



Chain of Poverty

Shehab uddin

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Introductory text:

I woke suddenly from a bad dream, shaking, sweating. It was 4am in Brisbane and midnight in Dhaka. I wanted to know that Mali and Jarina Khala were okay. I hadn't called them for a long time after I left them a few months back. I dialled the number, fingers shaking, body shaking. Finally, Khala answered. I felt instant relief, they are alright. Jarina Khala is not really my Khala (aunty), but we are like an extended family now.

Mali is mentally and physically disabled and living with her single mother, Jarina Khala on the street outside Kamalapur Railway Station, Dhaka, Bangladesh. They wait for morning, hoping the new day might free them from this life.

For two and a half years I have been exploring the lived experience of three impoverished families in Bangladesh. They are Jarina Khala's family who are city street dwellers, Bellal Bhui's family who are rural villagers, and Nurjahan Khala's family who live in a slum. I have immersed myself into their situations, living with them, engaging with them and becoming a stakeholder in their daily lives.

The World Bank stated that while poverty reduction in Bangladesh has occurred, the overall number of people living below the poverty line remains significant. Poverty is accepted as a social institution, which sustains the unfair distribution of wealth in the global society. As a result it is difficult or simply impossible for people to break the chain of their own impoverishment.

Through collaborative storytelling, I seek to give voice back to these families and close the gap between 'them' and 'us'. The aim is to recognise impoverished people as multidimensional and change the ways in which audiences understand their lives and communities. In attempting to do so, intimate relationships have been formed and the compassion among us can never be broken.

There's no life on the street

Living on the streets they wait for another morning everyday, believing the new day might free them from this life. The life Jarma Khala, 45, a single mother and her daughter Mall, 14, live on the street at Kamalapur Railway Station. The life started for Jarma Khala in her 10 after she was displaced from her own family and has been living on the street for more than 35 years and for Mall the life started even before she born on the street.

Now Khala collects garbage to earn a living (about \$30 per month) but she used to do what ever she can, including beg. She got married to Bhandari, a Rikshaw Puller, when she was a teenager, but he left her after she gave birth to their first child. Among the three children Jarma is the only child who survived. Sohel, the eldest son died at the age of 8 or 9 and Mall's brother died at her 22 days of pregnancy. Mall's husband died at the age of 35. Mall's early days was delighted with mother but when she was about seven Khala noticed that she was mentally and physically disabled. Until last year Khala along with other neighbour strongly believed that the bad evil who lived with Mall is the reason for her illness. Mall has to chain her daughter to a fence all day by her hands from dawn to dusk because she can't Despite every doctor's misgivings and physical instabilities, she has never been diagnosed. In November 2013 she underwent an electroencephalogram (EEG) in order to determine a course of illness and medication. Mall suffers from epilepsy and she is lucky if Khala is nearby when she has a seizure. Other times, she has sustained injuries from falling while no one is around. As soon as Mall been diagnosed we started her long-term medication and it seems now she is getting better.





















