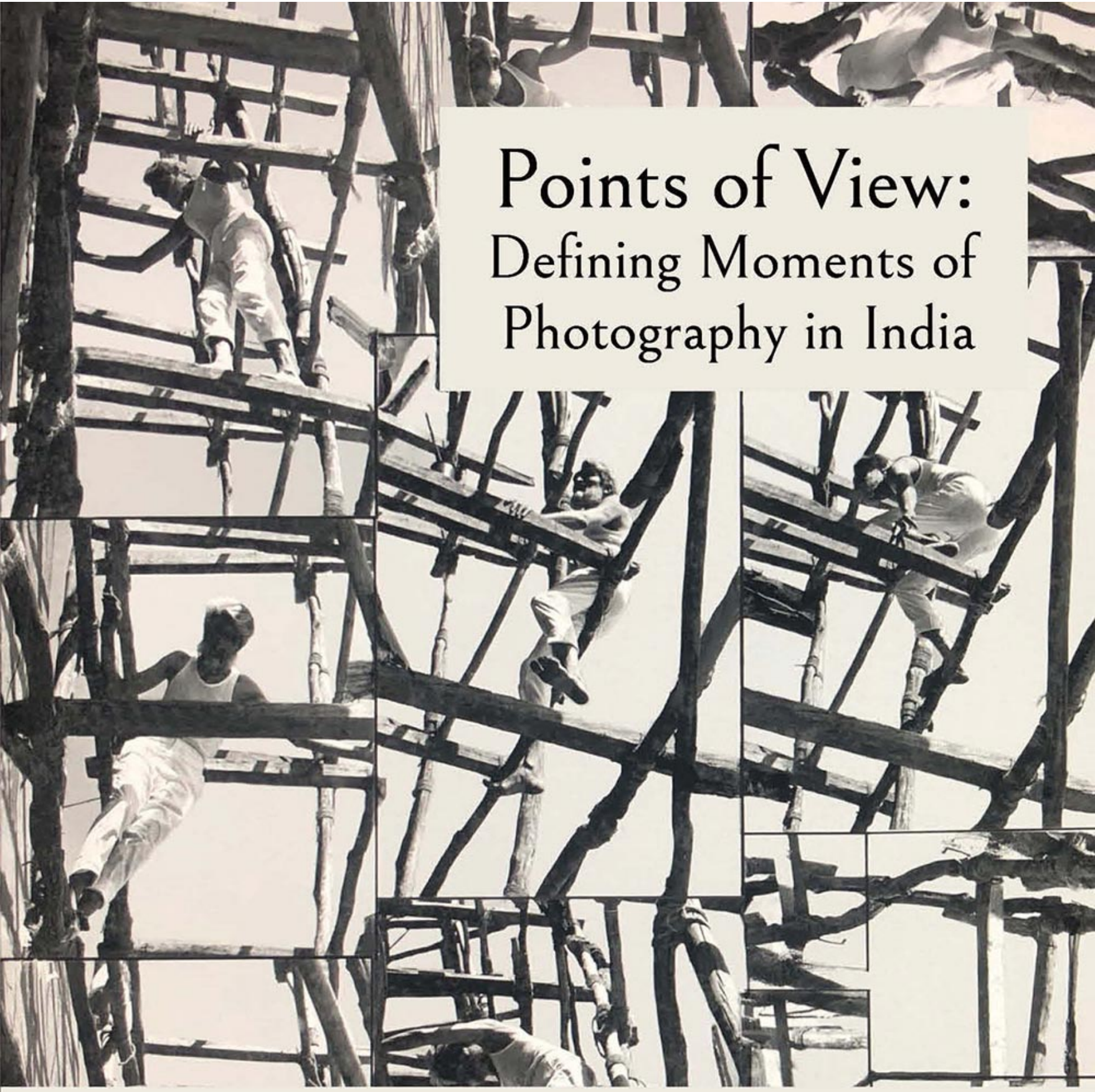

Points of View:
Defining Moments of Photography in India

KIRAN NADAR MUSEUM OF ART

Edited by

GAYATRI SINHA

POINTS OF VIEW:
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KIRAN NADAR MUSEUM OF ART

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Courtesy Karan Khanna

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COSMOPOLITANISM AND INTERMEDIALITY:

Visualizing Postcolonial Calcutta

Ranu Roychoudhuri

'The city itself is our resource center and the students are encouraged to integrate the various media experiences that the city offers: films, drama, folk media performances, music, dance, exhibitions, radio, television, advertising, seminars, lectures, etc.'

—Gaston Roberge[1]

Made by photographer-activist Ardhendu Chatterjee in 1977, the photograph "Shaheed Minar" (Fig. 1) depicts a medallion inscribed in Bangla typeface, a scantily clad man lying underneath, and a faded graffiti in Bangla longhand. The inscription reads 'Shaheed Minar' (translated as 'Martyrs' Monument') and the date below marks August 9, 1969. The faded graffiti is undoubtedly a portion of a political slogan used during the campaign for the historic legislative assembly election of 1977. Enhanced by the graffiti '*[sri]nkhala phiriye aante*' (translated as 'to bring back order'), the ironic contrast of the inscription and the male body, faced away from the camera, alludes to the idea of poverty as social martyrdom. Indeed, this was Chatterjee's attempt to portray the postcolonial Indian state's failed promise of welfare, where the poor were not offered succour but simply left to themselves, as if they did not exist. Within the visual space of the photograph, the graffiti's demand to institute 'order' can be read as a demand for a social matrix that would not overlook the underprivileged. The photograph appears to call attention to a social problem without offering a particular solution, but for Chatterjee the photograph is meant to complete the graffiti and affirms the dignity of the marginalized by making them visible. In other words, making visible the people who remained invisible in public discourse was a tactic 'to bring back order'.[2]

Chatterjee's work is one of 4,000 documentary photographs from the series *People of Calcutta* (1977–

Fig. 1. Ardhendu Chatterjee, "Shaheed Minar", 1977. © Ardhendu Chatterjee/Chitrabani.
Reproduced with permission of Ardhendu Chatterjee and the Chitrabani Society, Kolkata, India.

