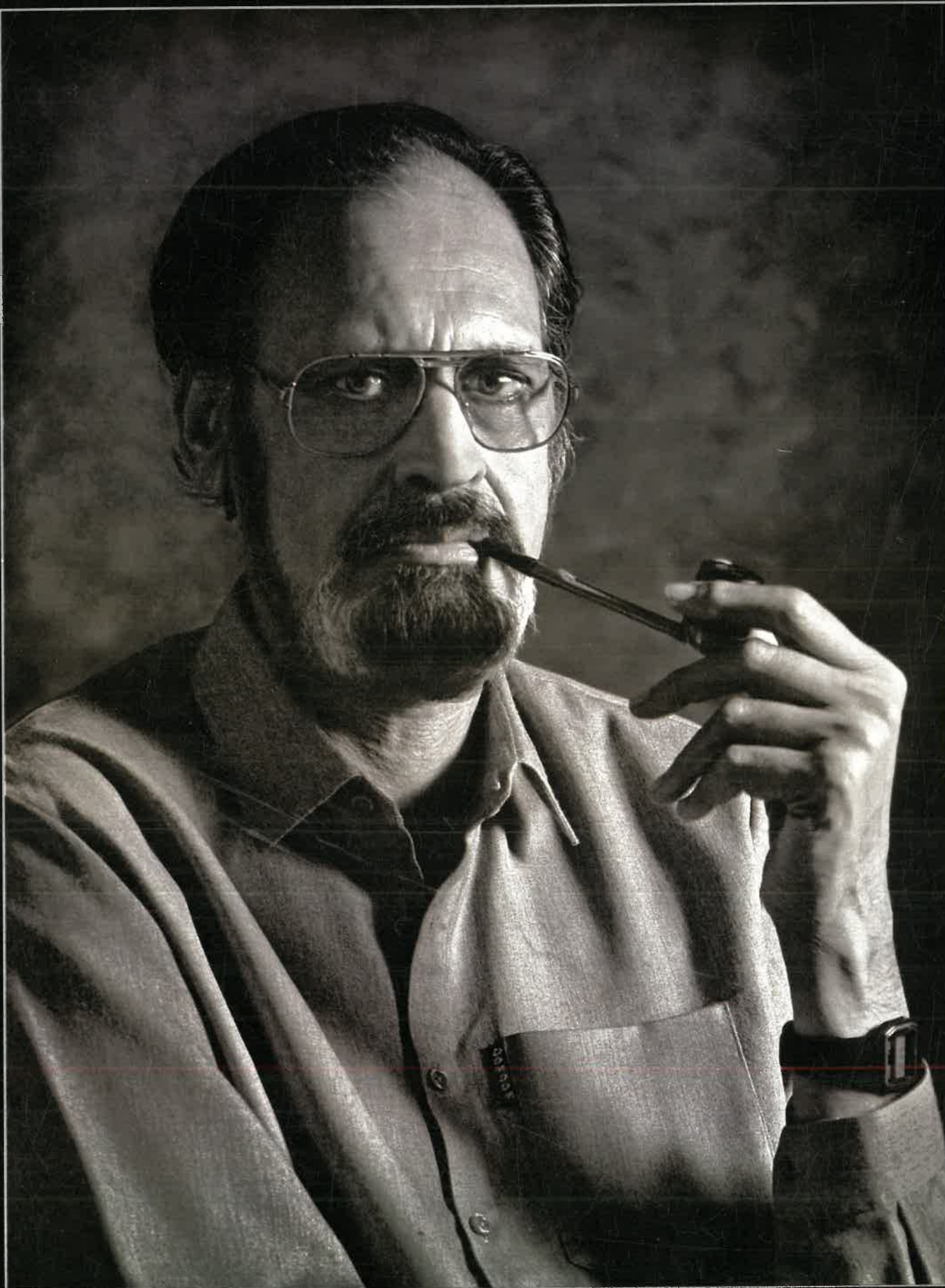
'STRANDED' - 2010
Hawkes Bay Beach, Karachi

I feel this photograph has an aura of infinity and timelessness about it. All elements - a horse standing completely still on a beach, ebb and flow of the waves, a golden evening, could have been at anytime and anywhere. Mesmerized by this unusual yet simple composition, I happily captured the moment.



'AN EVENING AT THE BEACH' - 2010
Clifton Beach, Karachi

An otherwise monotonous evening at the beach but made exciting with the realization that all elements of nature had converged together in an orderly manner and taken their places in the frame. Luck too plays its role but only when you venture out to take your chances.



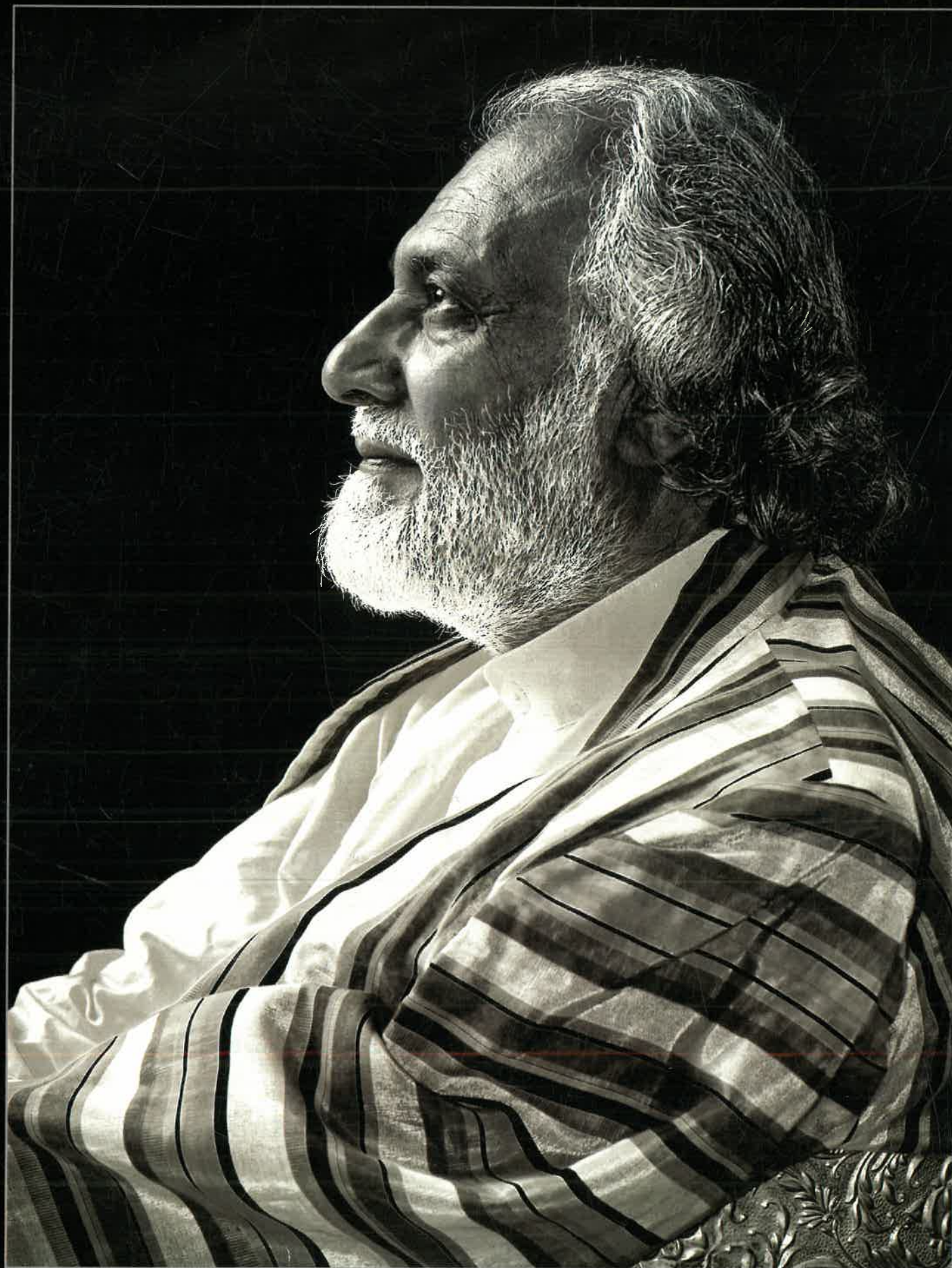
'ABDULLAH HUSSAIN' - 1994
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

The celebrated author of 'Udaas Naslain', Abdullah Sahib (late) remains one of the greatest Urdu novelists of our times. He visited my studio with Niaz Sahib (late) of Idara Sang-e-Meel for a portrait. A great conversationalist, he would lighten up the room with his abrupt laughter. As Henri Cartier-Bresson once remarked, "As time passes by and you look at portraits, the people come back to you like a silent echo. A photograph is a vestige of a face, a face in transit. Photography has something to do with death."

'SARDAR ASEFF AHMED ALI'
2007

Raiwind Road Residence, Lahore

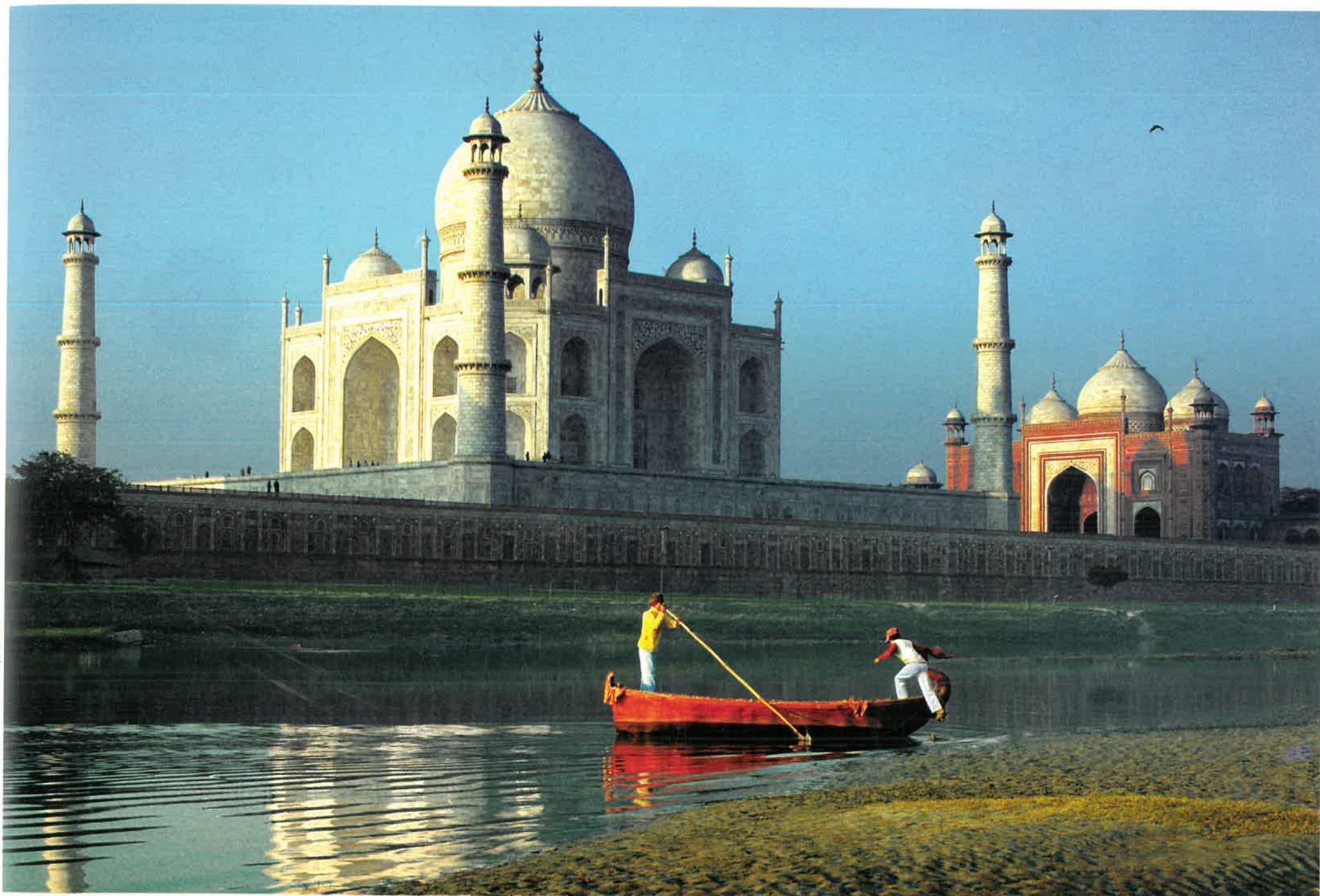
Sardar Sahib, the former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, has a dynamic presence that makes a great subject for portraiture. He is a soft spoken private person and a gracious host. Yusuf Karsh describes it most eloquently what I tried to achieve in this session with him. 'There is a brief moment when all that there is in a man's mind and soul and spirit may be reflected through his eyes, his hands, his attitude. This is the moment to record. This is the elusive 'moment of truth'.'





'FROLICKING' – 2011
Hawkes Bay Beach, Karachi

I sat for a long time completely absorbed in watching the ebb and flow of the waves caressing the soft surface of the beach. As luck would have it, this family appeared from nowhere and filled the emptiness of the canvas with their mirth and laughter. I waited patiently until they reached an ideal spot for me press the shutter.



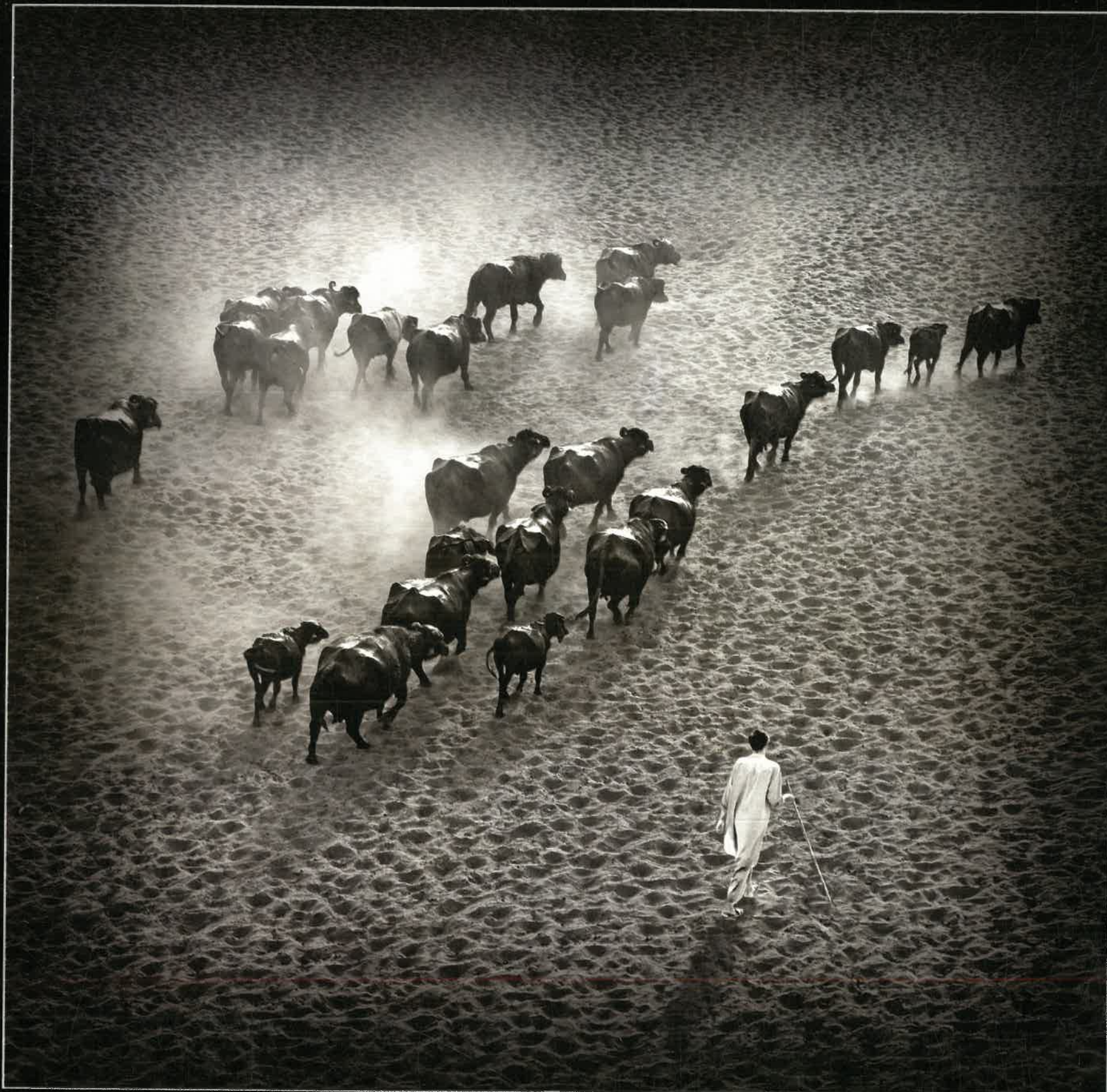
'AN EARLY COMMUTER' – 2005

Crossing River Jamuna, Taj Mahal Agra, India

On a visit to Agra, photographers Aftab Ahmed, Nayyer Reza, Saleem Khawar and I decided to capture the magnificent Taj Mahal from a different angle under different lighting conditions. So we hired taxis before daybreak and went across River Jamuna to Taj's rear side. We braved the windy and chilly conditions of February but were rewarded with some stunning shots.