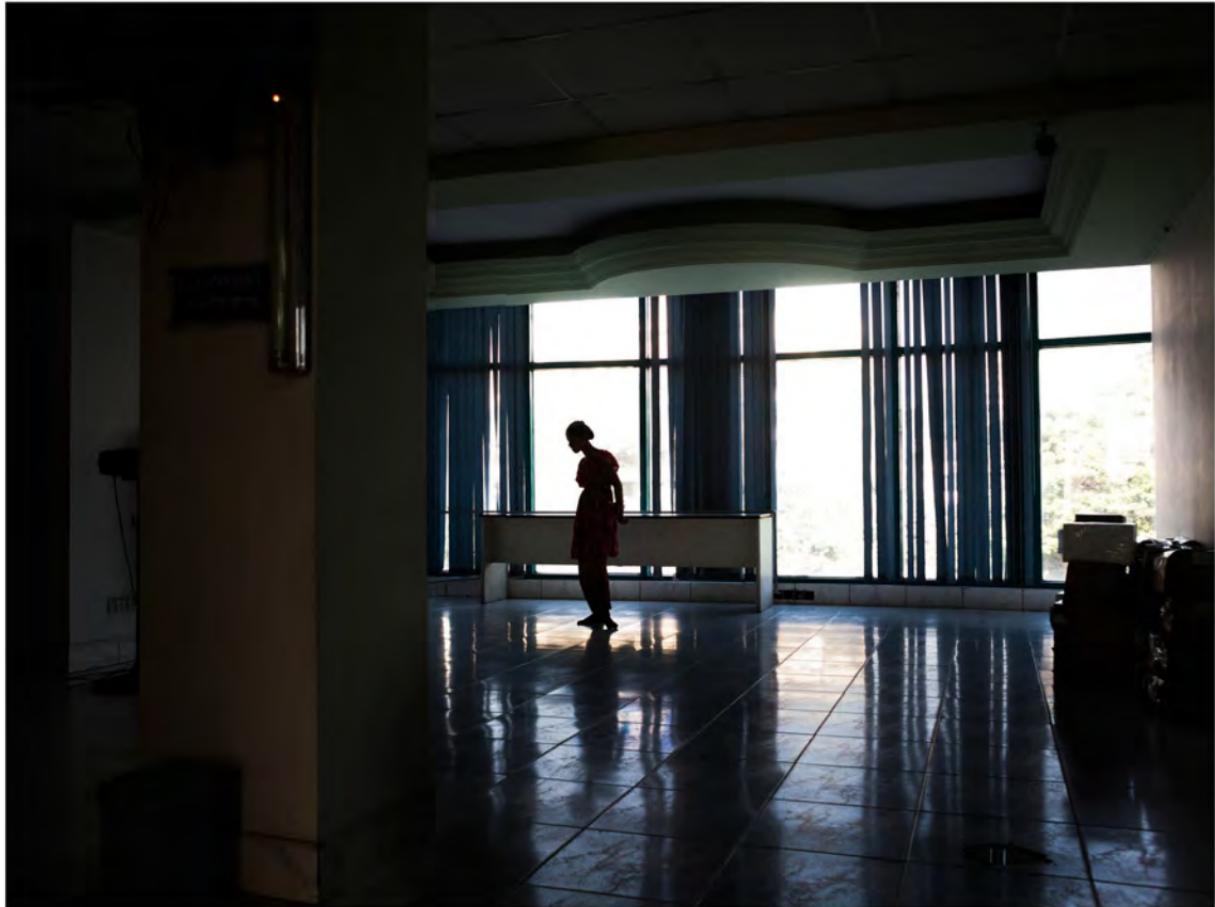




















One day, everyday:

The days are repetitive, especially for both of them particularly for Mall, who lives within 10 square meters. It is every moments of her life she passed, passing and going to pass. This particular 24 hours that captured in a series of 96 moments in every 15 minutes pause, started on 7am November 21, 2012 and finished on 6:45am November 22, 2012. Jarina Khalil and I hope she would and/or will have 'another life' when she can able to have the freedom of life.











We are poor because we were born into a poor family

I went fishing with Bellal Bhai numerous times. On January 2, 2013, after a long day we were able to catch 82 shrimp fries and sold them (\$0.74). We were lucky enough to catch around 100g of other small fish for his family. He has to go to Sunderbans (the world's biggest mangrove forest) to fish and collect firewood where he risks being killed by man-eating tigers. He mainly catches shrimp fries and sells them for a living. His income varies depending on how much he catches. Some days he does not catch anything and makes no money. His wages fluctuates between \$0.25 and \$4.00 per day, depending on how much he catches. Some days he does not catch anything. Bellal Bhai, 34, Nurunnahar Bhabi, 25, and their daughter Bilkis, 6, live in Kalabogil village in Khulna in the southwest of Bangladesh. Nurunnahar Bhabi sometimes works as a domestic helper.





