



# Trans*portraits*

Women And Mobility In The City

“When do you start being afraid of a man?

Is it when he drives along saying ‘excuse me’ in a city where nobody stops for your sake, not even the rain?

Is it when he stops his bike twice, while you walk past, then gets on again, rides some distance ahead then stops again and waits for you to walk past?

Is it when you are already sitting in his auto when the rain is pouring so hard that visibility is near-zero and you can barely hear your own thoughts? Is it when he asks why you were walking? Is it when he asks where you work, and why he happened to pick you up on a street that is two kilometers to the east of your office address? Is it when he asks where you live, and why you are out this late? Is it when he wants to know why your tongue does not reek of this city? Is it when he wants to know why you walk, and whether you don’t have enough money to take taxis and autos? Is it when he asks you whether he should take you home instead of the taking you to the nearest train station? Is it when he says he is willing to accept a little less money if only you will allow him to take you all the way home? Is it when he asks this for the fifth time? Or the sixth time?

When is the right moment in which to crane your neck forward, put your mouth to the grey skin of the city and let it know how you’ve been kicked back into place? When is it time to drop your pitiful stare-back at a rear-view mirror that has been adjusted specially to watch your eyes, your clenched jaw?

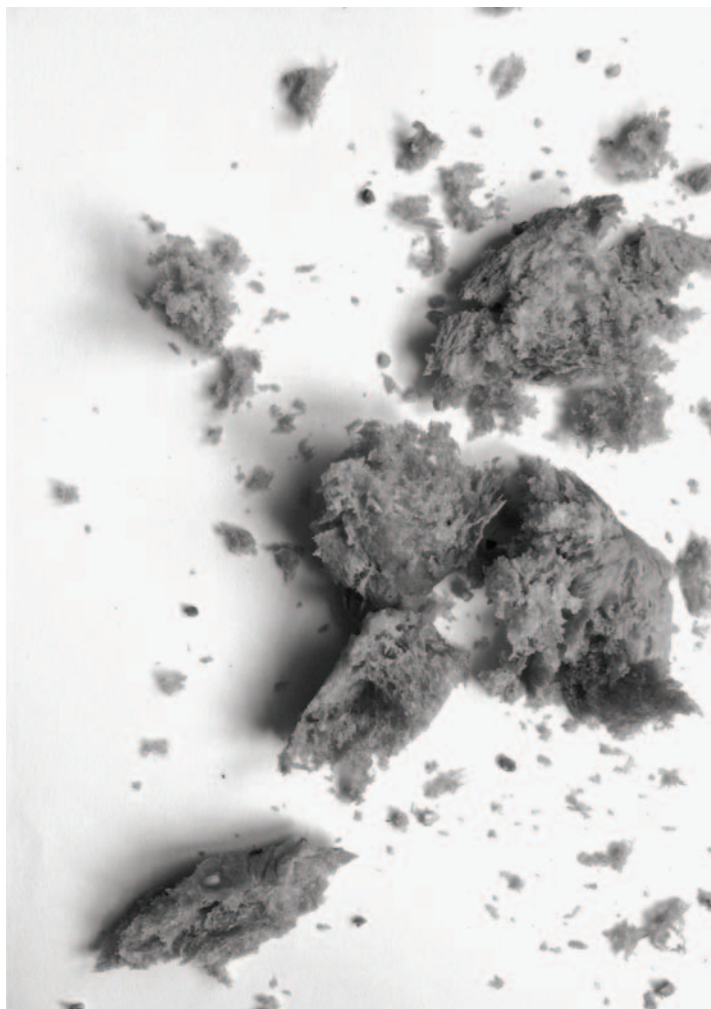
When, after you have stopped being afraid, must you again begin?”

**- Annie Zaidi**

Upon overhearing their parents' plan to abandon them in the Black Forest, young Hansel went in search of his jack-knife, while Grethel, his sister, went in search of pebbles to strew along the way so they could find their way out of the forest again. She carried these pebbles in her apron pocket and it is only well that there were no streams to cross en route.