'I DROPPED IT HERE!' - 2010
Hawkes Bay Beach, Karachi



'THE LONG WALK HOME' - 2012
Ravi Riverbed at Shahdara, Lahore

As the shadows lengthen this herd slowly makes its way back to the shed. The last rays of the sun light up the cloud of dust with a magical glow providing a ideal backdrop for the shot.



'A BUMPER CROP'- 2011

Green Acres Farm on Raiwind Road, Lahore

The view of grain bundles spread across a field is certainly a source of immense joy for a farmer but it also provides enormous possibilities of interesting compositions for a photographer.



'DRYING RICE'- 2014

Ferozepur Road, suburbs of Lahore

The hustle bustle of drying rice begins early morning with grain spread out on the mud plastered ground. After the day's exposure to the sun it is again filled back into the sacks. The process is repeated for about three weeks. The coordinated movement of the farm boys in this image appears almost rehearsed although they are feverishly trying to wrap up their day's task.

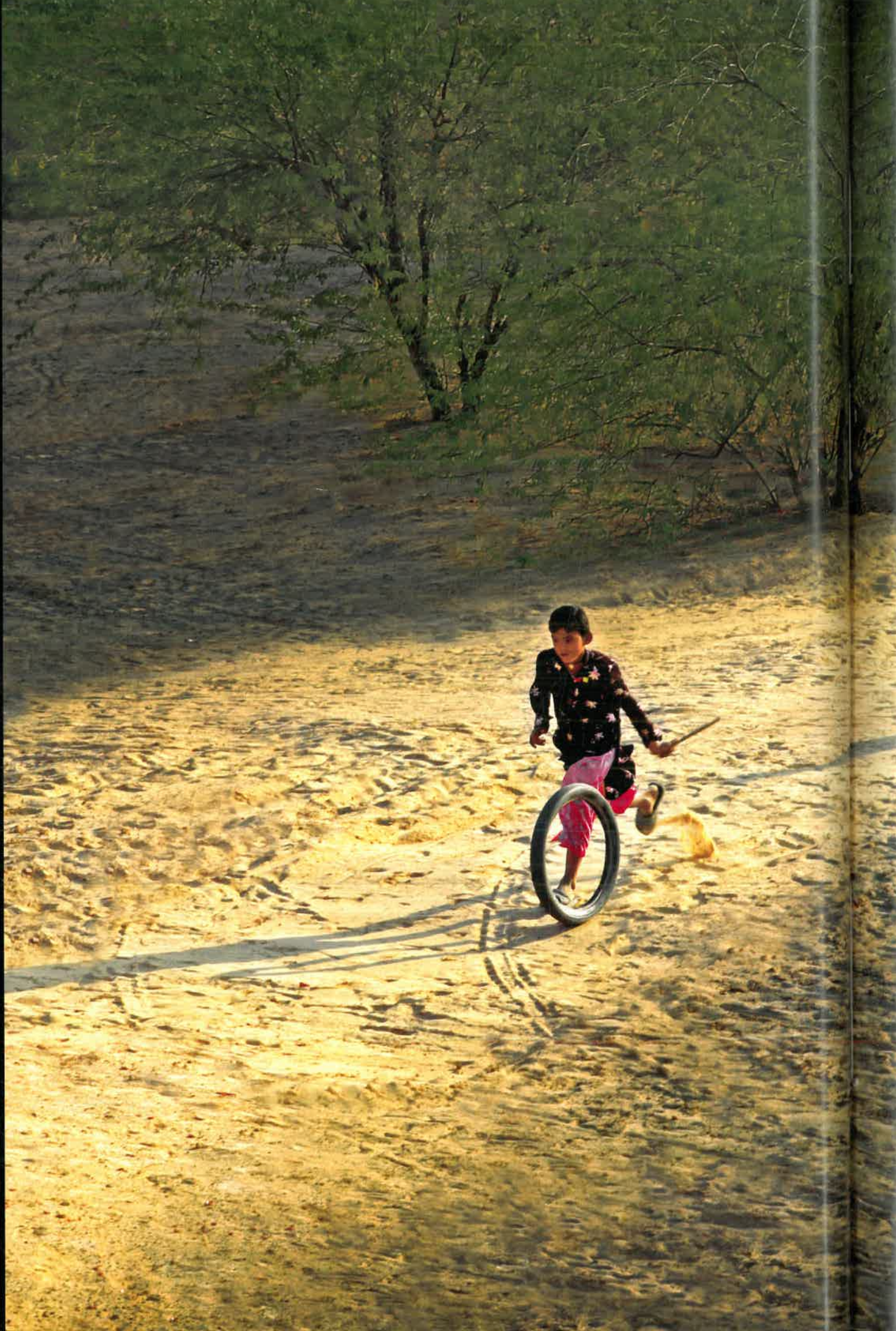


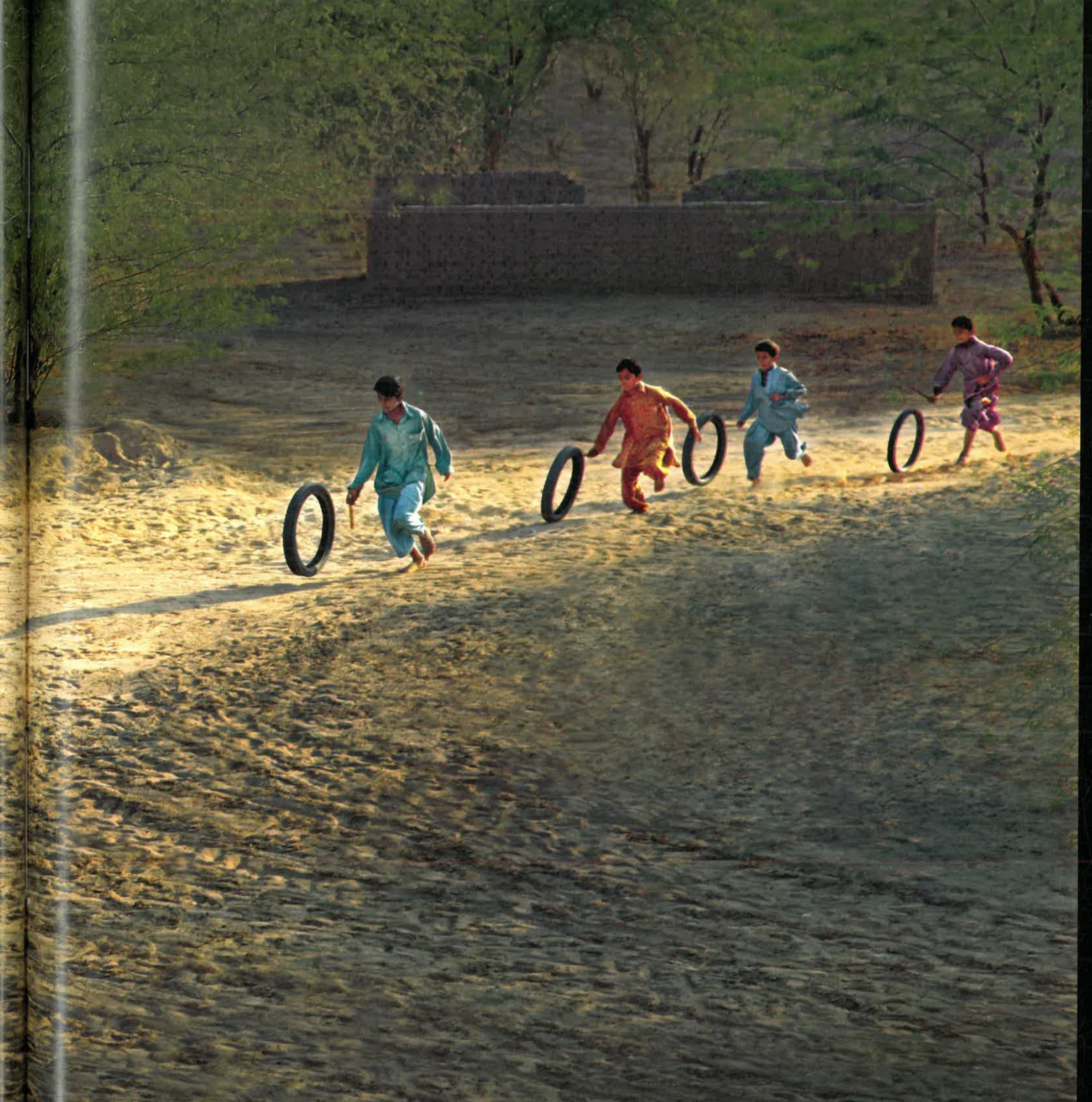
'THARI WOMEN' – 2010
A village near Umerkot, Thar Desert, Sind

'THE GRAND PRIX' - 2010

Derawar Fort, Choolistan Desert, Bahawalpur

While visiting the Fort for taking pictures I noticed some children enjoying themselves with a game of tire racing. Elliott Erwitt describes it eloquently: "To me, photography is an art of observation. It's about finding something interesting in an ordinary place... I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them."







'THE WHIRLING DERVISHES' - 2016

Sarıhan Cappadocia, Turkey

The Sufi whirling dance is part of a formal ceremony 'Sema' and draws its inspiration from Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi (1207 - 1273). It is performed to reach religious ecstasy (from Ascension to Mirac). "Come, come, whoever you are; / Be you infidel, idolator or pagan, come / Our convent is not a place of despair / Even if you have gone back on your oath a hundred times, still come!" Rumi



'THE WAITING ROOM' – 2016
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey



'THE BIRD' – 1986
Lawrence Gardens, Lahore

An experimental study with textures and backgrounds during early days of photography.



'THE DANCING TREE' – 2012

Malakwal, Sargodha

Although a dead tree evokes negative feelings, this one appeared to me like a 'kathak' dancer striking a pose' highlighting characteristics of subtlety and grace of the dance. The brightly lit crimson clouds with the freely floating kites against a rich blue sky has helped create great ambiance for the image.



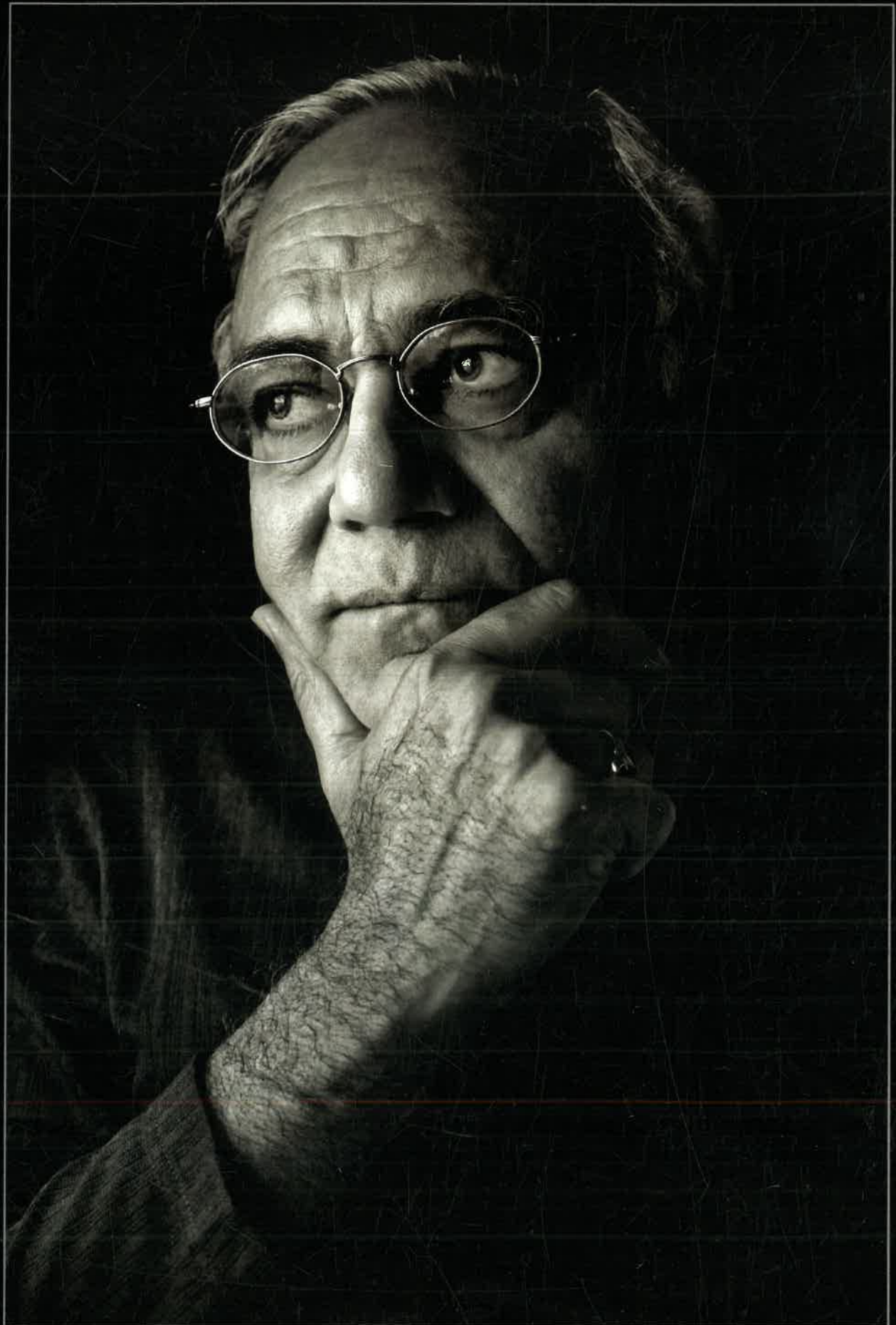
'MARIA IN BLACK & WHITE' - 2001
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

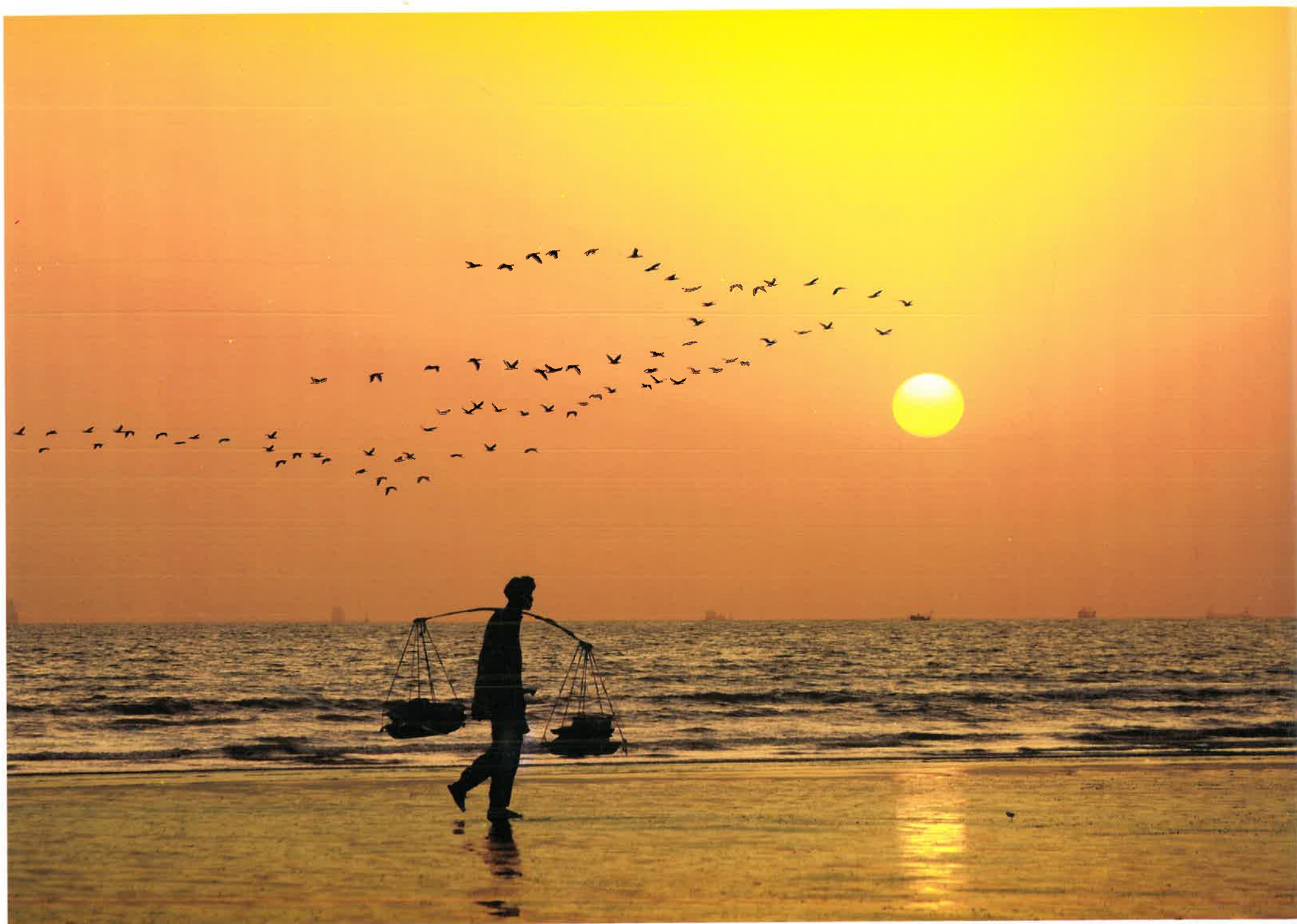
'Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught on film is captured forever... It remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything.' — Aaron Siskind

'NAYYER REZA' - 2010

Portrait taken during a train journey,
Sukkur

Travelling all over the country by train while photographing for my book 'Pakistan Railways, I was accompanied by photographer friends Nayer Reza and Agha Waseem Ahmed. These were two unforgettable years. I caught Nayer in this contemplative mood while staring out of the compartment window.