1991) that critically reflects on the ordinary and the everyday urban and peri-urban experiences of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, and age. In the long and illustrious history of photography in India, this series stands out as a unique effort in making non-commercial and socially committed documentary photographs whose avowed goal was to 'give faces to the faceless'.[3] Arguably the longest running photo-documentary project on the city, it was organized by Father Gaston Roberge, SJ, the French-Canadian Jesuit scholar, long-time Calcutta resident, and founder director of the Jesuit social communication organization, Chitrabani.[4] *People of Calcutta* began after the Emergency (1975–1977) and involved 23 Calcutta-based Left-leaning photographers, including Ardhendu Chatterjee, over a span of almost three decades.[5] Most photographs were made in two concentrated spells: photographs of the urban poor were made during 1977–1979 under the title *Shaheed Minar*, while images of the middle-class *bhadralok*, under the title *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World), predominated during 1989–1991. Even though the two phases focused on different social classes, the collective's perspective on human struggle and their focus on ordinary Calcuttans united the two sub-series, in the backdrop of a socio-political and economic flux.

As the Chitrabani collective represented postcolonial Calcutta, their elaborate visual repertoire, in black and white and colour, reflected the city's historically specific cultural ethos, while drawing on internationally circulating discourses on Leftist politics, social documentary practices, the post-Vatican Council II Catholic social thought and theology of communication. In their cosmopolitan orientation and intermedial engagement, these photographs challenged the popular narrative of a decaying postcolonial city, and raised questions around issues of development and visibility/invisibility in post-independent India by reinterpreting urban spaces and built structures.

Shaheed Minar, the first phase of the *People of Calcutta*, took its name from a prominent victory column located in the heart of 'Imperial Calcutta', (Fig. 2) with balconies near the top offering an elevated panorama of the city. Originally built as the Ochterlony Monument in 1848 to commemorate Sir David Ochterlony's victory in the Nepal War (1814–1816), this tall white column was renamed Shaheed Minar in 1969 in memory of the martyrs of the freedom struggle of India. The series title *Shaheed Minar* reinterpreted this iconic public site by offering a body of photographs that functioned as a conceptual vantage point and a metaphorical monument to social martyrdom. However, the photographs flipped the idea of a panorama and a vantage point: unlike the conventional view from the monument's balcony, which creates distance by elevating the viewer above the city, the photographs of the series brought the photographic subjects and viewers closer. The photo-documentation emphasized not the imperial achievements of which the monument was a signifier, but Calcutta's 'unintended city' that embodied ordinariness,

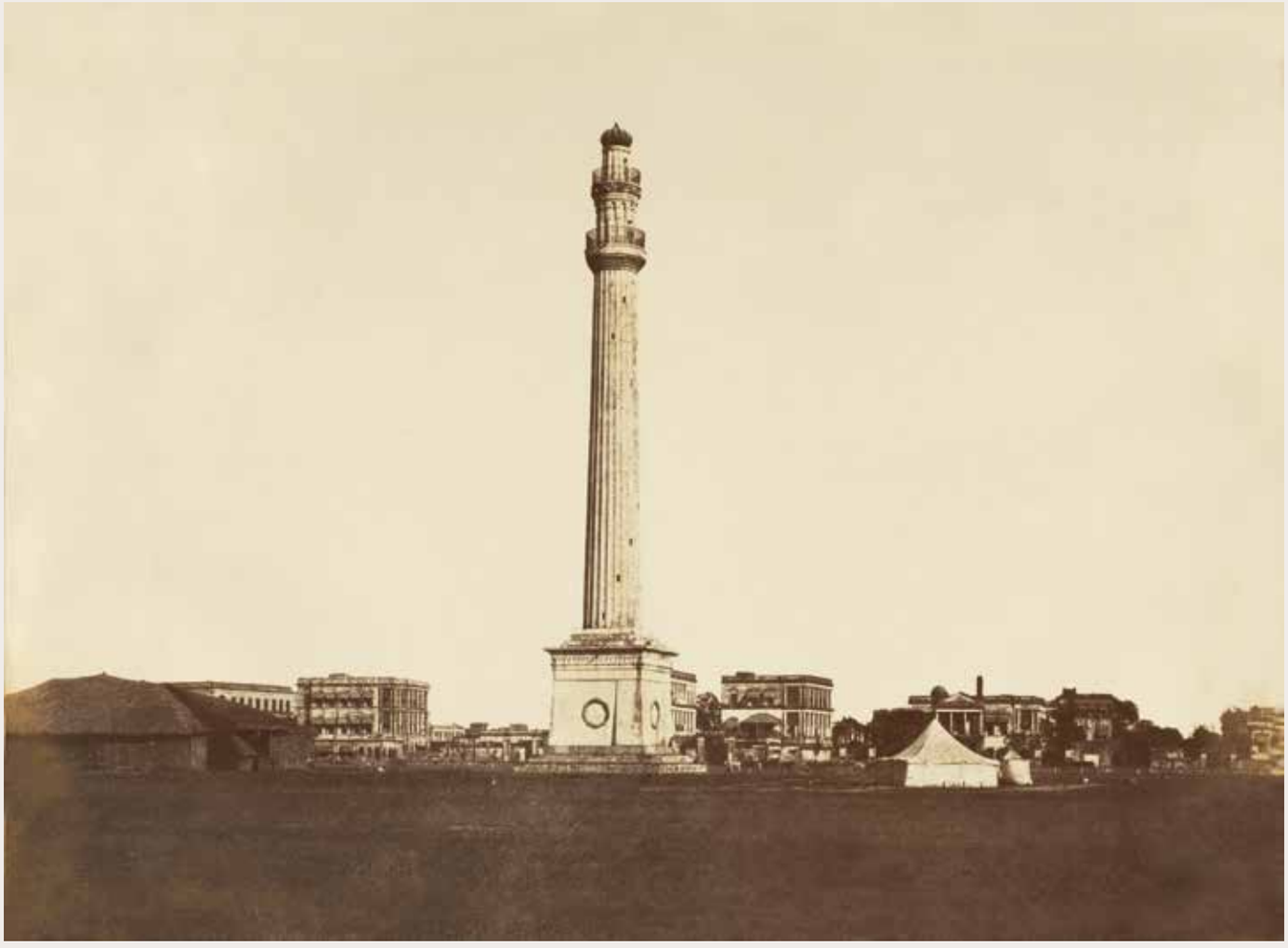

Fig. 2. Francis Frith, "The Ochterlony Monument", Calcutta, 1850s–1870s.

marginalization and resilience.[6] The series metaphorically claimed anew, in the name of the people, an imperial icon that was later defined by the postcolonial state as a nationalist monument. Likewise, the second phase of *People of Calcutta* focused not on the middle classes' literary, artistic or political achievements but on their mundane daily acts of inhabiting the city.