Next time the siblings overheard their parents' plan to abandon them, Grethel, who had run out of pebbles, filled her pocket with stale bread crumbs instead - a plan that was lightweight in more ways than one, and was doomed to fail on account of avian intervention. We needn't dwell upon the rest of the tale - it ends reasonably well, with one evil stepmother and one wicked witch dead, and no main protagonists harmed.

Later, it came to light that Hansel, who'd been preoccupied with whittling sticks and clearing undergrowth with his jack-knife, had noticed neither pebbles nor crumbs, and ascribed their navigation through the forest to his own fine animal instinct. Grethel declined to comment.



## About the work

Through labyrinths, forests, battlefields, predatory wastelands - women have always laid out private, particular trails by which they hoped to find their way home safely. 'Navigation and Safe Passage' is about four such journeys.

The Adi Parva lovingly documents her tapering thighs and inky hair. To set eyes on her was to love and desire her beyond reason - and most men were mere mortals. In castoff clothes, Draupadi stood more imperious than Queen Sudeshna herself. Without unguent or adornment - she still looked, and smelled, like a divine blue lotus.

A queen's entourage of comely handmaids and conniving slavegirls has always been easy game for predatory royalty. Technically, Draupadi was coiffeuse, not handmaid, but life couldn't have been easy during that year of exile incognita in Virat's kingdom.

She navigated through the land using five imaginary body guards as her shield. To all who'd listen, Draupadi talked about her five magical husbands who'd emerge out of ether and rip the arms off anyone who so much as looked her way.

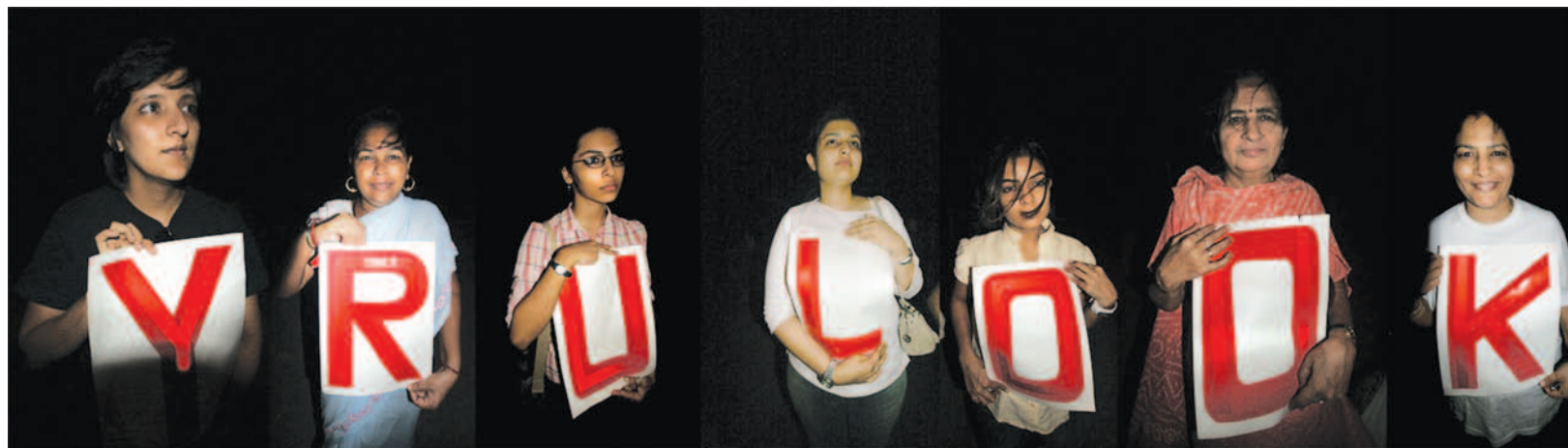
This phantom sentinel guarded her with far greater efficiency than did the five flesh-and-blood men who sat shamefaced in the gaming hall while Dushhasan tore at her hair and robes.