'HIGH FLIERS' - 2010
Clifton Beach, Karachi

The sight of hundreds of birds flying in various formations over the horizon is an amazing sight. The fact that this happens every day at sunset and without fail is all the more incredible. The photographers usually parade the lengthy stretch of this beach for getting a winning shot.



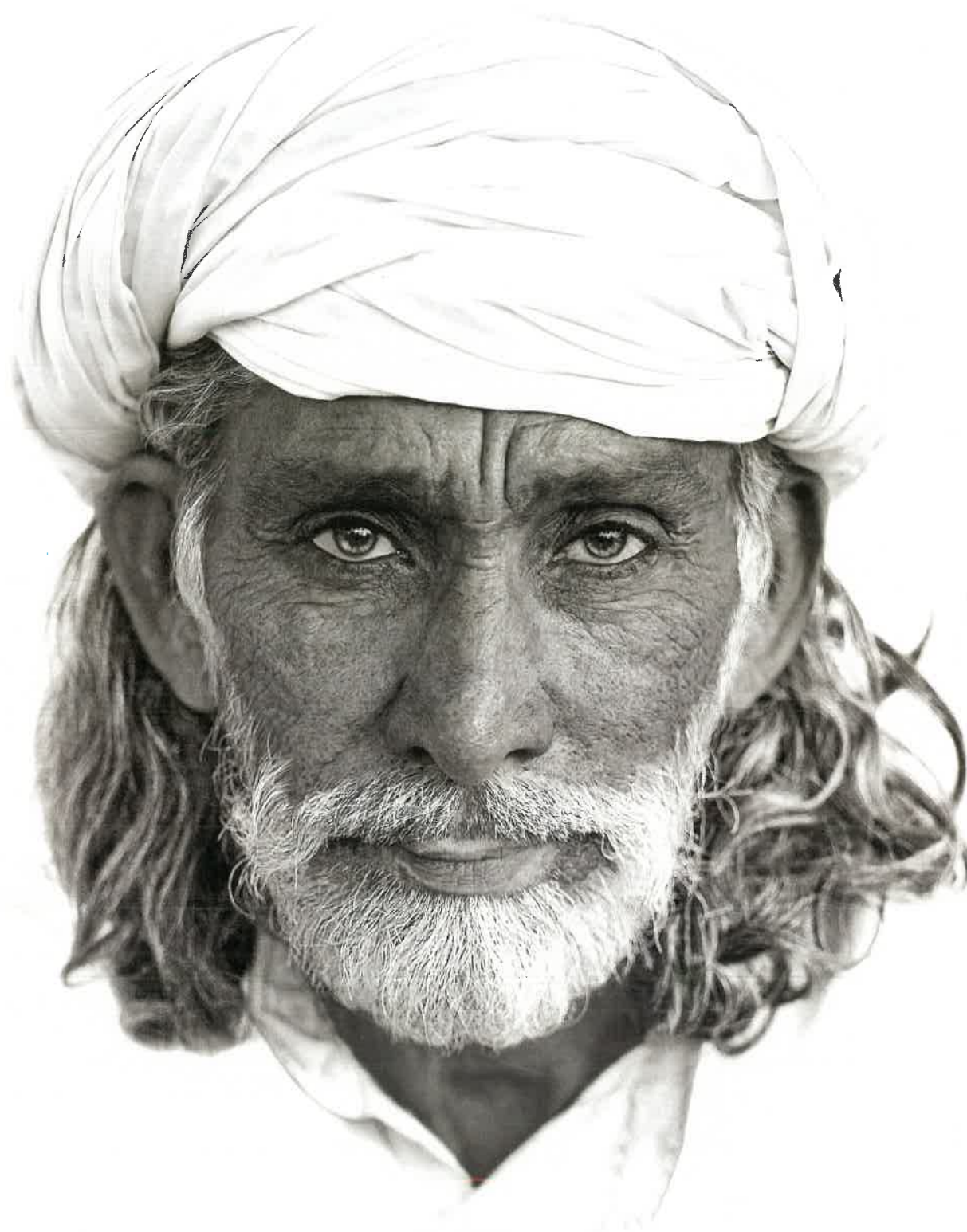
'MAKING WAVES' – 2014

On the banks of River Ravi

The act of making waves and creating ripples by this old man almost appeared child-like while he sat on the edge his boat. He was completely oblivious of his surroundings while he amused himself. Superb light, a diagonal composition and a candid environment can provide an opportunity for some stunning photographs.



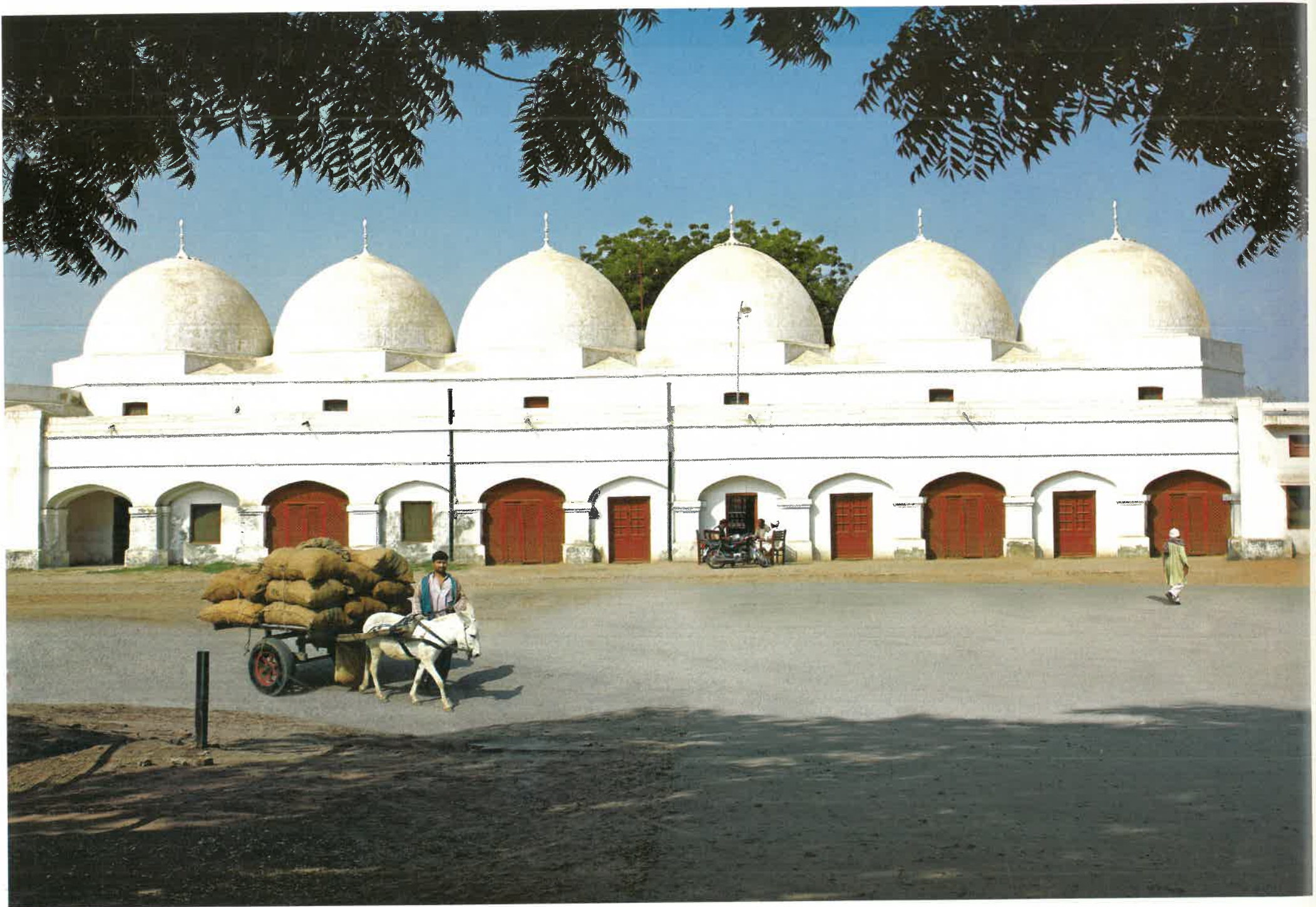
'FORBIDDING LOOKS' - 2014
A Malang at Sher Shah Shrine near Multan



'DEVOTEE AT CHANAN PIR SHRINE'- 2011

Yazman, Choolistan Desert, Bahawalpur

Visit any shrine and one is sure to come across a variety of eccentric characters – forlorn lovers, abandoned kids, bearded malangs and pitiful female beggars. Some appear lost while others are quite menacing. Interact with them and you discover a softer side to their otherwise forbidding demeanor. However the disheveled and scruffy appearances make interesting subjects for portraiture.



'SAMMA SATTA RAILWAY STATION' - 2010
Bahawalpur

The domed structure of the Railway Station office buildings is unique to the old Bahawalpur State as several other buildings including Dera Nawab Sahib Railway Station are constructed on the same design.



'TOMB OF BIBI JAWINDI' - 2010

Uchh Sharif, Bahawalpur

Uch Sharif situated in Bahawalpur District is an important historical city, believed to be founded by Alexander the Great. Formerly located at the confluence of the Indus and Chenab rivers Uch Sharif contains the tombs of Bibi Jawindi, Baha'al-Halim, Ustad Nuriya and Jalaluddin Bukhari, which are considered masterpieces of Islamic architecture and are on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list.



'PRAYING FOR THE DEAD' – 2013
Shah Ali Akbar Shamsi Shrine, Multan

Caretakers called 'mujaawars' spend lifetimes occasionally dusting and annually washing the graves. Whether this duty is performed out of devotion or they are employed by the descendants of the Pirs, their livelihood appears to be dependent on alms given by an infrequent visitor and food provided by the residents around the shrine.



'PRAYING FOR THE LIVING' – 2010

Roadside in Quetta Suburbs

I watched this old man and his grandson offering prayers under an improvised straw hut on one of the most dangerous roadsides of Quetta suburb. The effects of mindless bloodshed in recent times were evident on the old man's face as opposed to the pure innocence on that of the boy. I was warned by my host to cover my telephoto lens as it appeared to be a formidable weapon, for fear of a sniper attack and we had to move away from the spot hastily.



'MORNING WASH' - 1987

Bank of River Ravi at Shahdara, Lahore

One of my earliest attempts at shooting with transparency film. Seems like yesterday! Some thirty years later I still found the hand pump at the same spot. Considering what flows in the river this is the only source of clean water.



'AN EARLY WINTER MORNING' - 2010

Taken from a moving train at Raiwind near Lahore

'The hallmark of a spectacular shot is when a photographer is able to capture the transient reality through instinct and spontaneity since the creative act lasts but a brief moment, just long enough to level the camera and to snap the shutter.' Henri Cartier-Bresson calls it 'the decisive moment'. Travelling to Lahore I woke up to witness this remarkable scene outside the compartment and had barely time to shoot a few frames from the moving train.



'SMOKE SIGNALS' - 2011
Suburbs of Quetta, Balochistan

Some images leave a deep impression on the mind of the photographer because of the hazard or vulnerability he is exposed to. At a time when Quetta was in serious turmoil, driving to no-go areas in quest of images can only be termed as imprudent. That is why I treasure this image.



'THE LONE RANGER' - 2013
Shahdara, Lahore



'MELANCHOLY' – 2010
Clifton Beach, Karachi



'THE DESERT WELL' – 2010
Village near Umerkot, Thar Desert, Sind



'MARIA FARAZ' - 2016
Cleopatra's Pool, Pamukkale,
Turkey

*Maria Faraz, my niece has been
a wonderful and keen model
over the years. This image was
taken on our last visit to Turkey
this year.*

"DADDY'S PRINCESS"

- 2016

Kabil Road, Ankara, Turkey

The pretty Turkish girl was listening to a live music performance while lovingly holding on to her father's arms.





'RAHNE - THE GUITARIST' – 2016

Ephesus near Izmir, Turkey

Rahne Pistor stringing merrily at the steps of Celcus Library, Ephesus.



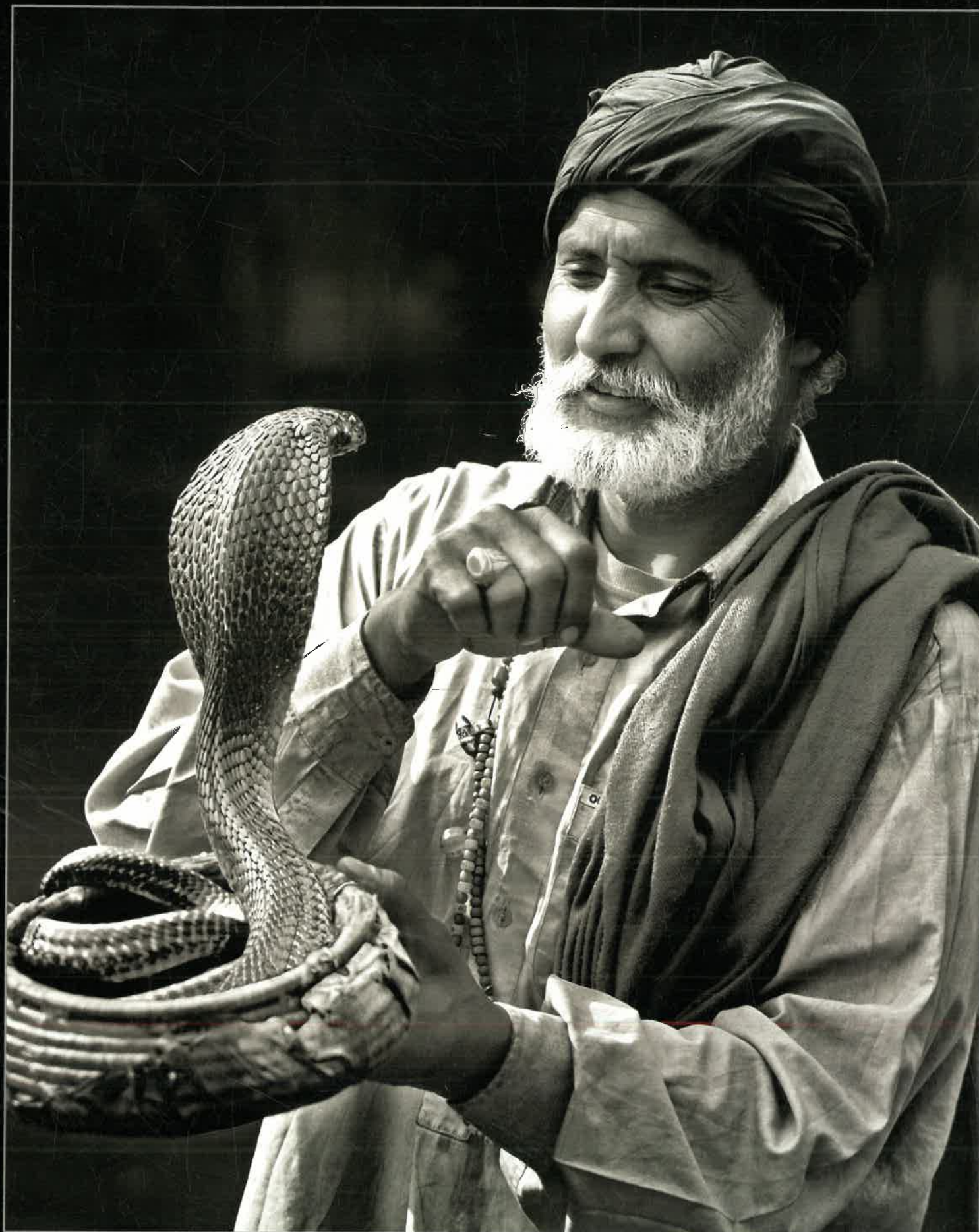
'TURKISH SELFIE MANIA' - 2016
Ephesus near Izmir, Turkey

A candid shot at the Ephesus taken during a day trip from Izmir, Turkey.