Chitrabani's newsletter described this series of photographs as a monument, an emblem of congregation of the city's marginal people:

> '"Monument", (that is, a "reminder") bearing witness to the fact that Calcutta consists largely of people who suffer, martyrs of an unjust order, who keep on with the business of existing with a simple, unpretentious heroism.'[7]

Indeed, for a long time the open ground around the monument, called Maidan in Bangla, was a gathering place for the socially marginalized who largely belonged to the informal sector of the city's economy. The Chitrabani collective's focus on the monument and the Maidan area was a counter-narrative to the popular discourse about this space that emphasized criminality rather than marginalization. The name 'Maidan' provides an added layer: derived from the Arabic word *maydān*, the word implies a 'large, open, demarcated area, designed for all kinds of equestrian activity'.[8] However, when imagined in the spatial context of the Maidan in Calcutta, the word implies a space enclosed within urban built structures and this implication resonates with the hardship-ridden lives of the people that the Chitrabani collective made visible.

Icons of a Cosmopolitan Camera Culture

People of Calcutta began at a time when 'the people' and non-elite experiences of the everyday became the focus of critical attention among the Bengali intelligentsia. The period was marked by an emphasis on 'culture' as a vehicle for the 'political'; broadly speaking, for the Leftists, 'culture' became a way of reaching out to subaltern consciousness. Chitrabani was a melting pot of Leftist/Left-leaning creative intellectuals and *People of Calcutta* was the product of a milieu influenced by the ideologies of the Left and its emphasis on the 'peoples' struggle'. Besides, Chitrabani was a result of the proceedings from the Vatican Council II Conference (1962-1965) that emphasized the importance of communication media technologies in carrying out the church's social mission and recognized the cooperation of non-Christian's, including atheists, for the benefit of humanity.[9]

Along with their tangible global affiliations with Leftist internationalism and the Catholic church, the Chitrabani collective intellectually flourished in a 'virtual cosmopolis' that came into being through the circulation of reproduced texts and images. Art historian Partha Mitter proposed the phrase in the

context of early twentieth-century critical engagement of Calcutta artists with modernism.[10] Mitter argued that a shared outlook among the elites of the visual arts in the West and in India was made possible by printed media and 'hegemonic languages such as English'.[11] Despite significant historical differences between the colonial and postcolonial power hierarchies that conditioned the early and late twentieth-century art world in India, the idea of 'virtual cosmopolis' is productive in thinking about the cosmopolitan location of the Chitrabani collective. However, the collective's cosmopolitan world view can be explained more accurately when seen through Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty's reflections on cosmopolitanism as 'ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home—ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller'.[12] The Chitrabani collective's visual practices and their intellectual histories exemplify their plurality of belonging and affiliation that was instrumental in articulating their 'alternative' approach to photography and the city.

The collective engaged with an array of visual practices, ranging from fiction and non-fiction cinema—including Bangla fiction films, documentary and realist traditions of the Russian Kino-Pravda, French cinéma-vérité, Italian neorealism, and works of documentary film theorist John Grierson—to American social documentary photographs, including Firm Security Administration photographs, and the street photography of Magnum. Magnum members like Henri Cartier-Bresson and Werner Bischof, Indian photographers like Raghu Rai and Raghubir Singh, and American photographers Jacob Riis and Robert Frank provided significant stylistic impetus to Chitrabani photographers. These multiple affiliations were rooted in the Chitrabani library's extensive collection of books and magazines, Roberge's own intellectual commitment to communication theology and secular film and media theory, and the *People of Calcutta*'s orientation towards globally circulating documentary practices. The collective's key member Brian McDonough's week-long course in documentary photography in May 1977 was instrumental in especially infusing the American documentary tradition from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century.[13] However, the collective had the closest affinity with the tradition of 'concerned photography'— a term that came as a corollary to the establishment of the Fund for Concerned Photography in 1966 by Cornell Capa with roots in Magnum.

In 1972 Cornell Capa declared in the introduction to the catalogue of the second edition of "The Concerned Photographer" exhibition that their first show in 1967 presented 'an antidote to the then-accepted bland notion equating the "objectivity" of photographic images with dispassionate neutrality'.[14] He claimed that the show '...demonstrated, instead, the intense empathy and involvement of each [photographer] with his fellow man and the world in