### About the artist

Amruta Patil is a writer and artist. Author of graphic novel 'Kari', (2008), and co-editor of Mindfields, a journal about ideas and alternative education. Amruta has an abiding love for mytho-history and a growing interest in simple, sustainable living. You can view Amruta's writing and artwork on <http://amrutapatil.blogspot.com>





## About the work

Y R U LOOKING AT ME (2005/ 2006/2007) / Street action at a traffic signal.  
Cities - Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai.

The Action Heroes show up at the traffic signal when the lights turn red and stand in front of the traffic reading "Y R U LOOKING AT ME".

The exhibit includes 'Y R U LOOKING AT ME' as well as 'Step by Step Guide to Unapologetic Walking' and the two channel video installation, 'Moments of a Long Pause'.



### **About the artist**

Blank Noise is a volunteer led collective seeking to trigger public dialogue on 'eve teasing' via events both on the internet and on the streets of different cities. Volunteer participation shapes the collective. Volunteers / participants are celebrated as Action Heroes. <http://blog.blanknoise.org>



Jaya Das going home after her day's work, Madanpur Khadar, New Delhi

## About the work

Street Lights / The series of pictures highlights the effect a basic civic infrastructure like street light or lack of it thereof has on the issues of women safety and mobility. This series of portraits of women who were out in the night were made under street lights, literally bringing into light a pocket of perceived safe space beneath these lights. The function of the street light could thus be deemed empowering, but even in this space we see overt glances and encounters being played out.





Lakshmi going to the hospital with her kids Shekhar and Pooja, Madanpur Khadar, New Delhi

**About the artist**

Lucida is a photographers’ collective, aiming to develop and support a range of independent and critical photographic practices, that focus on research and education. Lucida endeavors to influence photographic thinking through a design oriented approach in photography services. Lucida was founded in April 2010 by four Post Graduates of the Photography Design program at the National Institute of Design.

The founders are Arunima Singh, Mridul Batra, Pradeep Kumar and Suruchi Dumpawar.





“Near school, two guys were going on a bike. Seeing a girl coming, they started laughing and staring at her. That is when I clicked the photo.”

- Amresh Chand, Madanpur Khadar, New Delhi

## About the work

Safe In the City - Photographs and Text by young residents of Madanpur Khadar / The workshop conducted on 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2010 was aimed at generating self expressions from the participants on the issues of safety and mobility that they face in their daily lives, through the medium of photography. A selection of their pictures and comments recorded during the workshop are a part of the exhibition.

## About the artists

The workshop conducted by LUCIDA had participants from Madanpur Khadar area in New Delhi, a mix of young boys and girls, their ages ranging from 13 to 18.

Participants: Amresh Chand, Baby, Gita, Gulbahar, Laltesh, Naveen Kumar, Nilima, Pooja, Preeti Das, Rahul, Rohit, Sanjay, Sarita, Shaistha, Sharmila, Shashikala, Sunita, Veeru

You don't see any girls and women out in the night as it is really dark and most of the street lights don't work. The streets are dominated by men. - Shashikala

I saw a girl going to school. I liked her so I went to her and said that I wanted us to be friends. "Don't you have a mother and sisters at home?" she said to me, angrily. "Yes" I said "But I need a wife." - Rahul

Guys still manage to play even if the parks are dirty, as they are boys. How will the girls play? - Gulbahar

I want the city to be such that girls don't hesitate in going out. - Nilima



The muddy ground in front of Preeti's school is a dumping ground and also a waste to girls' school. Madanpur Khadar



Open road. Phase 1. Madanpur Khadar



Kachhwa Gaurav, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar

You see a guy in this photo wearing a stylish vest. The guys here will buy the same clothes and then they will roam around whistling and whistling at girls. People should be in style, but keep it to themselves. - Sharmila



On the road going to Government girls' school. Madanpur Khadar

Near school, two guys were going on a bike, seeing a girl coming they started laughing and staring at her. - Amresh Chandra