'ROYAL MESSENGER' – 2008
Amber Fort, Jaipur, India



'THE SNAKE CHARMER' – 2015
Lahore Wildlife Park,
Raiwind Road, Lahore





'DONE FOR THE DAY' - 2010
Boat on Kabul River at Nowshera

The cloud formation at sunset on a winter's evening is indeed a gift of nature when God sends a photographer to a place such as this to capture the striking image.



'OLD MAN AND THE SEA' - 2010
Clifton Beach, Karachi



'AFGHAN REFUGEE GIRL' – 1989
Afghan Refugee Camp, Mansehra

'ALINA' – 1997

ZIM's house at Model Town, Lahore

Zafar Iqbal Mirza's grand-daughter Alina, shy at first finally agreed to pose for the camera. The photo won a silver medal from Australia.







'PARTING OF WAYS' - 2012

Ravi Riverbed at Shahdara, Lahore

Buffalo herds slowly making their way back to their respective cowsheds on a late summer evening after a day of grazing and one last drink from the River.



'LIFE BY THE RIVER' - 2010

River Indus at Sukkur, Sindh

These little mermaids should have been in school but unfortunately this is what life has offered to them. However the true story may be more painful than how it appears. In the words of Elliott Erwitt, "The whole point of taking pictures is so that you don't have to explain things with words."



'COLOURS OF THE DESERT' - 2010
Village near Umerkot, Thar Desert, Sind

During a visit to Thar Desert we crossed several villages comprising of thatched huts inhabited mostly by Hindu families. The lifestyle of these tribes amid rough conditions was quite an education. The womenfolk tend to all family chores including fetching of water from the community well usually located a fair distance away from village.



'FISHING AT DAWN' - 2010

Bridge over River Indus at Jamshoro, Sind

Catching fish with nets is a traditional method but is a fascinating demonstration of immense patience and hard labor. Because of poverty every member of the family has to work irrespective of age which usually begins at dawn and ends only when the job is done.



'A LATE EVENING WASH' - 2012

River Ravi, Lahore

The Tonga driver's trusted friend and companion needs cooling off after a day's running around. Reflections of the setting sun highlight the ripples created by the late evening breeze. Images taken against light are usually the most challenging and invariably produce stunning results.



'TAJ MAHAL AT SUNRISE' - 2005

A view from the Jamuna River (rear side) Agra, India

When photographers Aftab Ahmed, Saleem Khawar and I decided to shoot the Taj from across the River we were not sure what would be in store for us. We reached at the break of dawn. It was bitterly cold but the next hour of snapping was enough to warm our hearts. "A landscape image cuts across all political and national boundaries; it transcends the constraints of language and culture." Charlie Waite



'CARAVAN' – 1996

A view from the Motorway near Sial Mor, Sargodha.

While travelling to Sargodha I saw a cloud of dust some distance away. Viewing a lovely sunset on the horizon I instinctively knew something dramatic was in the offing. By the time I leveled the camera this herd of camels had come quite close and I started shooting excitedly since such opportunities occur very rarely. This image, one of my most favored, has received worldwide appreciation most prominently on Flickr.com with over 6000 comments besides winning several International awards.



'NADRIYE OGUZ' – 2016

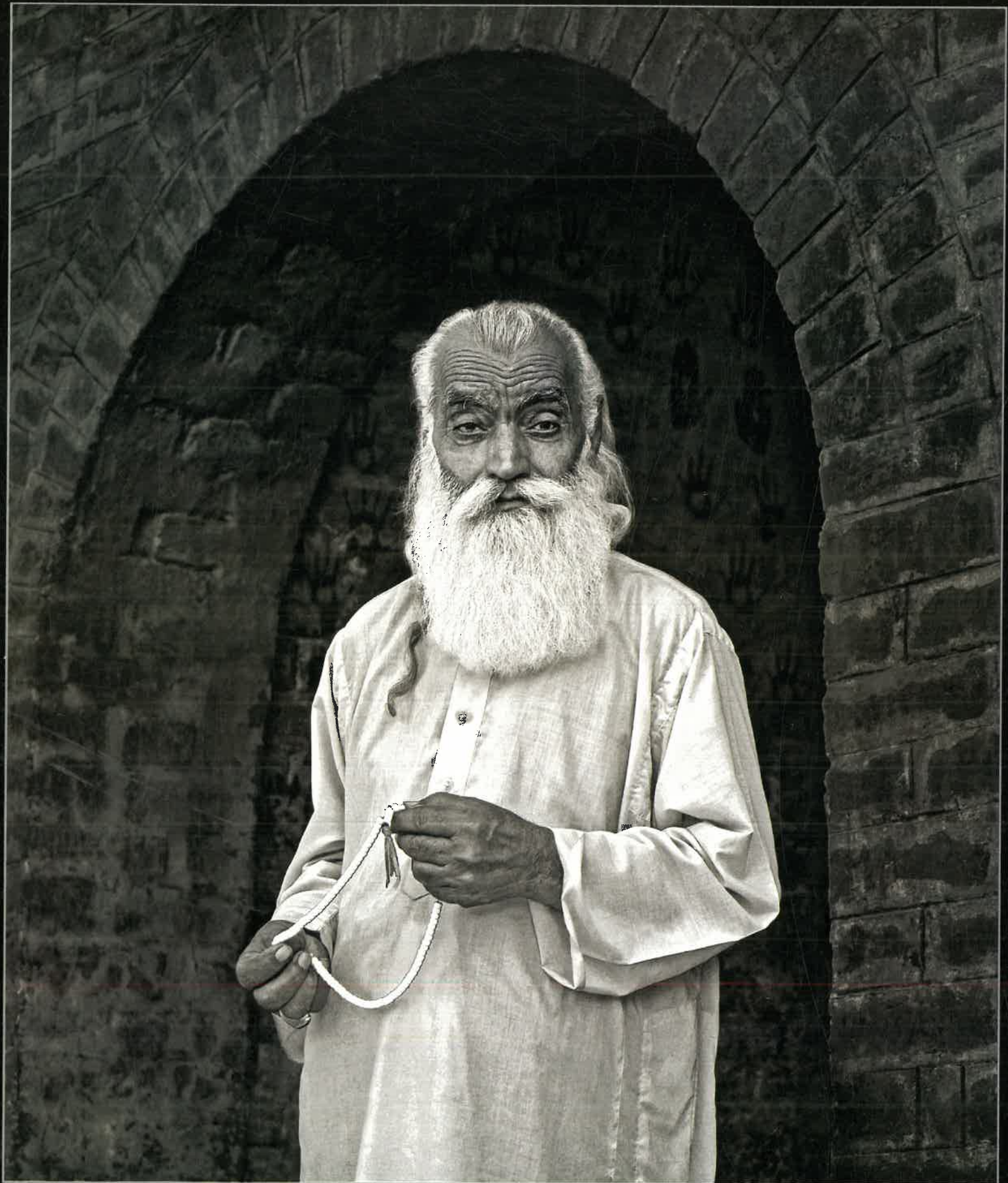
Pammukale, Izmir, Turkey

Our charming tours guide on a trip to Pammukale, who could converse fluently in English, a rare phenomenon in Turkey.

'MUJAWAR' - 2013

Sher Shah Shrine, Multan

Shah Ji, the caretaker has devoted his life to the service of the Shrine ever since he abandoned his home in Azad Kashmir. What motivated him to a life of celibacy or even piety is unclear since he migrated here as a child. Stories of faith healing, miracles and the supernatural abound around these shrines which give these places a strange sense of mystique.

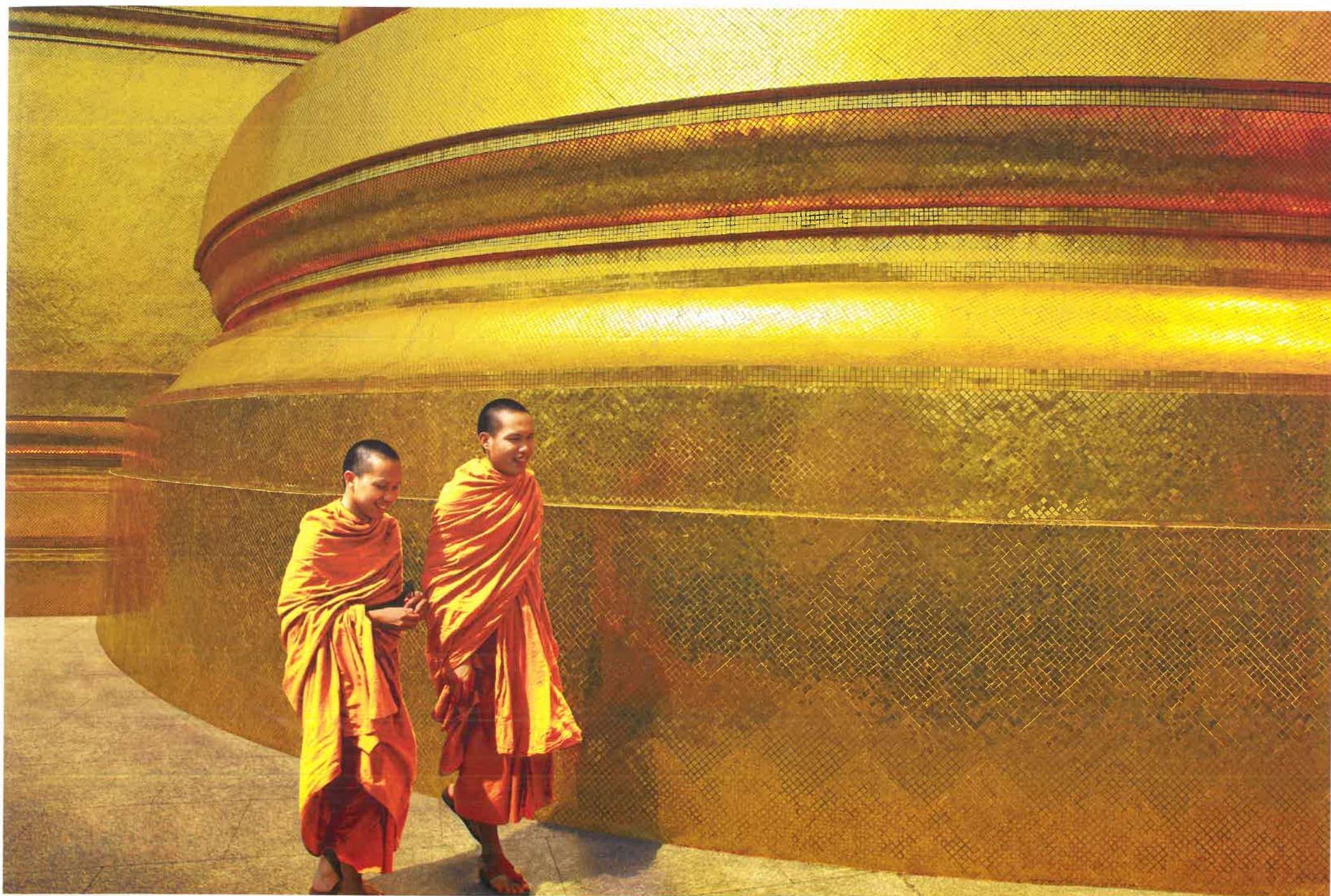




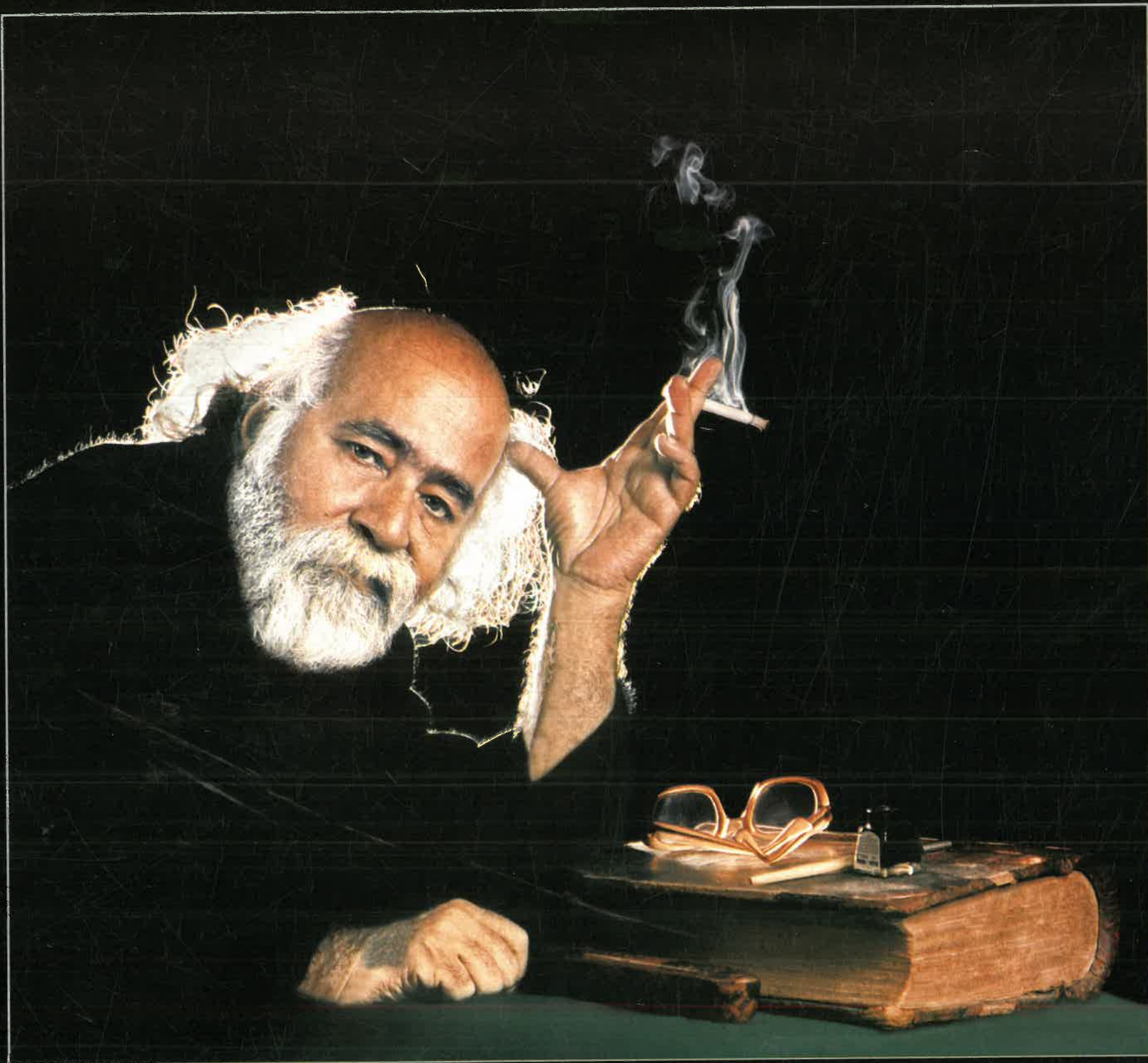
'HEADING OUT' - 2014

A view from the Ravi Bridge, Lahore

Termed as minimalist, such shots do not necessitate the presence of diverse elements for filling the frame. Apart from the boat, the waves, ripples and the reflections of the evening sun can also contribute to its innovative look.



'MONKS AT THE GRAND PALACE' – 2012
Bangkok, Thailand



'MIDNIGHT SCHOLAR' – 1993

Zafar Iqbal Mirza at Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

Zafar Iqbal Mirza had only posed for me in available light but when I bought studio lights he agreed for a sitting under the glare of lights. The image highlights ZIM's personality as a man of letters, accentuated by props, the rim light, and the flight of the smoke. A sense of mystique surrounds the portrait – quite like ZIM in real life for most people.



'PENSIVE' - 1994

Mina Shahid at Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

Family members have always obliged even with their modest modeling skills. Since children are most natural before the camera, I decided to employ my young niece's talent for this dramatic lighting set-up. The flashing lights produced a variety of expressions – sullen, astonished, bewildered, mystified or simple laughter. Her body nestled between two affectionate figures also helped develop a strong composition. The session had its rewards as this picture bagged five international awards.



'RAISING DUST' – 2014

A Farm on Ferozepur Road, Suburb of Lahore

The hustle bustle at such farms, where rice is dried after threshing, is hysterical. The commotion of arranging the grain in furrows during the day and hastily packing it in sacks before dew starts falling is a fascinating spectacle. It is a festive atmosphere and the farmhands are more than willing models.



'FOLLOW THE LEADER' – 1996
Near Sheikhupura on the Motorway

While driving along the Motorway near Sheikhupura town, I noticed a herd appearing from the horizon amidst a cloud of dust. I stopped for a closer look and what amused me was the composition of this herd being led quite nonchalantly by a donkey. Ever since then I have always relished the political undertones the image's title has helped create.