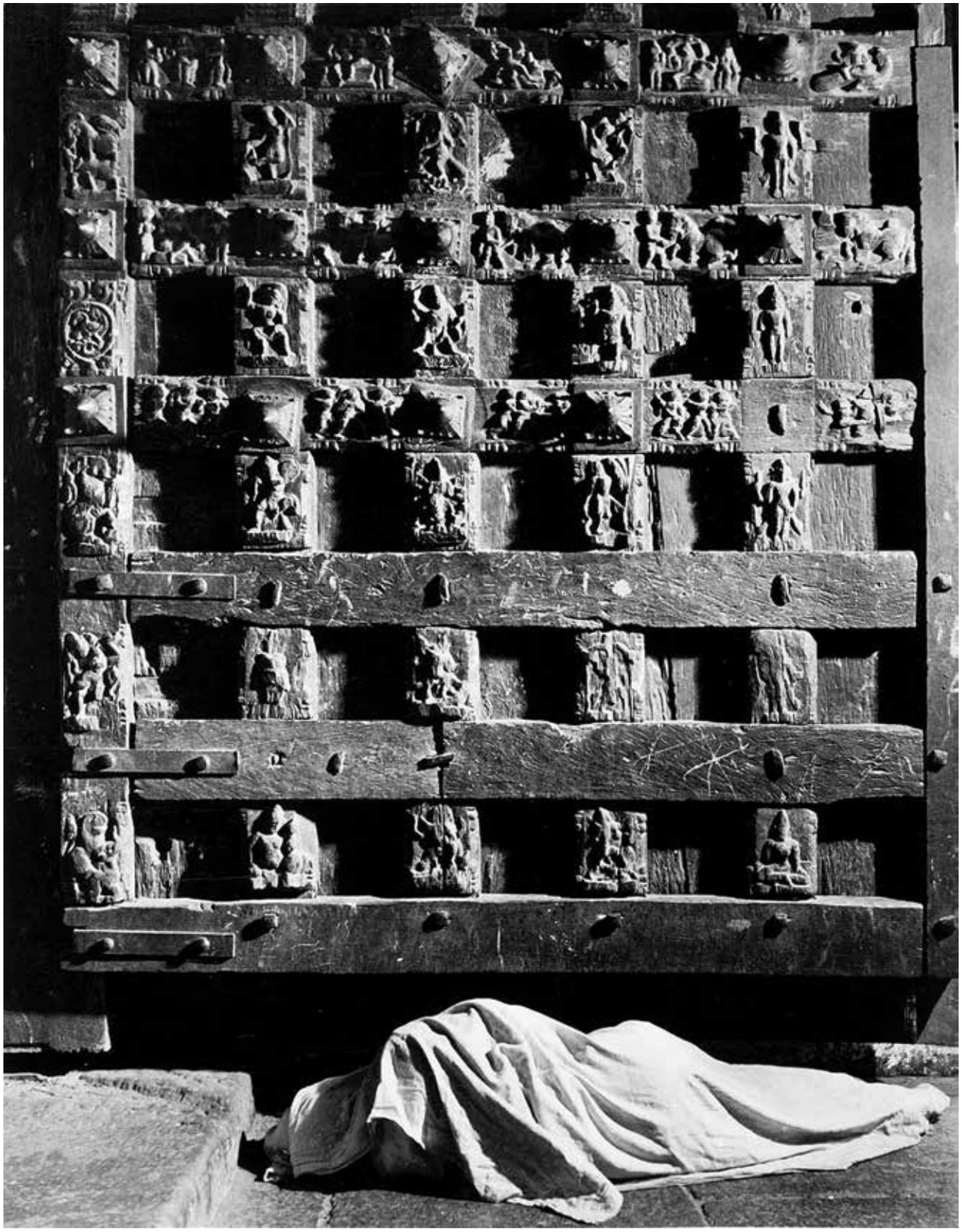

Fig. 3. Werner Bischof, "Beggar sleeping in front of a temple, Madras, India", 1952.

which he lived'. The associate editor of the catalogue, Michael Edelson, elaborated that a 'concerned photographer' was not simply 'a social worker with cameras instead of case files' and that he was more than a 'bleeding heart with Kodachrome II'. He explained 'concerned photographer' by invoking W. Eugene Smith: '...if my photographs could cause compassionate horror within the viewer, they might also prod the conscience of that viewer into taking action.'[15]

Contrary to Smith, the Chitrabani collective understood action not quite as the viewers' prerogative; action for them was not extra-photographic. Their photographs formed a part of the collective action. Rethinking Ardhendu Chatterjee's photograph (Fig. 1) together with a Werner Bischof photograph (Fig. 3), made in 1951 during his India visit to cover the Bihar famine for *LIFE* magazine, illuminates the Chitrabani collective's divergences. Bischof's photograph together with its caption make explicit that his investment lay more in documenting the beggar's plight and less in reinterpreting public spaces and their relationship to people. Without any spatio-historical specificity, Bischof's photograph comes from a timeless zone. All we can glean from the decaying woodcarvings is the antiquity of the temple door. When seen without an explicit caption, Bischof's photograph by itself offers hardly any visual clue as to the time of the photograph's production. Despite formal compositional affinities and a shared visual idiom, Chatterjee's "Shaheed Minar" depicts a specific location with its unique temporal pointers within the frame itself, i.e., the medallion, the script and the graffiti. Of course, dating Chatterjee's photograph from only the frame without the caption assumes the specific linguistic skill of the audience. The Chitrabani collective's intended audience was primarily the people they photographed and the people of the city who were often ignorant of the plight of the marginalized. This intended audience is one of the historical specificities that make Chatterjee's frame grounded in postcolonial Calcutta, as it also belonged to the globally circulating visual discourse of the social documentary.

Reflecting on the relationship between the photographs and their accompanying texts, Bischof's work appears with a more explicit explanatory caption than Chatterjee's brief title. However, the caption uses rather generic words to describe what is depicted and the photograph emerges as a generic scene of a beggar's plight. When read in conjunction with the intent of the Concerned Photography movement, it appears that Bischof's photograph was meant to create 'compassionate horror', so that the audience would be prompted 'into taking action'. Marked as a 'beggar' the figure's identity remains fixed within the photographic frame, appearing incapable of self-help and a passive recipient of the audience's action. In contrast, by not specifying any attribute to the human form, Chatterjee's two-word title offers a possibility for the sleeping man to go beyond his socio-economic situation to emerge as an

agent of social change. Flipping Walter Benjamin's understanding of titles as free-floating contemplation and captions as specific information, Chatterjee's two-word title is more specific than Bischof's supposedly explicit caption. "Shaheed Minar" is specific in conveying its purpose, in the photographer's creative intentionality and commitment to human development.[16]

Chatterjee's photograph may be the visual transliteration of the title of the first phase of the *People of Calcutta* series and how the photo-documentation reconceptualized Calcutta's built structures. But for the Chitrabani collective, the photograph "Canning Street" (Fig. 4) stands both as an icon and a signifier of their visual documentation project and the city at large. Visitors to Chitrabani are still greeted by an approximately 7 x 4 ft print at the entrance to the premises. "Canning Street" reminds us of other top-angle or aerial shots of Calcutta streets by numerous resident and visiting photographers, especially the photograph of M.G. Road taken by Raghubir Singh in 1975.[17] Salim Paul's photograph is comparable in its choice of location and compositional schema: both Canning Street and Singh's stretch of M.G. Road are in central Calcutta, in the Burrabazar area, a part of the city's business district characterized by an extreme disparity of wealth. Both photographs are high-angle vertical compositions where streets appear as long triangles and limited space narrows down the viewer's gaze on the details of the respective streets.