Boys hanging out near a school. Phase 1. Madanpur Khadar



These men are playing cards on the street, seeing this even someone who is going to school will become curious and will want to play. - Neelima



Dangerous road leading to Mother's school. Madanpur Khadar

I like to roam around in the city a lot. As one gets to see different things. - Baby

I feel unsafe on the way to school as it is deserted, but as there is no other way I am forced to go. - Sarita

I hum when I feel unsafe, that tends to help at times. - Preeti

Whenever I go on the RTV, it is a lot of trouble. I never get a seat. - Pooja

Boys should not stand in front of public toilets as girls find it awkward to use them. - Sunita



Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar



Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar

The park where I took these pictures there were no girls playing, guys were flying kites and playing cricket, people were gambling also. - Preeti



Boys playing in the park filled with water during monsoon. Adjacent to Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar



Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar



Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar



Golden Garden park, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar

People in front of a wall painted by Jagori last day. "We want Jagori" D Block, Madanpur Khadar



Kuruksha and Dina coming back from school continuing to Madanpur Khadar

I have noticed many times that guys come to tease girls outside their schools. - Sanjay

I walk fast with my head down when I feel unsafe. - Baby



Public toilet, D1 Block, Madanpur Khadar



Overcrowded RTV bus stand. Jagori chowk, Madanpur Khadar



People, Phase 1. Madanpur Khadar





Our Nubile Miscreants are three-fold strategists.

In a high speed, lo-band, fluctuating landscape of mid-level moral highgrounds and commodity fetishism, they operate as daytime hawks and nighttime rodents.

They believe that dubious means may or may not lead to dubious ends.

They don't stand for apologists, anarchists, or anagrams.

potential hit-list

easy victim



## About the work

Beware Our Nubile Miscreants \*  
This is not entirely a work of fiction.

[\* Borrowed from a song title by 'Of Montreal']





Fear spreads among the echelons of nubility in many parts of the city.

"They have taken over our streets ,our homes, our days, our nights, our hearts and our minds. " says one newspaper report.

"Everyone's involved. It's the way we are", say the analysts.

"It's in everything, and because of everything, it's in what is behind us and in our future", say the artists.

**BEWARE! OUR NUBILE MISCREANTS**

### About the artist

Priya Sen works as an artist and filmmaker in New Delhi. She is considering long expeditions on slow moving transportation as her next big career move.



8:57 PM

### About the work

Her Walk Home / Soon after daylight fades in the busy metropolis of New Delhi, something else begins to swirl over its neon-lit roads. An uneasy disquiet, a sense of foreboding that casts a shadow behind the lone women traveling back home. Being a woman myself, it seems a bit strange to be almost stalking them on their journeys. Little things catch my eye. Their hurried, urgent stride.

A protective holding of hands. That naked feeling of exposure. The loneliness of one against many. A desire for anonymity. And even as early as 9 pm, I can barely spot a woman out on the street. It's time for me to get back home...



6:59 PM

### About the artist

Ruhani Kaur's photo-story on 'India's Invisible Women: Repercussions of Female Foeticide' won her the 'Days Japan Grand Prix Award' 2006. Exhibited in the Daegu Photo Biennale 2006 at S. Korea and India Habitat Centre, it was published internationally. During her eight-year long career she has worked on varied photo-essays for The Indian Express, UNFPA, Down to Earth and First City, and now Open Magazine.





## About the work

In documenting the lives of young women from the Northeast in Delhi, I was confronted with a two-fold dilemma that the women face: gender inequality and racial discrimination. A big city usually provides possibilities of integration into modern society free of social structures and prejudices. The anonymity it offers not only empowers but also enables the evolution of one's identity and dreams. This is not true for majority of the women of the Northeast staying in the city.

To come and live in the city is an ordeal that they say robs them of their 'dignity'. Where belongingness to a metropolis is stolen by their distinct looks, always caught up in labels - 'exotic', 'chinky' or 'available'. They live in constant fear of being targeted as the 'other'. Lack of knowledge about their culture further compounds matters.