'VILLAGERS HUDDLE' – 2013

Uchh Sharif Mosque, Bahawalpur

The village mosque is an ideal venue where old timers sit and discuss practically everything – politics, religion, marriages, local rivalries and police cases, but most of all juicy gossip! Significantly it is still a closely knit society where everybody knows each other and their problems. The simplicity of their expressions and lifestyle makes great pictures.



'A NOSE JOB' – 1986

Kamran Shafi's Farm near Sheikhpura

I found this barber attending to his customer during a walk around the village. The camera was instrumental in inducing an exultant look which should have been a grimace. Elliott Erwitt explains it eloquently, "You can find pictures anywhere. It's simply a matter of noticing things and organizing them. You just have to care about what's around you and have a concern with humanity and the human comedy."



'NAYYER REZA' - 2011

Portrait taken on a train at Sukkur

Nayyer Reza is an internationally renowned and accomplished banker turned photographer. We have traveled to numerous places together- India, Thailand, South Punjab & Sind, over the last 20 years in quest of some memorable images. This image was taken while we were traveling in a moving train.



'CARETAKER RAJESH' - 2010
Sadh Belo, Rohri, Sukkur Sind

Sadh Belo is an island in the Indus River near Sukkur. A Hindu temple founded in 1823 by Swami Bakhandi Maharaj Udasi and held in high esteem by Hindus throughout Sindh and in India is a prominent landmark. The caretaker Rajesh showed us around the premises including its Library.



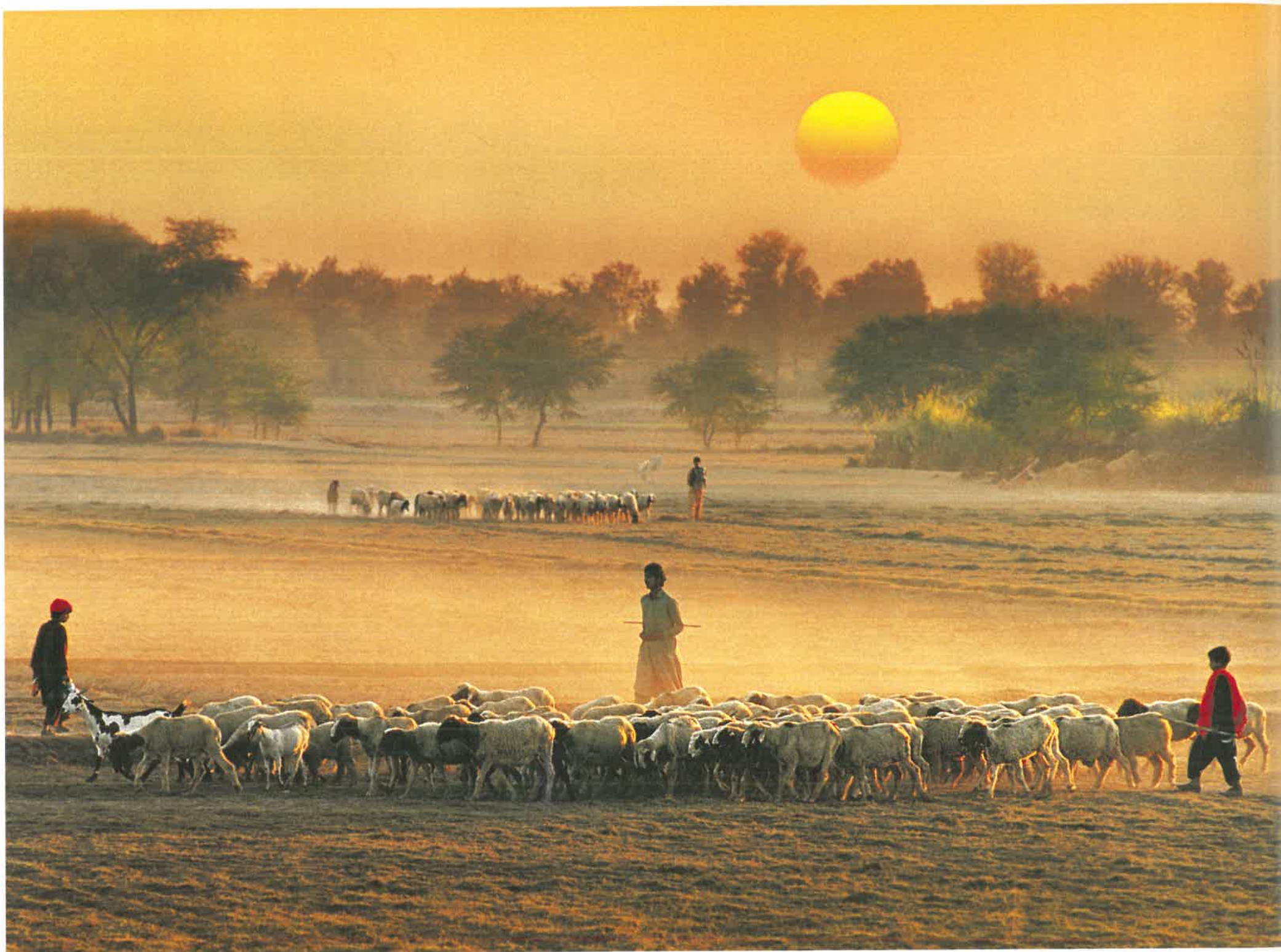
'A GREAT CATCH' - 2012
Pattiya Beach, Thailand



'BOY IN THE WINDOW' – 1987

A house in Murree

My elder son Bilal Sami modeled for me at a dilapidated house in Murree. The cross-light highlighting the textured window and the face against a dark background helped in creating a strong composition.



'FOUR SHEPHERDS' – 1996

Near Pindi Bhattian on Lahore-Islamabad Motorway

The nomadic tribes with their flocks migrate to the relatively warmer regions of Punjab when it gets unbearably cold in the northern areas. They walk hundreds of miles and return only when the pastures become greener with the onset of spring. Shepherds with their flocks is a popular subject with photographers and if one gets a sunset for a backdrop it is surely a bonus.



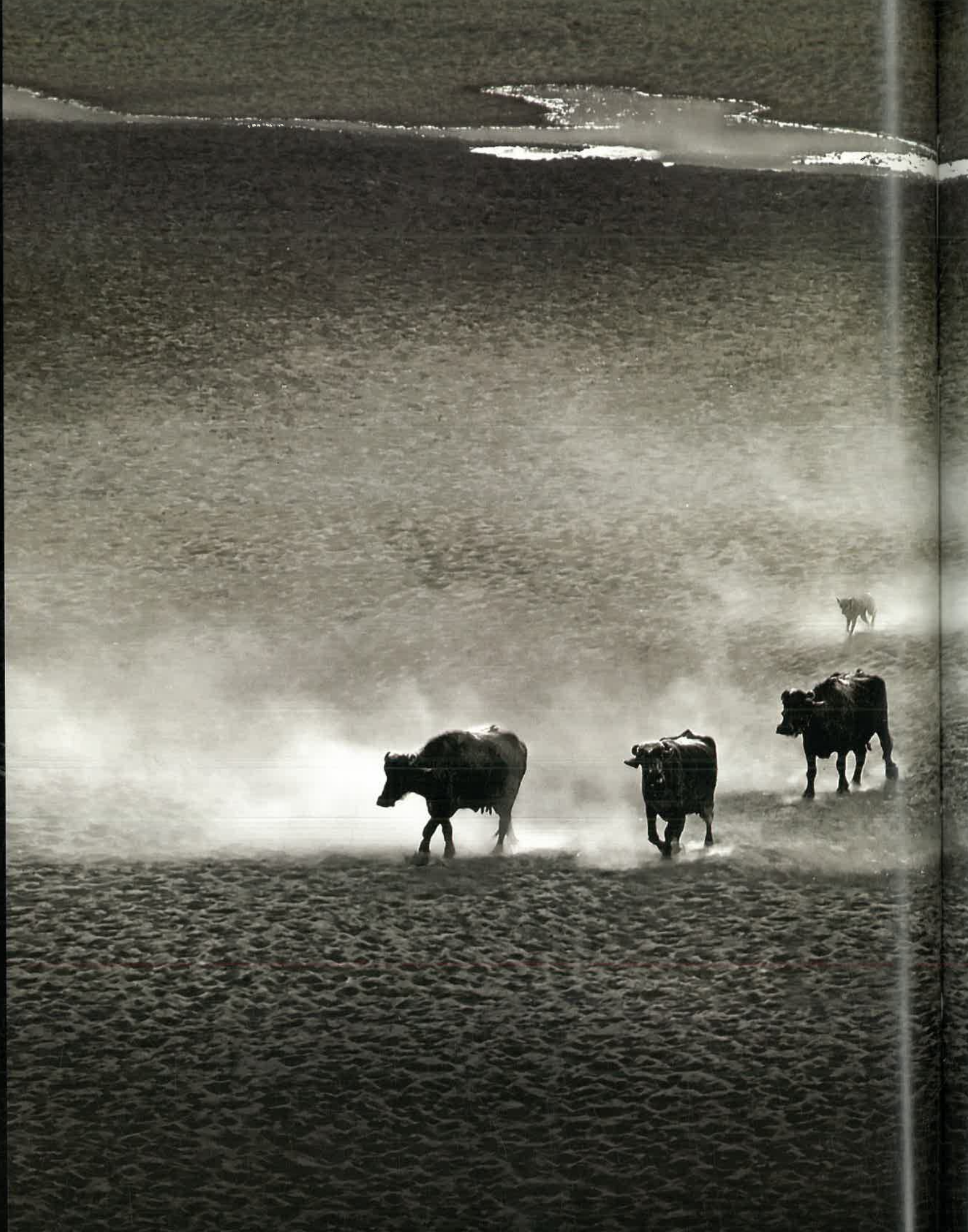
'EVENING IN THE FIELDS' - 1987

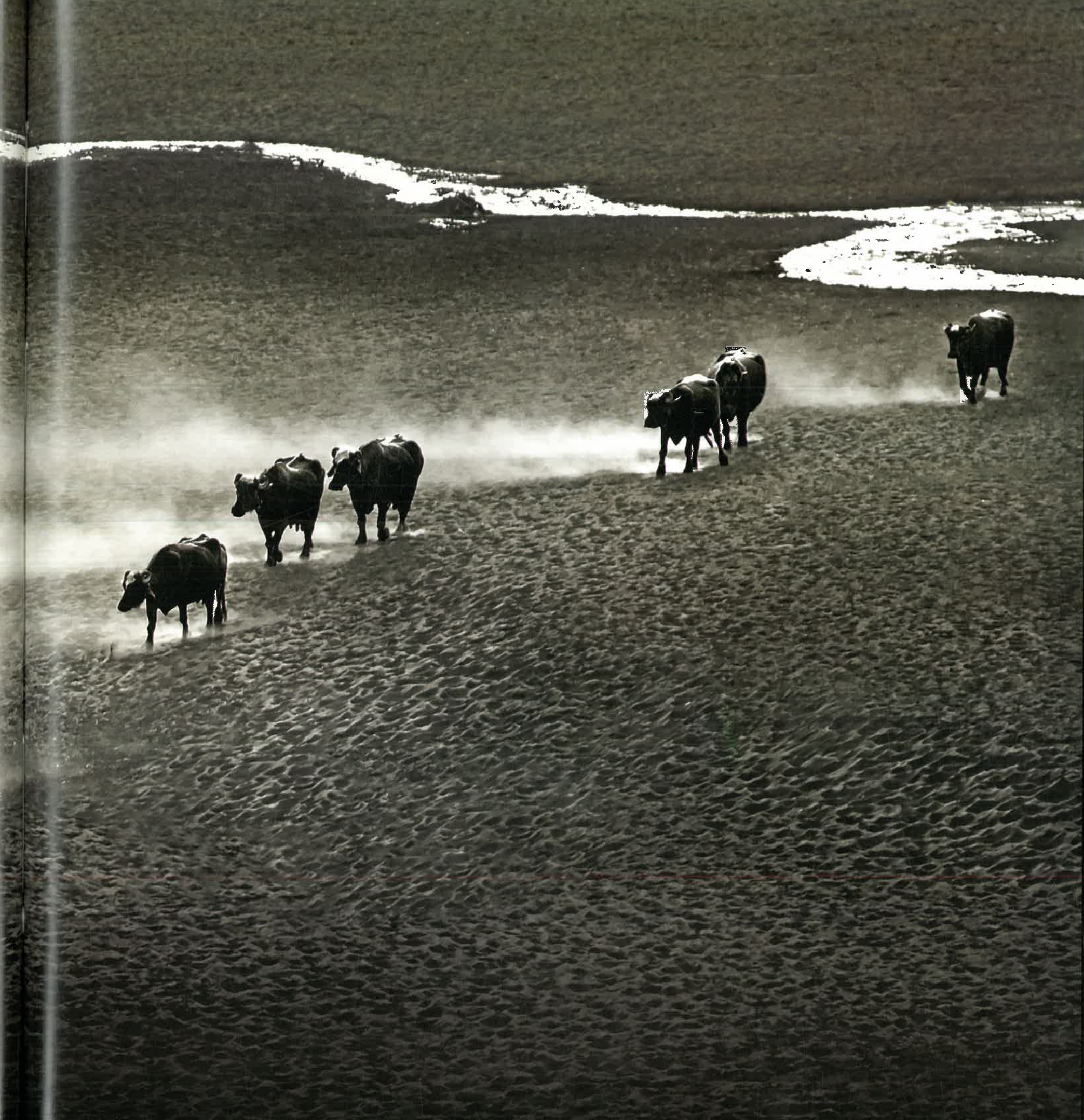
Outskirts of Wazirabad on Grand Trunk Road

Mian Majeed (Late) and I came across this farm on the outskirts of Wazirabad while driving back from an exhibition at Rawalpindi. Drying grain through this primitive but traditional process is still in vogue practically all over the country. The back light enhanced the effect created by the golden dust and the stacked sacks of grain provided an excellent backdrop. This image won four International Awards as well as Second Award from the National Fuji - Lok Virsa Contest.

'ONE LATE EVENING' - 2012
Ravi Riverbed, Shahdara, Lahore

"Recognition... of a rhythm of surfaces, lines, and values is for me the essence of photography; composition should be a constant of preoccupation" - Henri Cartier-Bresson. One can draw a lot of inspiration by viewing and reading how the great photographers achieved their masterpieces.