Yet, the photograph "Canning Street" stands out through its specific choice of location and its focus on the human dynamics of the street. Paul's choice of a narrow and rather insignificant street when compared to, say, the broad causeway of M.G. Road, points to his intention of depicting the ordinary and the insignificant. "Canning Street" depicts a sea of humanity, with an occasional hand-pulled rickshaw, two loading trucks, and a tram that is somehow making its way in the distance. In contrast, most photographs that aspire to be iconic representations of the city carefully choose signs that quintessentially define the space as Calcutta, including yellow ambassador taxis, tram tracks, the Howrah Bridge, wrestlers by the river, the nineteenth-century mansions of north Calcutta, and the former colonial "white town" of central Calcutta. Paul too uses a few obvious icons of Calcutta, such as the hand-pulled rickshaw and the tram, but they merge into human bodies, highlighting the complex spatial negotiations of ordinary and insignificant Calcutta pedestrians—people who come across only as a mass.

Photography, Intermediality, and the City

The cosmopolitan character of the Chitrabani collective was intertwined with the institution's embedded uses of intermedial practices and how the collective was 'encouraged to integrate the various media experiences'.[18] However, the most significant of all was their engagement with moving images

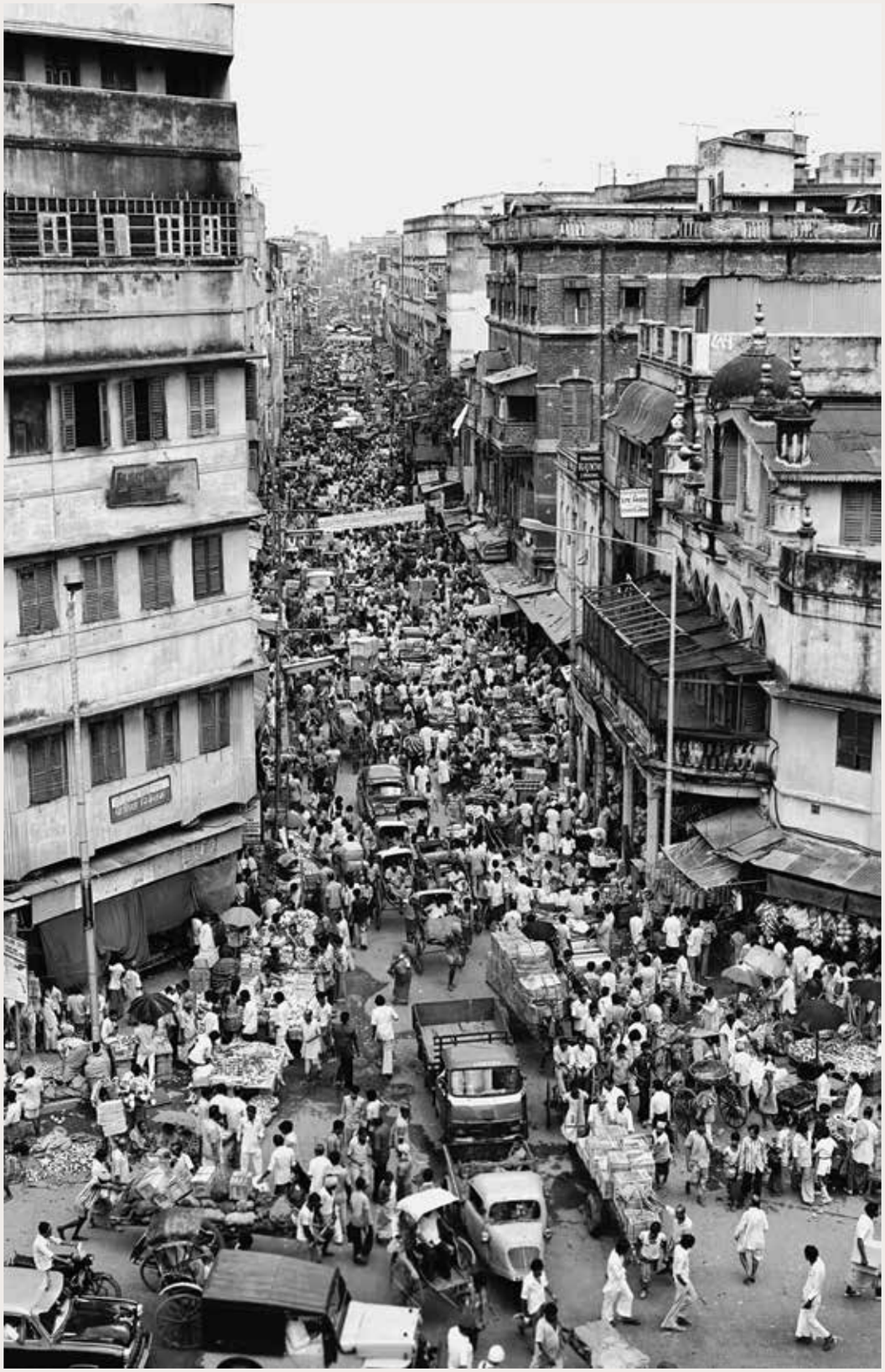

Fig. 4. Salim Paul, "Canning Street", 1977. © Salim Paul/Chitrabani.
Reproduced with permission of Salim Paul and the Chitrabani Society, Kolkata, India.