The following diptychs have emerged out of stories these young women have shared with me, providing a glimpse into their life and longing to be accepted no matter how they look. In this project I have tried to capture the spaces where they feel safe, free to be themselves. And other spaces, where they feel threatened and trapped by their distinctiveness or 'face'.



ANJU KSHETRIMALUM, 23  
*Meitei* from MANIPUR • In Delhi for 3 years

An MBA graduate, Anju (seen here with her brother) says that the city has much to offer in terms of economic opportunities but it is the mindset of the people that bothers her. "Even though I come from a small town, back home women are treated with much more respect and dignity," she says. "Delhi despite being a 'modern city' is different. Here men look down on women and harass them, especially if one looks different. I dress conservatively, often in salwar and kurta, but that does not stop men from passing lewd remarks."

### About the artist

Uzma Mohsin graduated from the National Institute of Design in 2000, specialising in graphic design. She has been the art director of *Tehelka*, a weekly news magazine, for over 3 years. She is also pursuing her keen interest in photography, in the form of several independent projects. Her work has been published in various publications including *Tehelka*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Outlook Magazine*: as well as being included in *Click!* an exhibition on contemporary Indian photography produced by Vadhera Art Gallery, New Delhi and London. In 2010, she assisted Martine Franck (Magnum) on a book project.





Aparna Rajagopalan, *Mother and Child*, Ahmedabad, 2008

A selection of entries from the public - contributed by professionals and amateurs from across the world.



Camino Laguillo, *Inward01*, Seville, Spain, 2008/9



Dayanita Singh, *Myself Mona Ahmed*, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi, 1994







Sunil Gupta, *Transporting or Dykes-on-Bikes, Delhi style*, 2010



Mirza Fahad Beg, *Ladies "Special"*, Nizamuddin Railway Station, Delhi, 2009



Lakshmi Prabhala, *Road Widening*, Begumpet, Hyderabad, 2010



Mithun Kumar, *Stories in every eye, My theory is men are no more liberated than women- Indira Gandhi*, MG Road market, Bangalore, 2009



Ram Rahman, *Delhi Metro*, 2009





Ruchika Chanana, *Autoshot*, RT Nagar, Bangalore, 2004



Sanjiv Valsan, *Mumbai Local Train*, 2010



Sanjiv Valsan, *Mumbai Flood*, 2005







Mehjabeen Jagmag , *Freedom in an Empty Train*, Mumbai, 2010



Alain Willaume, *Alone 2, Ahmedabad* (Nov. 2005) from the series *Self-Defence* (V).



Sonali Dalal, *Keeping to one's corner*, Ahmedabad, 2010



Nikita Dutt, *These seats are reserved for women*, Kolkata, 2010



Vinay Panjwani, *Desire*, Ghats in New Delhi, 2010



## About JAGORI

JAGORI (meaning “awaken women”) founded in 1984 is a feminist documentation, training, communication and resource centre. Its main objective is consciousness raising, awareness generation and production of creative advocacy material on women’s rights. JAGORI has sought to address violence against women (VAW) through direct interventions, campaigns and institutional and legal changes. The Safe Delhi Campaign launched in 2004 has been aimed at challenging the gender exclusions and violence that women (especially poor women) face in the city.

## About the Curator

Gauri Gill is a Delhi based photographer. Her work includes series such as ‘Notes from the Desert’, drawn from a decade of revisiting her friends among nomadic and rural communities in Western Rajasthan; and ‘The Americans’, a retelling of Robert Frank’s book of the same name made in the fifties, but this time with South Asians at the heart of it. Her works have been exhibited in group exhibitions all over the world including the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Yale Art Gallery, New Haven; Musee Quai Branly, Paris and Newark Museum, New Jersey.

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B-114, Shivalik, Malviya Nagar

New Delhi 110 017-12, India

**W:** [www.jagori.org](http://www.jagori.org) **E:** [jagori@jagori.org](mailto:jagori@jagori.org)

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