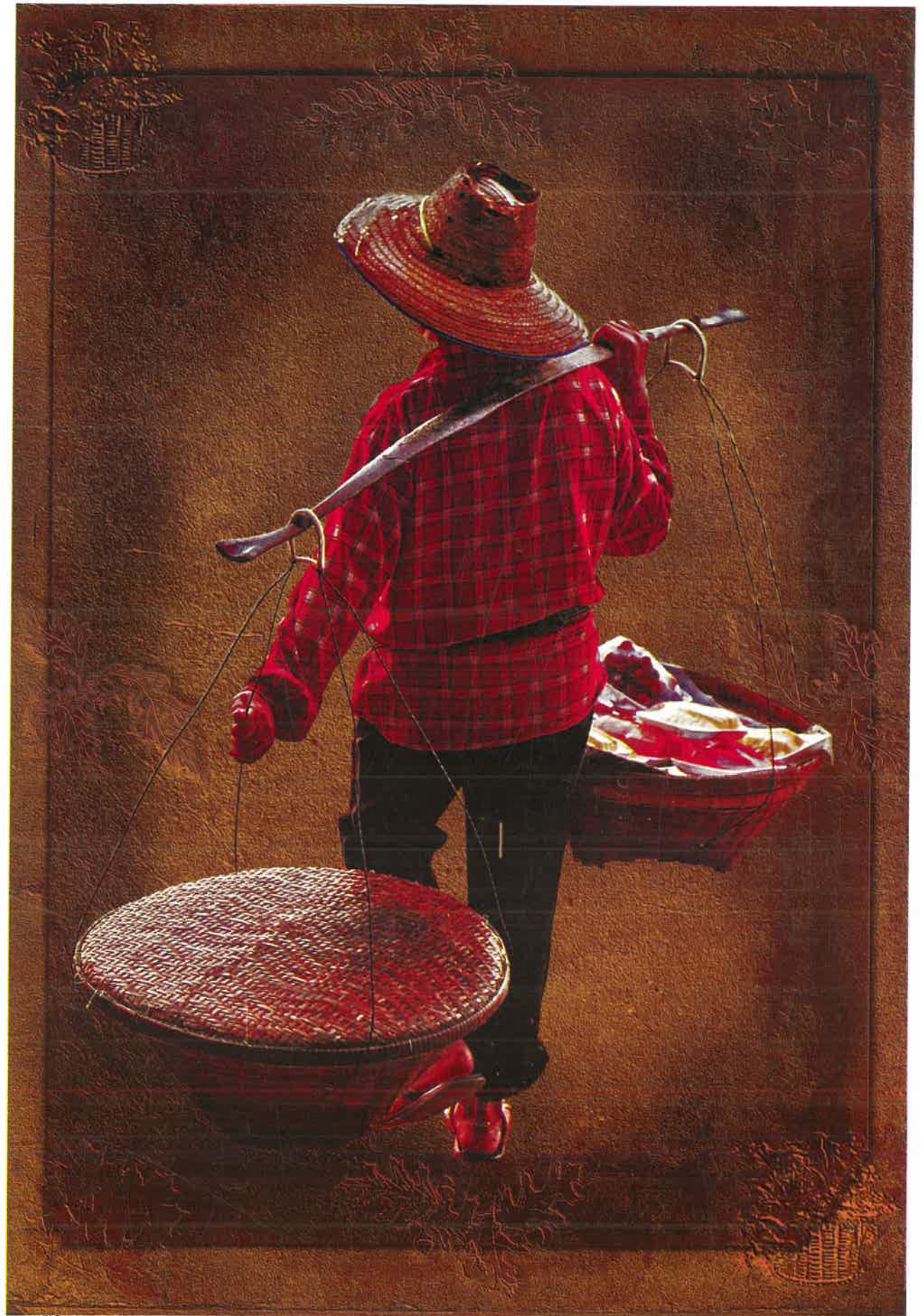


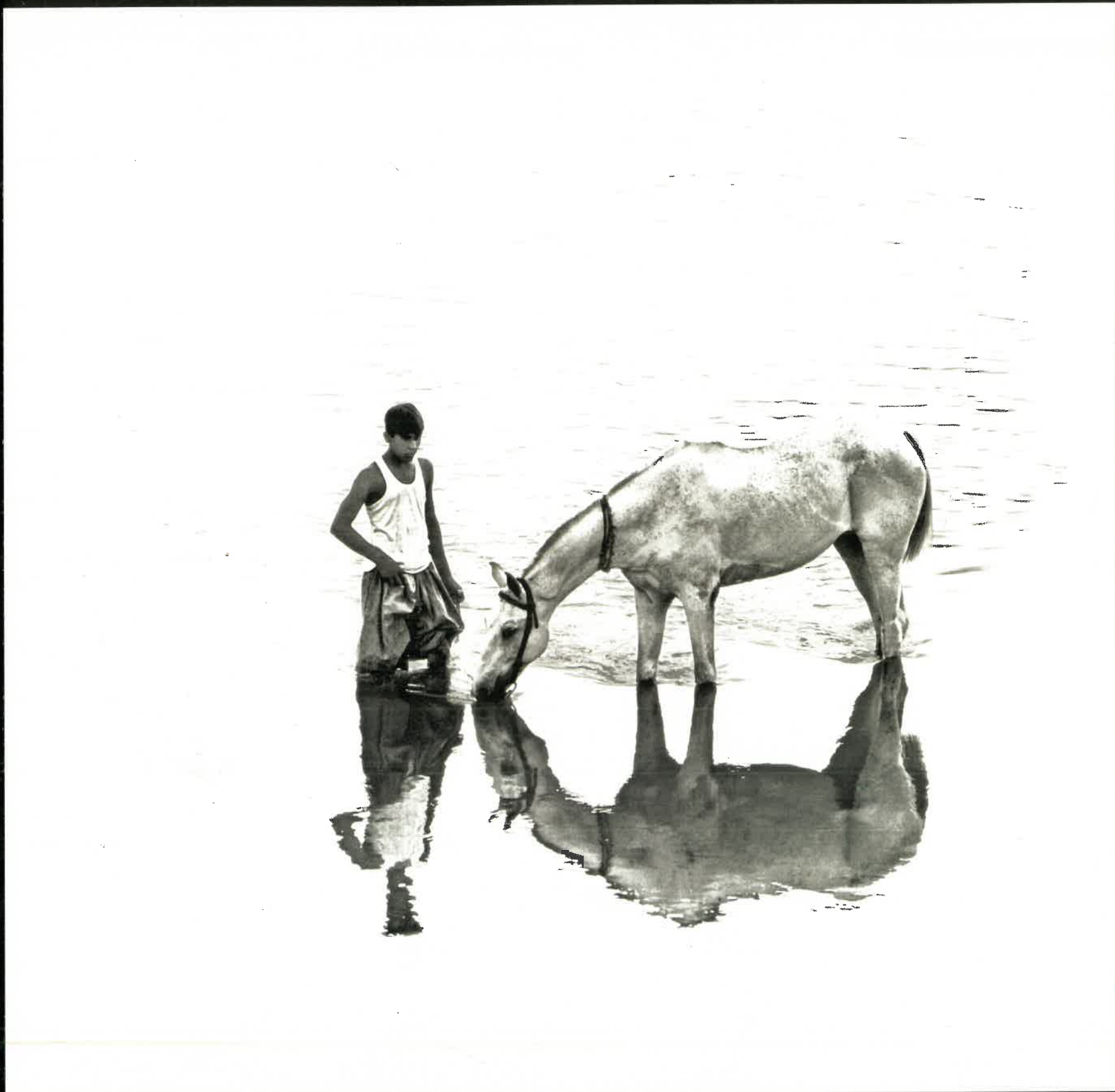




'A HELPING HAND' - 2011
Umer Kot, Thar Desert, Sind

'THE HAWKER WOMAN' - 2012
Pattiya Beach, Thailand





'END OF ANOTHER DAY' – 2010
A village pond on outskirts of Lahore



'WAITING FOR PASSENGERS' - 2011
Coolies at Railway Station, Rawalpindi

Standing in the verandah one morning I was reminded of what Andrew Hamilton had once said: 'It's not the light that makes form, it is the shadows'. Light filtering through the arches creating shadows was very eye catching. The presence of two coolies who were completely engrossed in their conversation made this composition priceless.



'CHASING DREAMS' - 1989

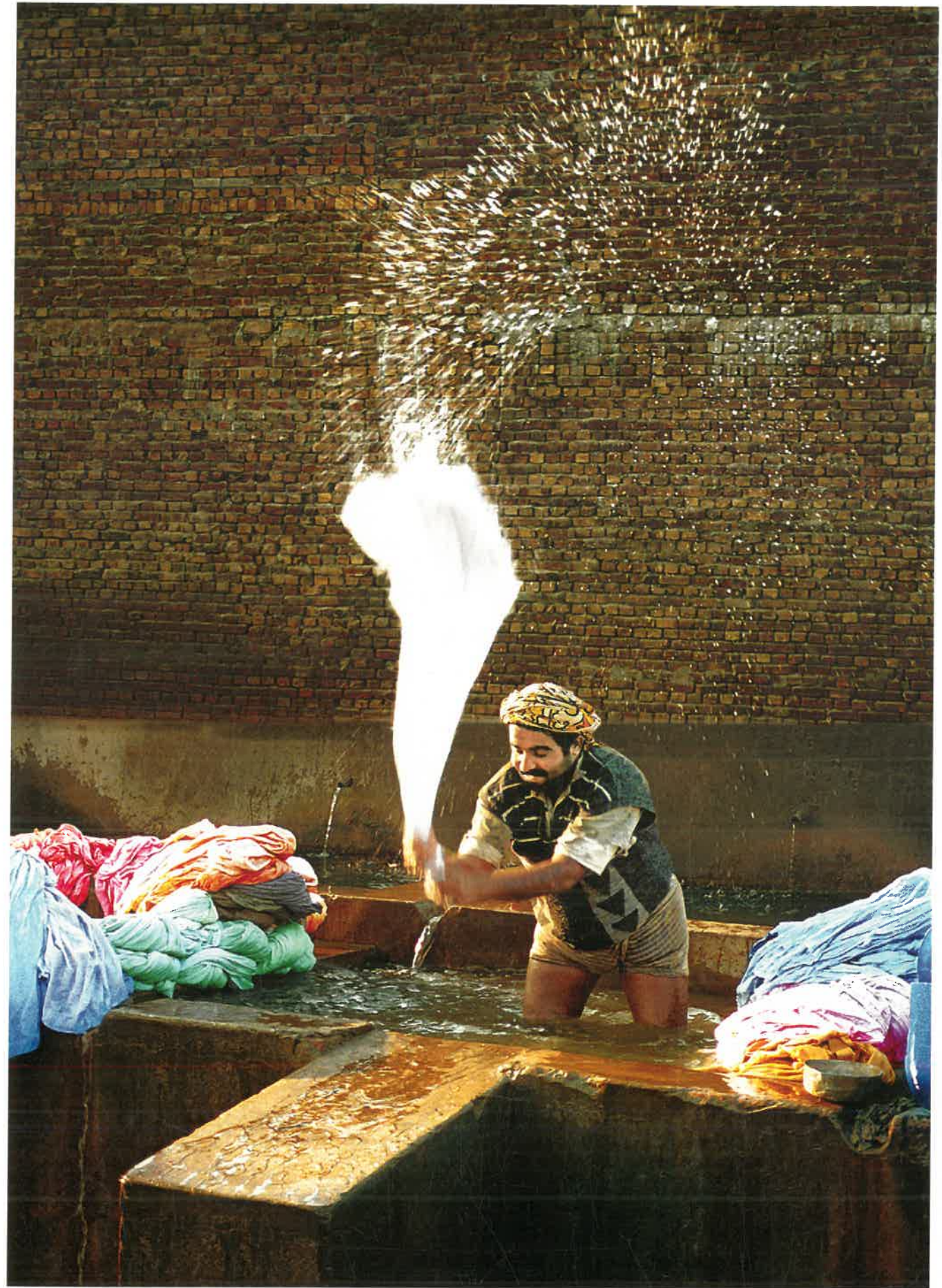
Farm near Nankana Sahib, Sheikhpura

A path lined with autumn trees surround Usman Sami – my son, as he lets go a bunch of balloons. The surreal scene evokes a pleasant and uplifting feeling of freedom and flight. This little path which traverses my in-laws village has been photographed by me in diverse moods and seasons.

'DHOBI GHAT' - 2001

Dhobi Ghat, Band Road, Lahore

Though the world has progressed by quantum leaps, life in a country like ours retains its slow and leisurely pace. Chores like washing clothes at the 'dhobi ghaat' on the banks of River Ravi have a nostalgic nuance to it. Although these vocations are fast becoming extinct they are still a great subject for photography.





'THE AGE OF INNOCENCE' - 1985

Battagram, Mansehra

The image dates back to my early days of photography. I recall clicking it through the car window – something my teacher would have disapproved. I was struck by the simplicity and innocence of the child's expression who gazed at us in some sort of disbelief.



'BALTI BOYS' – 1986
Gilgit – Hunza Road, Baltistan

Standing motionless on a road bend of the Karakoram Highway near Gilgit, the two innocent looking Balti boys gazed at us with suspicion and apprehension. We must have shot a number of pictures but that did not deter the lads to either change their stance or expression.



'SAY CHEESE PLEASE' – 2012
The Grand Palace, Bangkok Thailand



'THE BIRDS OF NETTY JETTY' - 2010

Kemari, Karachi

Kites and crows are found perched by the dozens on the electricity poles atop the Netty Jetty Bridge as well as swarming the sky above it. People buy meat packets and toss them in the lake below. These are expeditiously caught in flight by the diving birds before they hit the lake waters. I was constantly reminded of the great masterpiece 'The Birds' by Alfred Hitchcock while taking some shots.



'SAILING IN SOUTHAMPTON SEA' - 2002
On a visit to Isle of Wite



'BOAT IN THE HARBOUR' - 2012
Pattiya Beach, Thailand



'JEWELS IN THE CROWN' - 1995

Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore.

My niece Maria Faraz and I experimented with different lighting, backdrops, dresses, props etc. in my improvised home studio. This 'high key' photo session in which she is wearing a traditional headdress and draped in white, produced several pictures of merit. However the last frame of the session turned out to be my most successful picture ever, winning 25 International Awards.

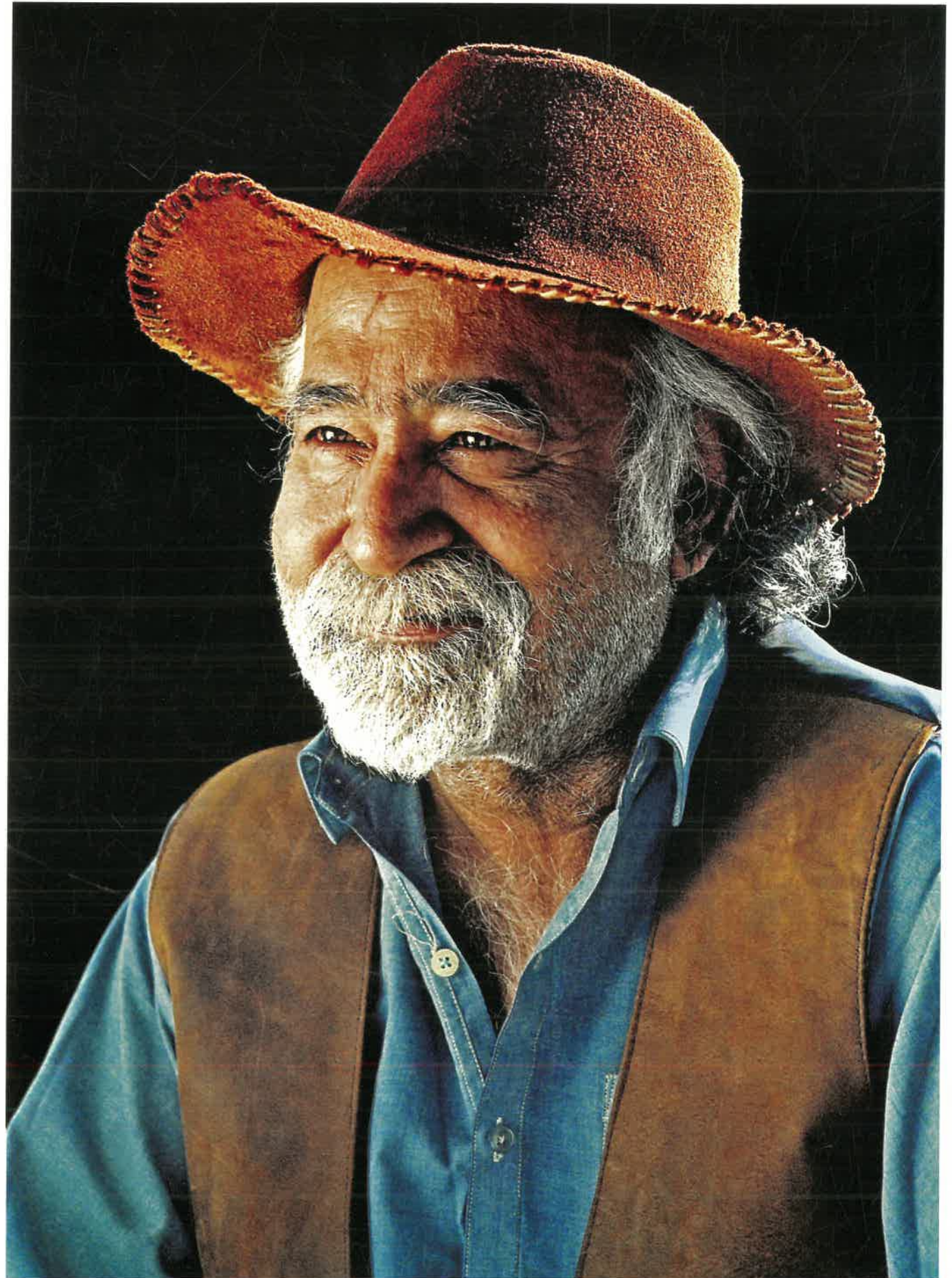


'USMAN SAMI' – 2012
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

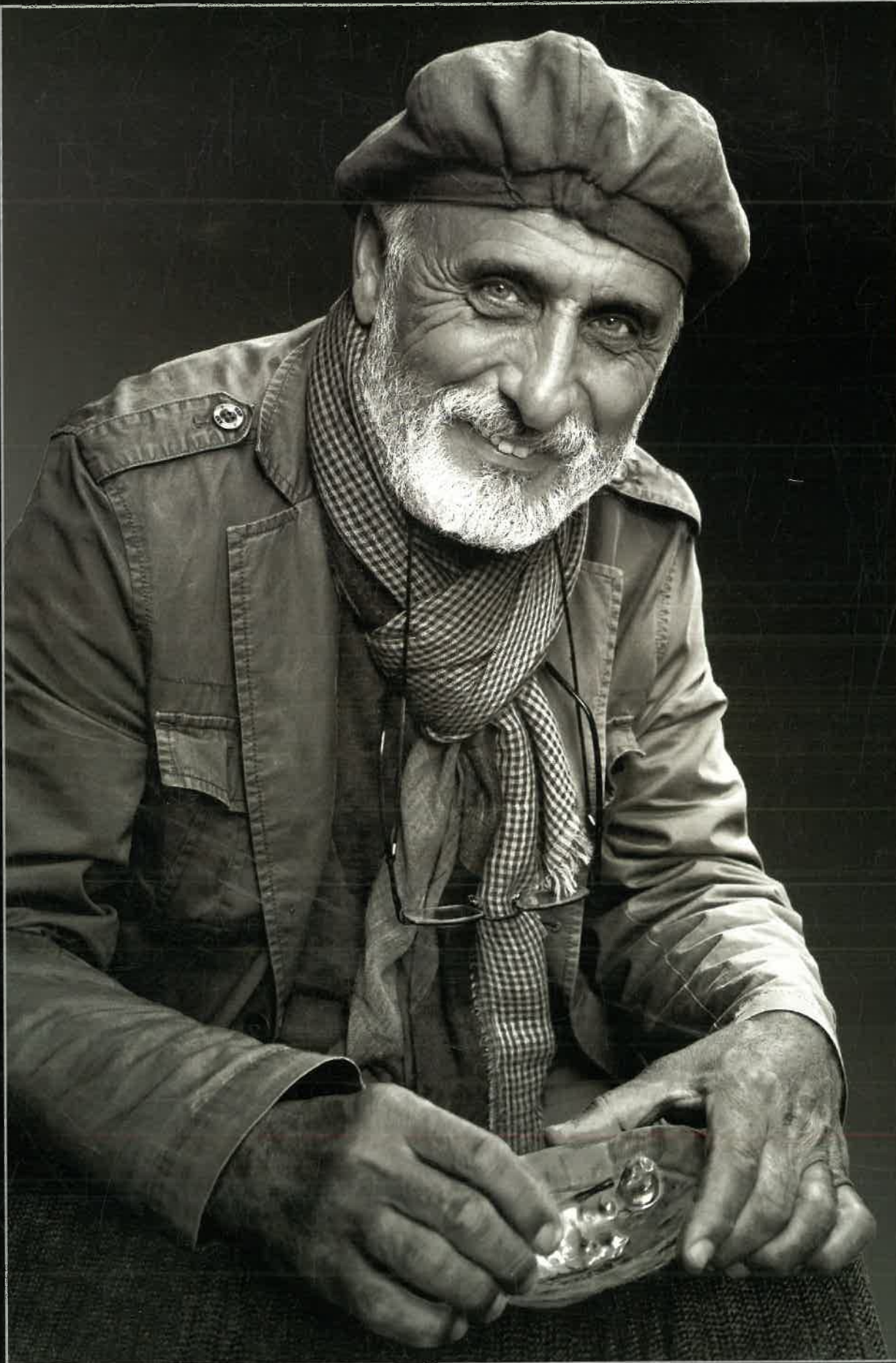


'VICTORIA BASCOVAN' - 2001
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

'ZIM @ ZAFAR IQBAL MIRZA'
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore



'THE CARTOONIST' – 2016
Istanbul street life, Turkey



'SHAHID MAJEED @ Gucci'
2002
Sami's Photography Studio,
Lahore

Friends since 1969, we share great memories - of days spent at the Punjab University, my posting as ASP Havelian, fun at Gucci's (as he is fondly called) home at Abbottabad and finally our stay at NIPA, Lahore. The party is still on! The smile and the giggle has been his special attribute therefore inducing one for the shot wasn't too difficult.





'RETURN OF THE HERD' - 1988

Bedian Road, Lahore

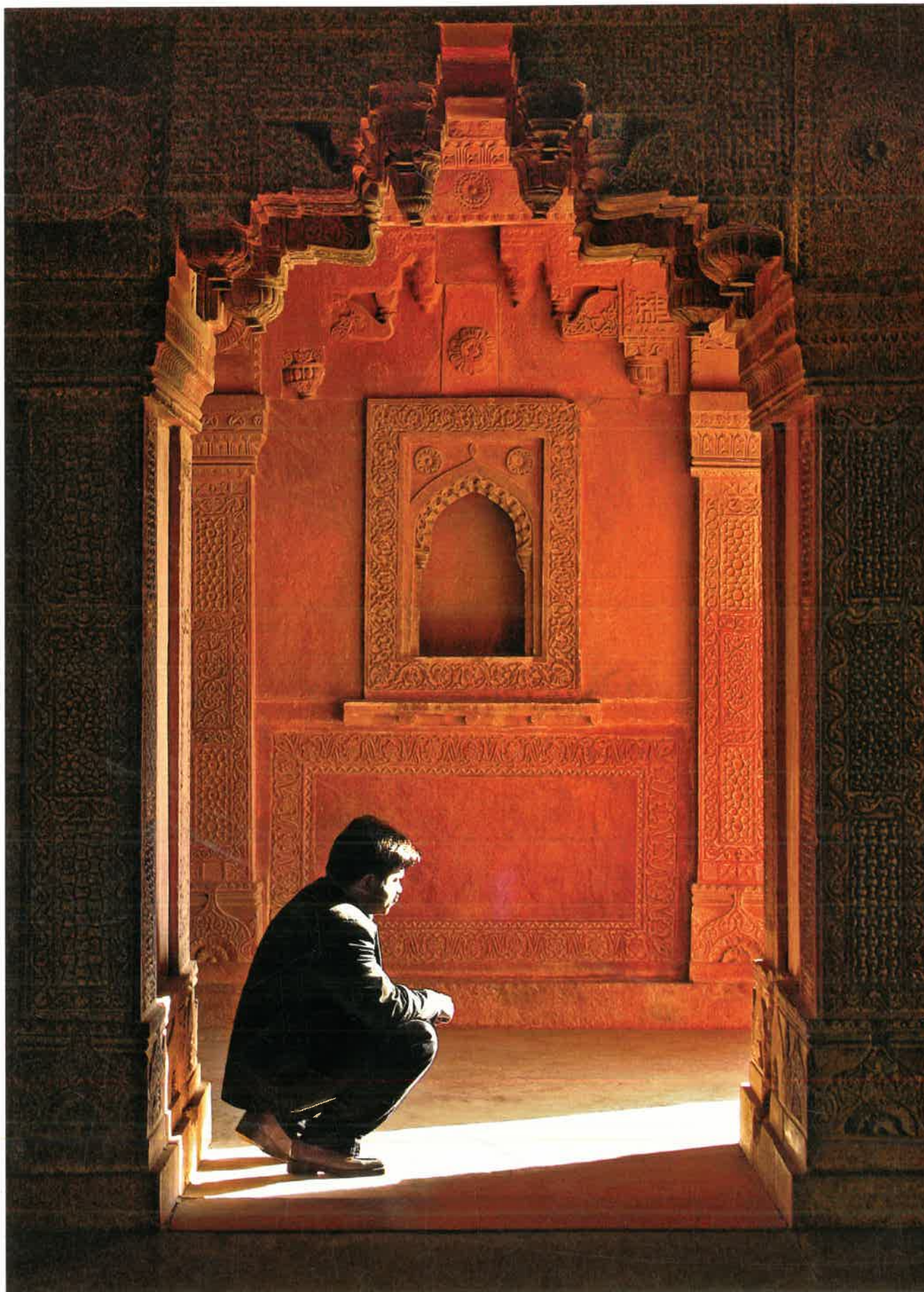
In the early days of photography I would usually take the less frequented roads in the winter afternoons. The mellow light fills the frame with a natural golden glow and the backlight provides an ideal setting. The presence of some appropriate elements – the herd and patchy clouds here, can assure a stunning shot.



'A MISTY MORNING' - 1996

Sheikupura

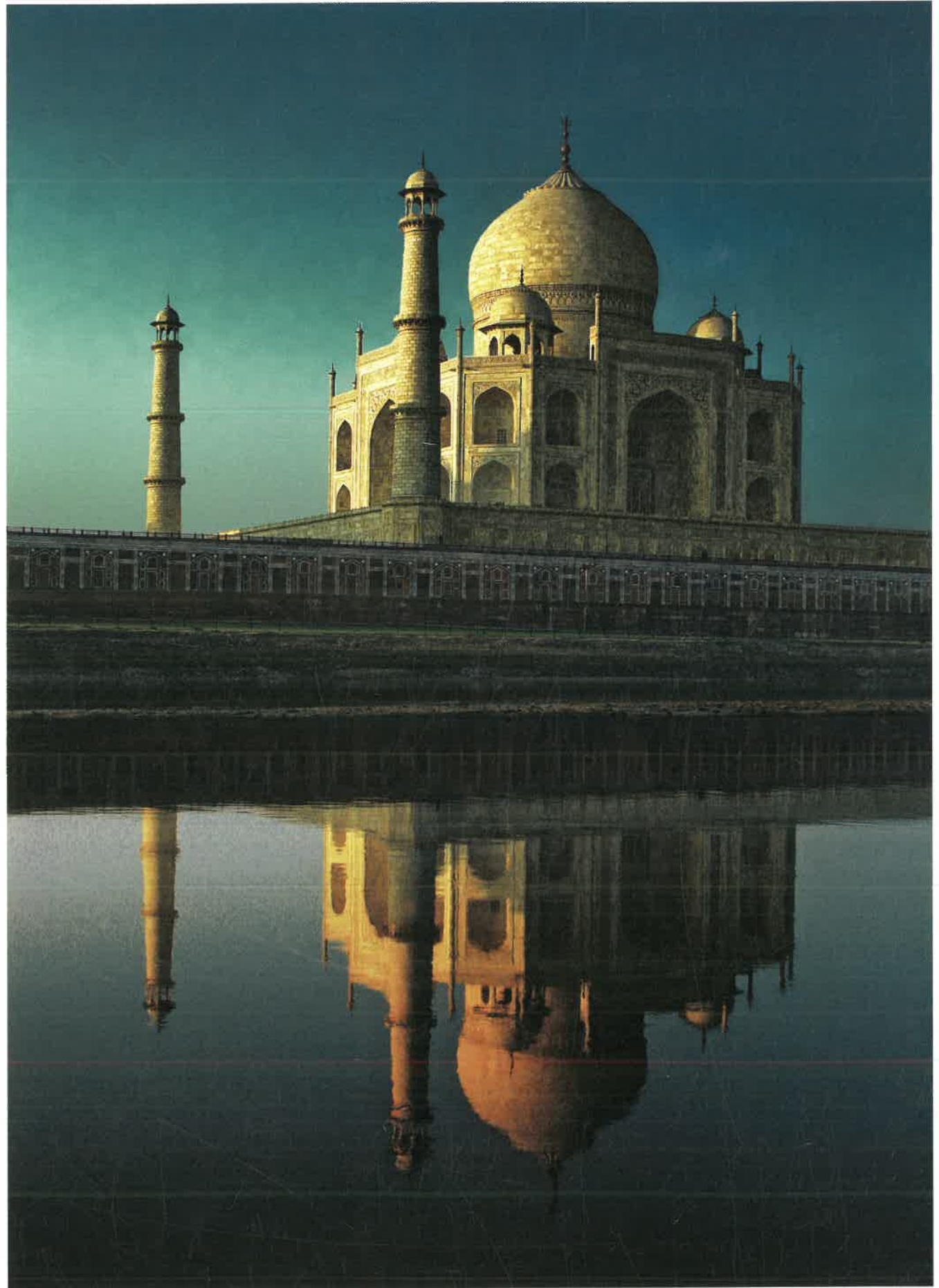
I would pass by this field on my way to Sargodha quite often during the winter of 1996. Stopping for taking a picture I would have been guilty of a traffic offence, this being a view from the motorway. But the day I saw the sun on that hazy morning I decided to take my chances with the law.



"LOST IN FATEHPUR SIKRI" – 2005
(About 25 miles away from Agra)

Zulfiqar Zulfi, Director, Lahore Arts Council on a visit to this Moghul Fort was Curator of our photographic exhibitions held in several cities across India. The room in the photograph was Joda Begum's (wife of Emperor Akbar) living quarters in the Fort.

'REFLECTION OF THE TAJ' - 2005
Taj Mahal, Agra, India

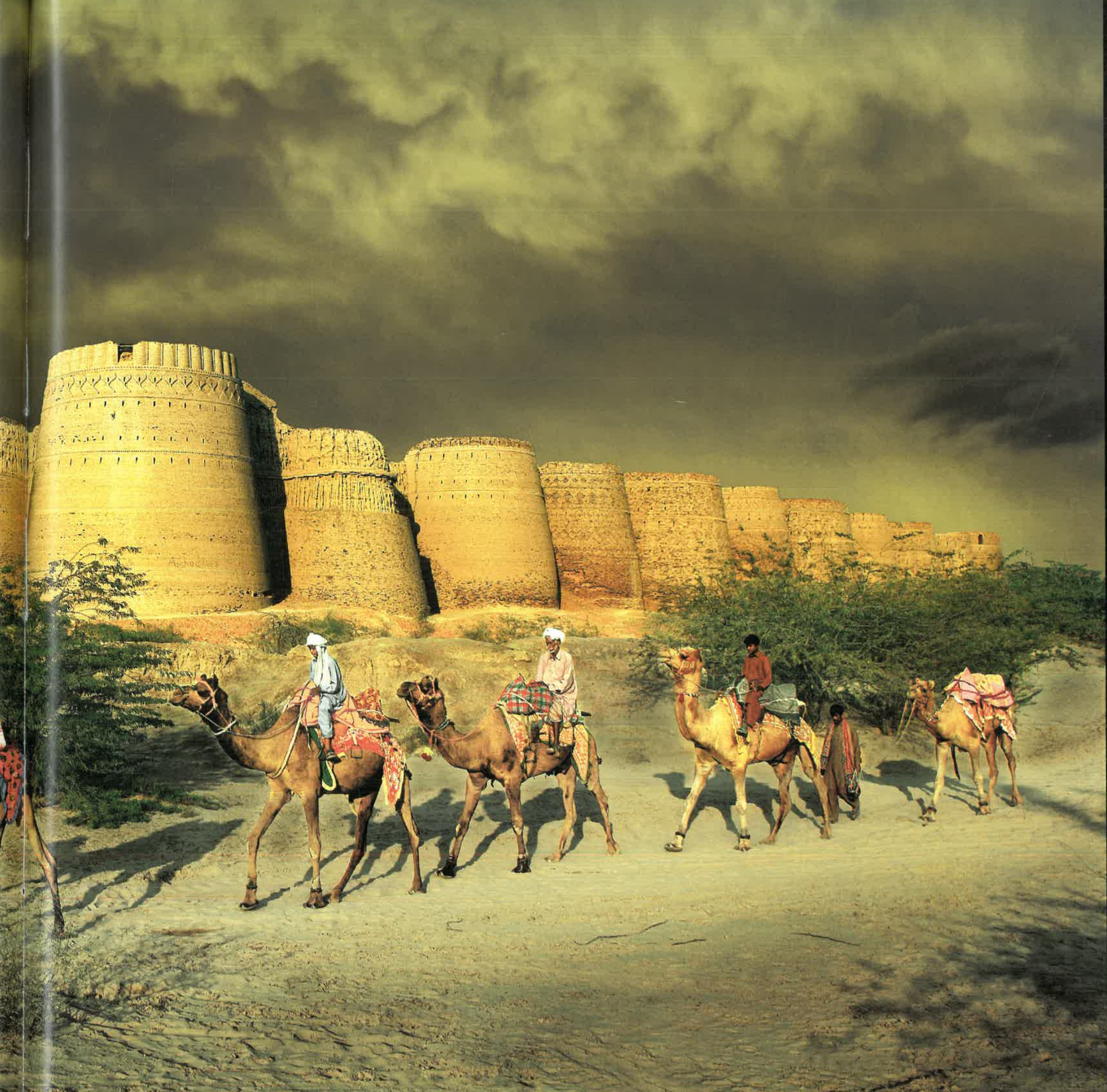


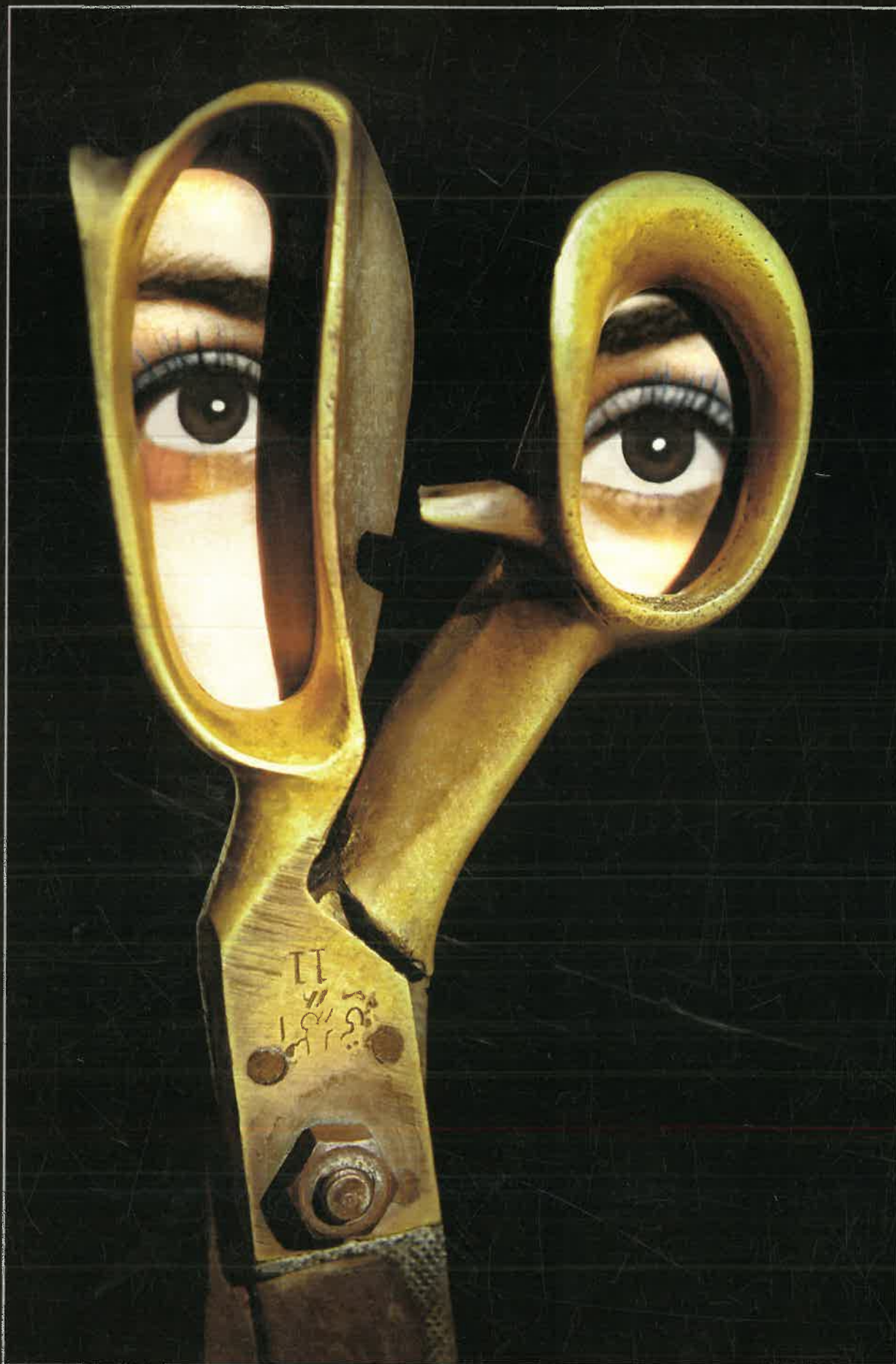
'AN APPROACHING STORM'
2010

Derawar Fort, Choolistan Desert,
Bahawalpur.