steered by Roberge's own intellectual location in film studies. Chitrabani was one of Calcutta's major film centres during the period and hosted an active film society from the 1970s. Auteur Satyajit Ray was closely associated with it since its inception, wielding a lasting impact both on the functioning of the institution and on Roberge as a media scholar.[19] Ray was also influential stylistically; his visual style of representing human lives, inspired by Italian neorealism, was often reflected in the works of the Chitrabani collective. One of the key features that tie Ray's work with that of the collective is the symbolism drawn out of everyday practices through an emphasis on visual details.[20]

Chitrabani was founded as a Social Communication Service to coordinate the production of films that would aid in social communication for the benefit of the urban poor.[21] *People of Calcutta* was conceived as an audio-visual project. The file boxes and index cards in the Chitrabani archive retain the name 'AVD data project' and members of the collective fondly remember it by the same name. However, a government-imposed 250 per cent import duty on raw film stock coupled with a shortage of funds prevented Chitrabani from venturing into filmmaking.[22] Consequently, they turned to still photography as a tool for social communication and established a photographic darkroom in the mid-1970s with a training course in still photography introduced in 1976. With its genealogy in motion picture photography, the collective in the 1970s had access to different formats of still and cine cameras—35 mm, 8 mm, Super 8 mm, and 16 mm—that the Chitrabani photographic department owned, and they often worked with leftover cut-films obtained from commercial filmmakers.

Members of the collective intellectually matured in a visual culture replete with cinematic representations of the city, especially in films by the three auteurs Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, and Mrinal Sen who reflected on urban life in postcolonial Calcutta. While the protagonists of these films belonged to an educated middle-class background that fell into economic deprivation, the Chitrabani collective weaved the narratives of the urban poor within the prevalent middle-class discourse of decay and erosion of moral values. The underprivileged masses, who had thus far remained marginal characters in cinematic representations, became the protagonists in *People of Calcutta*'s active investment in the question of social justice. Bearing witness to people's lives characterized the collective's approach, while also foregrounding the importance of creativity in the processes of witnessing.

The Chitrabani collective's simultaneous emphasis on creativity and witnessing is reminiscent of John Grierson's definition of the documentary as 'the creative interpretation of reality' and their emphasis on unmediated documentation echoes Dziga Vertov and the cinéma-vérité movement.[23] Their aesthetic aspirations had strong affinities with contemporary Indian documentaries by experimental filmmakers like S.N.S. Sastry and Pramod Pati under the

patronage of the Films Division of India.[24] Sastry was explicitly influenced by Grierson and Ray and quoted them both in *And I Make Short Films* (1968), while Pati, especially in *Explorer* (1968), appeared to be inspired more by Vertov. However, given Ray's profound influence both on Roberge and the collective, it appears that more than Grierson or Vertov, it was Ray's understanding of 'reality' that was reflected directly in *People of Calcutta*. On the question of 'reality', Ray wrote,

> '[I]t is not only what constitutes the tangible aspects of everyday existence. Subtle and complex human relationships, which many of the best fiction films deal with, are also as much a part of reality as those other aspects generally probed by documentary makers.'[25]

While Grierson limited the possibility of 'creative interpretation of reality' *only* within the genre of documentary, Ray added the genre of fiction to it, opening up the possibility of 'staging' the 'decisive moment'—a visual strategy not discarded only in favour of candid photography. Irrespective of being candid or staged, Ray's emphasis on details of everyday life was reflected in all photographs from *People of Calcutta*. Thus, by focusing on the mundane details of everyday lives in Calcutta and by trusting their own 'sensitive subjective approach',[26] the Chitrabani collective creatively interpreted reality.

Perhaps the most explicit example of Ray's influence on *People of Calcutta* was reflected in the naming of the second phase of photo-documentation as *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) and how the lead photograph for this phase was composed. Indeed, the title was a direct tribute to Ray's film of the same name.[27] Unlike the explicit deliberation that led to the use of the phrase 'Shaheed Minar' as a metaphor for the first phase, the formal naming of the second phase was somewhat accidental. Roberge was provoked by one of Shilbhadra Datta's photographs (Fig. 5), when he named both the photograph and the second phase *Ghare Baire*, well after the phase was underway. Many of Datta's works, including this photograph, are examples of how he staged his compositions by employing his meticulous sensitive attention to everyday details. This lead photograph shows a 'middle-class' lady in the act of stepping into the hallway from the inner rooms of her home. Roberge showed this photograph to Satyajit Ray and he asked if the photograph drew inspiration from the imagery he had used in his film *Ghare Baire* (1985). Set against the background of the politically tumultuous anti-colonial Swadeshi movement, the film depicted how the Bengali elite and middle-class 'home' could not be kept insulated from the upheavals in the 'world'.[28] The idea of porous boundaries between the home and the world must have prompted Roberge to adopt the film title. The Chitrabani collective wanted to complicate the supposed insularity of the middle-class homes in Calcutta. They emphasized that the 'world' affected the poor as much as it shaped the middle class. The photographs depicted how middle-class Calcuttans crafted their existence through little, apparently insignificant acts of everyday life.

Even though there are uncanny similarities between Ray's design for one of the *Ghare Baire* posters and Datta's photograph, Datta firmly asserted that he was more influenced by Ray's *Mahanagar* (The Big City, 1963) and *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964)[29] than *Ghare Baire* (1985). Reflecting on the photograph almost 20 years after it was made, Datta felt that even though Roberge borrowed the film's title for the entire second phase, there was little thematic similarity between Ray's film and the collective's work for the phase.[30]

Set against two different historical backgrounds spanning almost a century—*Charulata* in the 1880s and *Mahanagar* in the 1970s—both films have female protagonists and centre on issues of female respectability and propriety of conduct, women's emancipation, and the woman as a medial-liminal figure between an 'insular' home and a 'dangerous' world outside. The films are set in particular moments in Bengali history characterized by the 'women's question' in the nineteenth century and an increased middle-class female participation in the formal workforce in the twentieth century. In both films, the door frame (*choukath* in Bangla) plays an important role as cinematographer Subrata Mitra's camera follows the protagonists' movements; in each case the *choukath* signifies the boundaries between the home and the world and each crossing is significant for the cinematic narratives. In Datta's photograph too, the woman's stepping on the *choukath* is a symbolic act signifying emancipation and empowerment.[31] The photograph alludes to the perceived notion of home as an insular space, from which the female subject is stepping out to the dark and grim realities of the world. Coming from a middle-class background and being a single child of a working mother, Datta wanted to portray his female subject's desire to be financially independent. The lady in the photograph was from a traditional jeweller's family in Calcutta—a family that in the name of respectability restricted their women, in this case, a daughter-in-law, from working professionally. Datta further clarified:

> '[I] was simply working at two levels: (a) on [my] instinct to make a visual work with a model, but not a hired one, in almost a theatrical setting owing to the late winter light, and (b) emancipation, stepping out of woman from "purdah!"'[32]

Datta gave meticulous directions of what he wanted her to perform in front of the camera so he could portray all details of symbolic significance in a single frame. The style Datta adopted during "Ghare Baire" was significantly different from Chatterjee's approach during "Shaheed Minar". Chatterjee opted for candid street photography, while Datta preferred explicit staging. But not all photographers who worked during the *Ghare Baire* phase adopted Datta's techniques and they continued to prefer candid photographs.

Besides women and their relationship to the world, Datta's photograph also alludes to other aspects of middle-class lives and hardship, which the Chitrabani

Fig. 5. Shilbhadra Datta, "Ghare Baire", 1991. © Shilbhadra Datta/Chitrabani.
Reproduced with permission of Shilbhadra Datta and the Chitrabani Society, Kolkata, India.

collective wanted to document. The doorway, the arch over it, and the stained-glass pattern suggest that the mansion is decaying. The plaster of the archway is gone, the bricks are exposed, a stained-glass piece is broken exposing a segment of the wall in the inner quarter. This dilapidated condition speaks of the challenges in maintaining the once-prosperous mansion, and, more generally, evokes the hardship that respectable middle-class families were facing in their everyday life. Yet the smile on the subject's face is in contrast with these suggestions of hardship and is indicative of the self-image that the late twentieth-century middle-class *bhadralok* hoped to project. The Venetian blinds on the door and a calling bell on the top left suggests that by the time Datta was shooting, the original mansion was divided and partitioned among several heirs who had set up their own spaces within the main structure; the original heritage mansion housed many smaller homes by 1991. The inhabitants of these smaller independent units could step out of their homes without actually stepping out of the main door, which opened on to the street. The photograph holds a promise of emancipation for its subjects by marking the crucial journey across the door at a time marked by the liberalization of the Indian economy.

Despite their deep engagement with cinema, the Chitrabani collective consciously distanced themselves from certain kinds of documentary practices that they thought lacked empathy. For example, Roberge despised the Nouvelle Vague auteur Louis Malle's *Calcutta* (1969), in which Roberge thought Malle had expressed 'his own indignation rather than offered a positive image of the people of Calcutta. What could they gain from Mr Malle's indignation? True, some people in the West may have grown a little more "aware" or "sensitive", but what is this to the average Calcuttan?'[33]

The Chitrabani collective perceived Malle's representation objectionable because he depicted the 'Calcuttan as a passive, dependent, incapable, pitiable, frustrated and unruly man, woman or child'.[34] The collective's goal was not to evoke pity for the marginalized and ordinary Calcuttans but to cultivate empathy and to forge an ethical community founded upon the practices of everyday life. *Ghare Baire* expanded this ethical community by weaving together middle-class photographers and their homes with the lives of the poor in a shared space of solidarity and camaraderie through their quotidian encounters with the city.[35]

Irony of Images

People of Calcutta, especially its first phase *Shaheed Minar*, was meant primarily for exhibitions, group discussions, and adult education. Chitrabani wanted to produce notes providing the socio-economic information required for understanding the photographs and the marginalized communities depicted in them. The collective expected 'the persons whom they photographed or at least people

of the same class to be the main users of the photographs'.[36] Roberge and members of the collective emphasized photography's role in human development and asserted that

> 'photographs can promote a culture of the onlooker, especially if the photograph is one he/she can identify with. Then a photograph can reflect back to the persons portrayed—[a] positive image of themselves. Positive images support a dynamic sense of identity without which there can be no development.'[37]

The culture of onlookers had two aspects: first, the subjects looking back at their own positive images through the lenses of the collective; and second, the viewers looking at the social 'other', especially the middle class looking at their fellow Calcuttans who were less fortunate. Roberge explained,

> 'Our (Chitrabani) images show them (poor Calcuttans) as human beings having limitations but also having many qualities. We do not offer these images to arouse pity. We offer them as one would open a family album with trust in [the] onlooker's readiness to understand others.'[38]

Exhibitions were not only limited to community viewing/engagement but also took place in niche art galleries in Calcutta, foregrounding the collective's objective of visual education of viewers irrespective of their class affiliation. Chitrabani organized an exhibition titled "People of Calcutta" in 1981 in the Max Müller Bhavan (Goethe Institute, Calcutta) featuring 200 photographs from *Shaheed Minar* so that the gallery-going audience could see 'how the other half lives'.[39] The photographs were enlarged to a scale that would mimic the urban spaces of Calcutta, providing the audience a simulation of walking through the city streets. Even though these photographs were primarily non-commercial, often they were sold at a nominal price to Western volunteer tourists who would visit Calcutta. These photographs contributed to the volunteer tourists' deferred contemplation of the 'other side' of a Third World city that used to be a colonial metropolis. The photographs acquired a continued life in the eyes of these viewers/collectors and were often interpreted differently than what the Chitrabani collective had intended.

The photographs no longer have the same rhetorical charge of social justice; they have not survived in the collective memory of Calcuttans. Indeed, they were never so widely circulated as to create a lasting impact on the Bengali public sphere, and they now remain locked away in the little-known institutional archive of Chitrabani in central Calcutta. Yet, the juxtaposition of a group of Left-leaning photographers working under the aegis of a Jesuit social communication organization in the milieu of post-Emergency Calcutta is a rich moment of art practice in the postcolonial context. The project raised questions of class, subjectivity, and agency through the medium of photography against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan and intermedial visual culture.

ENDNOTES

1. G. Roberge, "Chitrabani: An Indian Experiment in Development Communication," ***Educational and Broadcasting International*** (September 1980), 137.