Being at the right place at the right time is a cliché in photography parlance. However there is no denying that most memorable images are spontaneous and 'the result of a simultaneous coalition, the organic coordination of elements as seen by the eye' i.e. in a perfect composition.







'WATCH OUT' - 1998

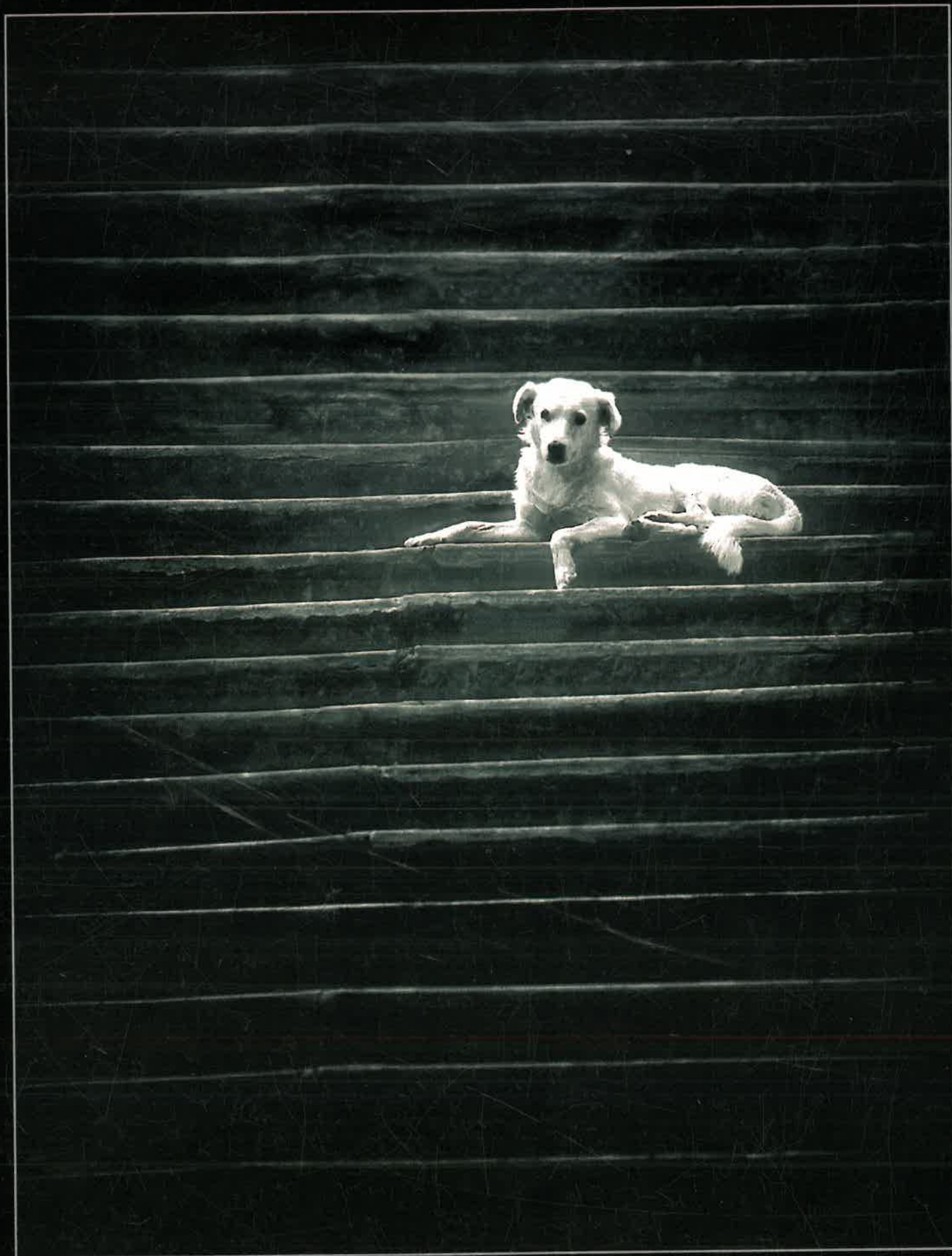
Sami's Photography Studio, Lahore

One day my wife was working with a pair of scissors while my niece happened to be visiting us. An idea stimulated me into action that resulted in an interesting image because of its mystique and inventive composition. The picture bagged nine international awards.

'MIRZAN MAI' - 1990
Village Wah, Taxila

The wrinkled face and discerning gaze of Mirzan Mai, over hundred years at that time, reflects a bygone era, of folklore and wisdom. A winner of 19 International awards, it also holds the distinction of being selected and printed in FIAP's 50 years Exclusive Collection. I am reminded of what Henri Cartier-Bresson once said: "Photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again."



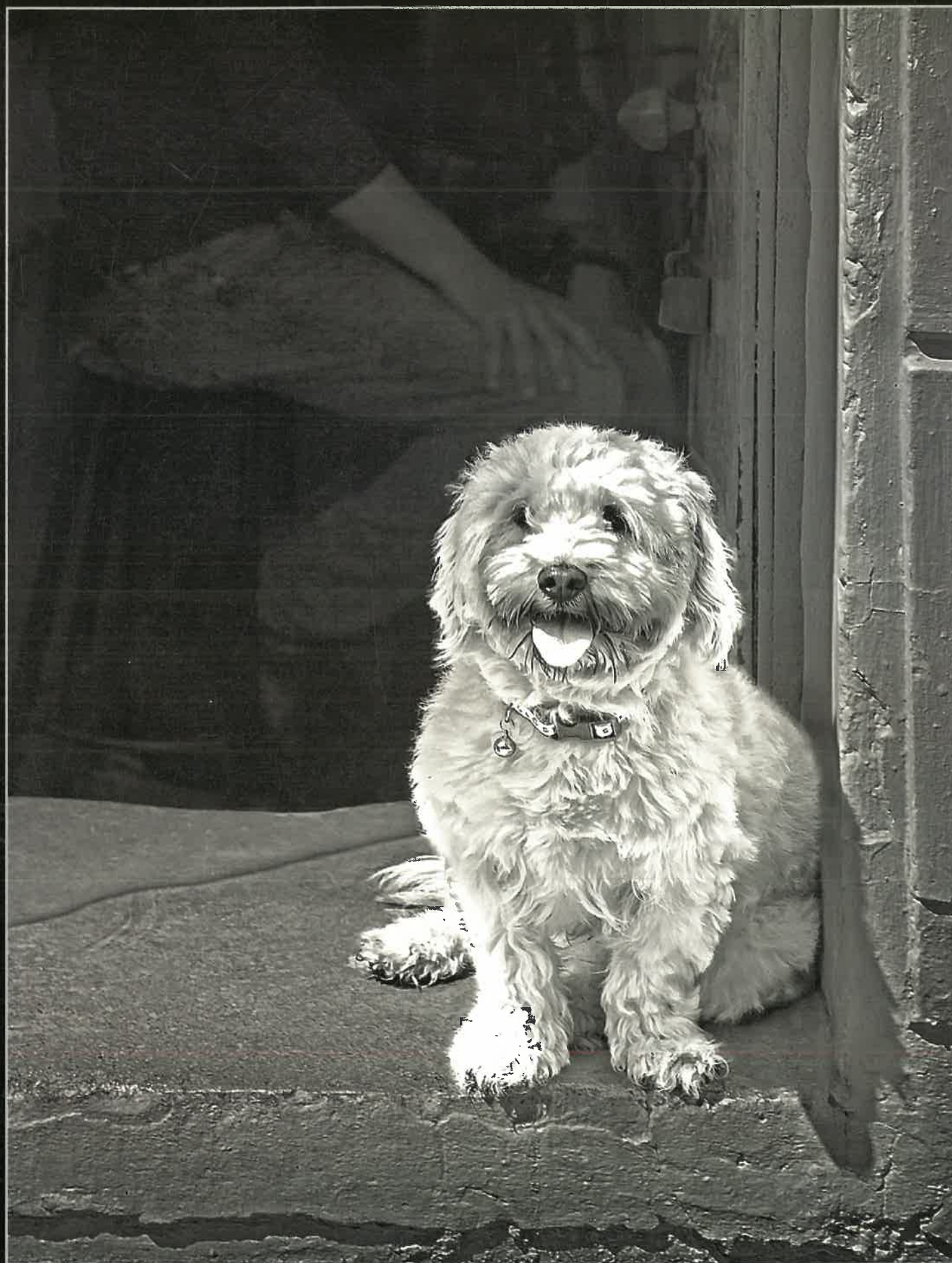


'RETIRED LIFE' – 1989

A deserted street in Murree

Ever since I shot this image at Murree there has been a debate going on with my colleagues about the appropriateness of the title. However I have decided to keep it that way.

'THE VIGILANT SENTINEL' - 2016
A shop near the Blue Mosque,
Istanbul, Turkey





'PHOTO-SHOOT IN PROGRESS' – 2016

Pammukale, near Izmir, Turkey

It is indeed difficult to please a woman as the posture of the photographer (read husband) says it all! The daughter cum assistant shields the lens with her raised palm from direct sunlight in order to avoid flare.



'FEEDING BIRDS' - 2016
Downtown Istanbul, Turkey



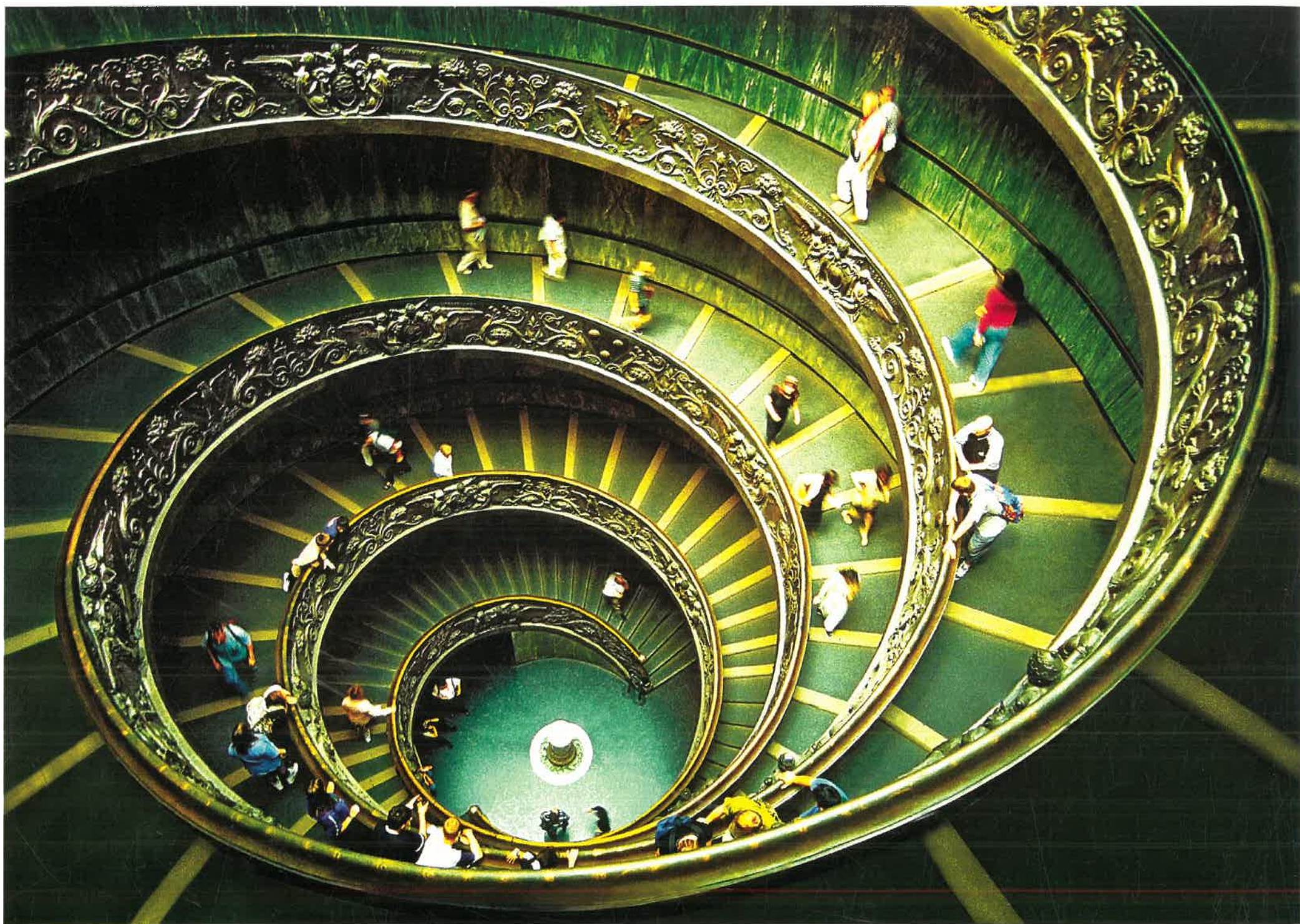
'THE COWBOY' - 1996
Sheikhpura

I do not head out with a pre-planned schedule but would first like to see, observe and capture only what please my eye and my heart. For me composition is fundamental for any photograph and I try to give a lot of attention to it. In the words of Henri Cartier-Bresson: 'One does not add composition as though it were an afterthought superimposed on the basic subject material, since it is impossible to separate content from form.'



'EVENING RETURN' – 1996
Sheikhpura

An everyday scene in a farmer's life made spectacular by a backlit herd and highlighted by the rising dust. The slightly elevated spot from where the image was taken has added to a better depth of field and perspective



'VATICAN STAIRCASE' - 1998

Rome, Italy

The staircase that leads to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel provides a splendid view for photography enthusiasts from all over the world. A winner of several awards this image has also been displayed in over 50 countries.



'THE FLOATING MARKET LADY - 2013'
Floating Market outside Bangkok, Thailand

Immaculately dressed females try to pass off as everyday workers selling freshly cooked delicacies, fresh fruits, garments and other items for tourists.



"A TURKISH DOLL" - 2016

Victoria Patisserie & Bistro, Kabil Road, Ankara

While Usman Sami & Saboohi Sarshar (daughter-in-law) took us out for breakfast, this cute child was busy playing games on her mobile phone. She was barely interested in the sumptuous food that was spread out the table.



'BETWEEN THE CUP
AND THE LIP' - 2005
A road side restaurant
on Delhi - Agra Road, India



'SERENITY' - 2001
A remote Lake in Switzerland

'ANGUISH' - 1989
Wah Gardens near Islamabad

A close-up study of Mirzan Mai's face became a trendsetter at the time as images of old people with wrinkled faces started being displayed in almost all exhibitions. The picture went on to win 9 International Awards.





Portrait by Shahid Zaidi
ZAIDISPHOTOGRAPHERS