2. For a discussion of strategy vis-à-vis tactics, see M. de Certeau, ***The Practice of Everyday Life***, trans. S.F. Rendal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 34–39.

3. G. Roberge, interview with the author, May 21, 2006.

4. Established in 1971, Chitrabani was the first media studies centre in Bengal. In Bangla translation, Chitrabani means image/word (chitra is image; bani is word or sermon, although Roberge preferred the former). While naming the institution, Roberge was inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's usage of the word to describe cinema.

5. The photographers involved in the ***People of Calcutta*** project included Amit Dhar, Anjan Paul, Ardhendu Chatterjee, Ashish Auddy, Brian Balen, Brian McDonough, Claudine Gomes, Deb Kumar Nayak, K. Ghosh, Lewis Simon, Premendu Bikash Chaki, S. Chatterjee, Santosh Mondal, Salil Nandi, Salim Paul, Shantanu Mitra, Shilbhadra Datta, Achinto Bhadra, Sita Sahane, Subrata Lahiri, and Vivek Dev Burman.

6. Conducted by Unnayan, a research-oriented activist NGO, and published by Cathedral Relief Society, a Calcutta-based NGO operated by the St Paul's Cathedral, ***Unintended City*** is a monograph on Calcutta's urban poverty. The document provided conceptual impetus to Chitrabani's visual rhetoric. See J. Sen, ***Unintended City*** (Calcutta: CRS, 1975).

7. "Shaheed Minar," ***Chitrabani Newsletter***, no. 40 (February 1980): 8.

8. F. Viré, "Maydān," in ***Encyclopaedia of Islam***, eds. P. Bearman et. al. (Brill Online, 2014), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/maydan-SIM_5067, accessed December 10, 2020. In continuation of the original meaning of the word, the Mounted Police Unit of Kolkata Police (previously Calcutta Police) has practised drills on the Maidan and has patrolled the area for the last 170 years.

9. See Vatican Council II's key document, "Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965," http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed February 25, 2015.

10. P. Mitter, ***The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922–1947*** (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 11 and passim; K. Moxey, "A 'Virtual Cosmopolis': Partha Mitter in Conversation with Keith Moxey," ***The Art Bulletin*** 95, no. 3 (2013): 381–392.

11. Mitter, ***The Triumph of Modernism***, 12.

12. C.A. Breckenridge, S.I. Pollock, H. Bhabha and D. Chakrabarty, eds., ***Cosmopolitanism***, Millennial Quartet Book Series (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 11.

13. B. McDonough, interview with the author, 2014.

14. See C. Capa and M. Edelson, eds., ***The Concerned Photographer 2: The Photographs of Marc Riboud, Roman Vishniac, Bruce Davidson, Gordon Parks, Ernst Haas, Hiroshi Hamaya, Donald McCullin, W. Eugene Smith*** (New York: ICP & Grossman Publishers, 1972).

15. Ibid.

16. See W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in Walter Benjamin et al., ***The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*** (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 27 and passim.

17. See R. Singh, ***Calcutta*** (Hong Kong: The Perennial Press, 1975). This bird's-eye view photograph was republished on the cover of the Penguin new edition of G. Moorhouse's ***Calcutta: The City Revealed*** (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998).

18. Roberge, "Chitrabani: An Indian Experiment in Development Communication," 137.

19. G. Roberge and various Chitrabani photographers, series of interviews with the author, 2006 and 2013.

20. See Satyajit Ray, "What is Wrong with Indian Cinema," in ***Our Films, Their Films*** (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1976), 19–24; Satyajit Ray, "The Question of Reality," in ***Satyajit Ray on Cinema***, ed. Sandip Ray in association with D. Chaterji, A.K. De, D. Mukerjee, and D. Mukhopadhyay (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 35–39.

21. S. Paul, interview with the author, 2013.

22. In 1973 the Film Finance Corporation (under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) became the sole channelling agency for the import of raw stock. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, ***Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*** (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

23. Grierson quoted in Ray, "The Question of Reality," 35.

24. Among other documentary short films, see ***And I Make Short Films***, directed by S.N.S. Sastry, 1968, 35 mm film, 15:39 minutes; ***I am 20***, directed by S.N.S. Sastry, 1967, 35 mm film, 18:46 minutes; ***Explorer***, directed by Pramod Pati, 1968, 35 mm film, 6:39 minutes. Indian documentarians of the 1960s and 1970s drew as much on local feature films as they drew on Soviet, French, and English documentary filmmaking.

25. Ray, 'The Question of Reality," 35.

26. Ibid.

27. ***Ghare Baire***, directed by Satyajit Ray, 1985, 35 mm film, 140 minutes.

28. See S. Sarkar, ***The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*** (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973).

29. ***Mahanagar***, directed by Satyajit Ray, 1963, 35 mm film, 131 minutes; ***Charulata***, directed by Satyajit Ray, 1964, 35 mm film, 117 minutes.

30. S. Datta, interview with the author, 2006 and 2013.

31. S. Datta, email conversation with the author, February 3, 2015.

32. Ibid.

33. G. Roberge, "Communication: Calcutta Image, Mirage of Development," ***India International Centre Quarterly*** 20, no. 1/2 (Spring–Summer 1993), 225–242.

34. G. Roberge, "Shaheed Minar," ***Quarterly Journal of National Centre for Performing Arts*** IX, no. 2 (June 1980): 21.

35. The majority of the indoor photographs of the second phase were made in the photographers' own homes, or those of friends and acquaintances.

36. G. Roberge, "The Involvement of Chitrabani in Still Photography," in ***The Collected Works of Gaston Roberge*** XI (publisher and place of publication unknown, early 1980s). For example, in the case of the Pilkhana Child Project, the photographs were first shown to the persons photographed.

37. ***Chitrabani Newsletter***, no. 40 (February 1980): 2.

38. Roberge, "Shaheed Minar," 21.

39. I borrow the phrase from American documentary photographer Jacob Riis' pioneering work ***How the Other Half Lives*** (1890) that led to positive changes in the living conditions of New York tenement dwellers.