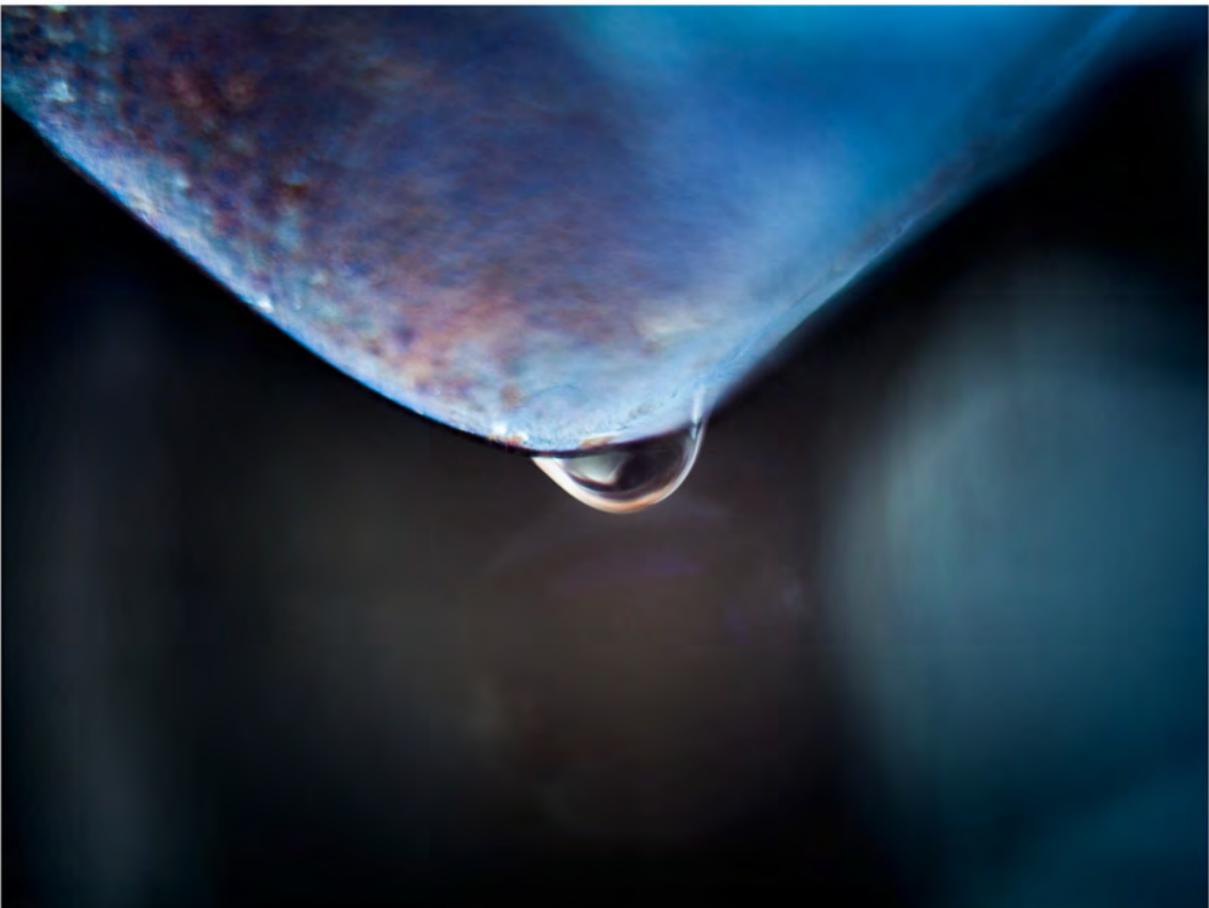








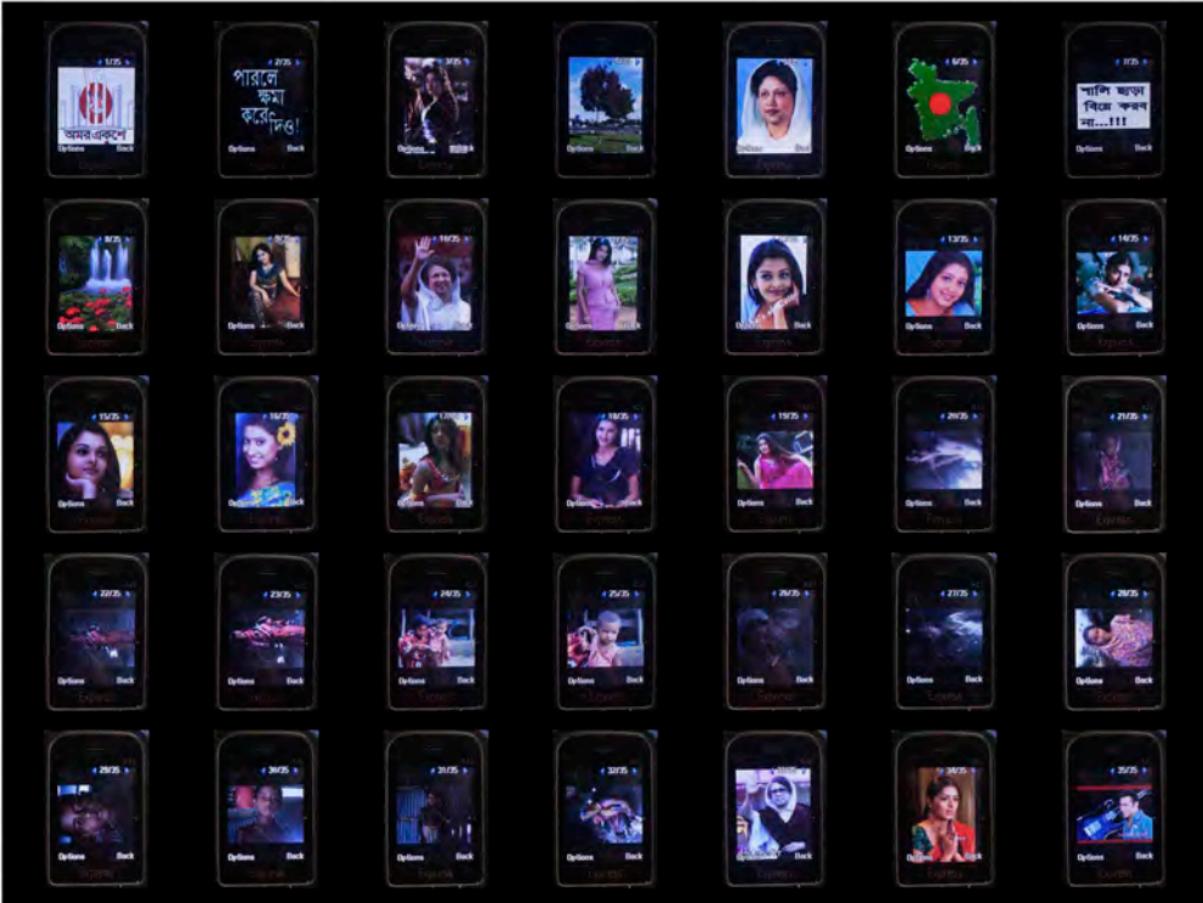








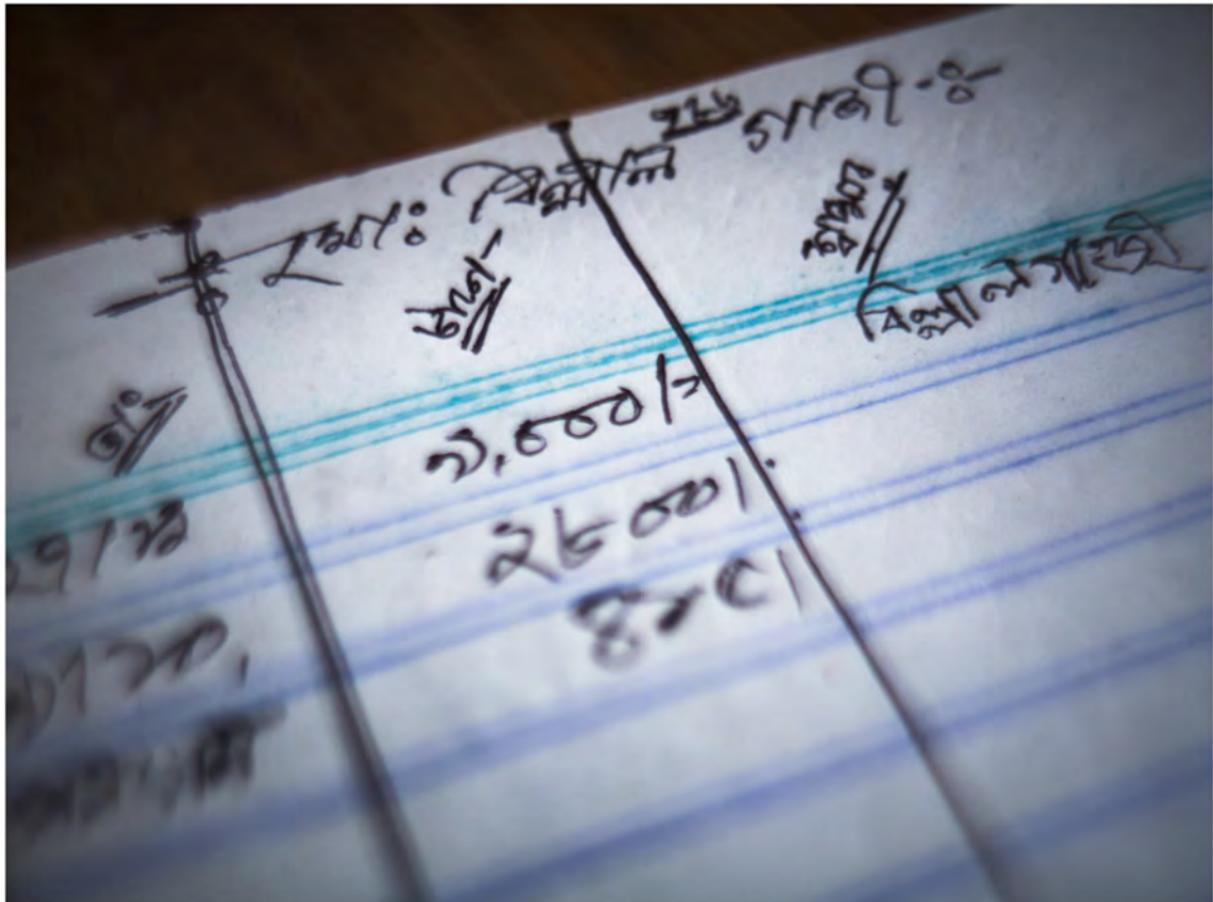












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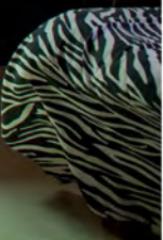




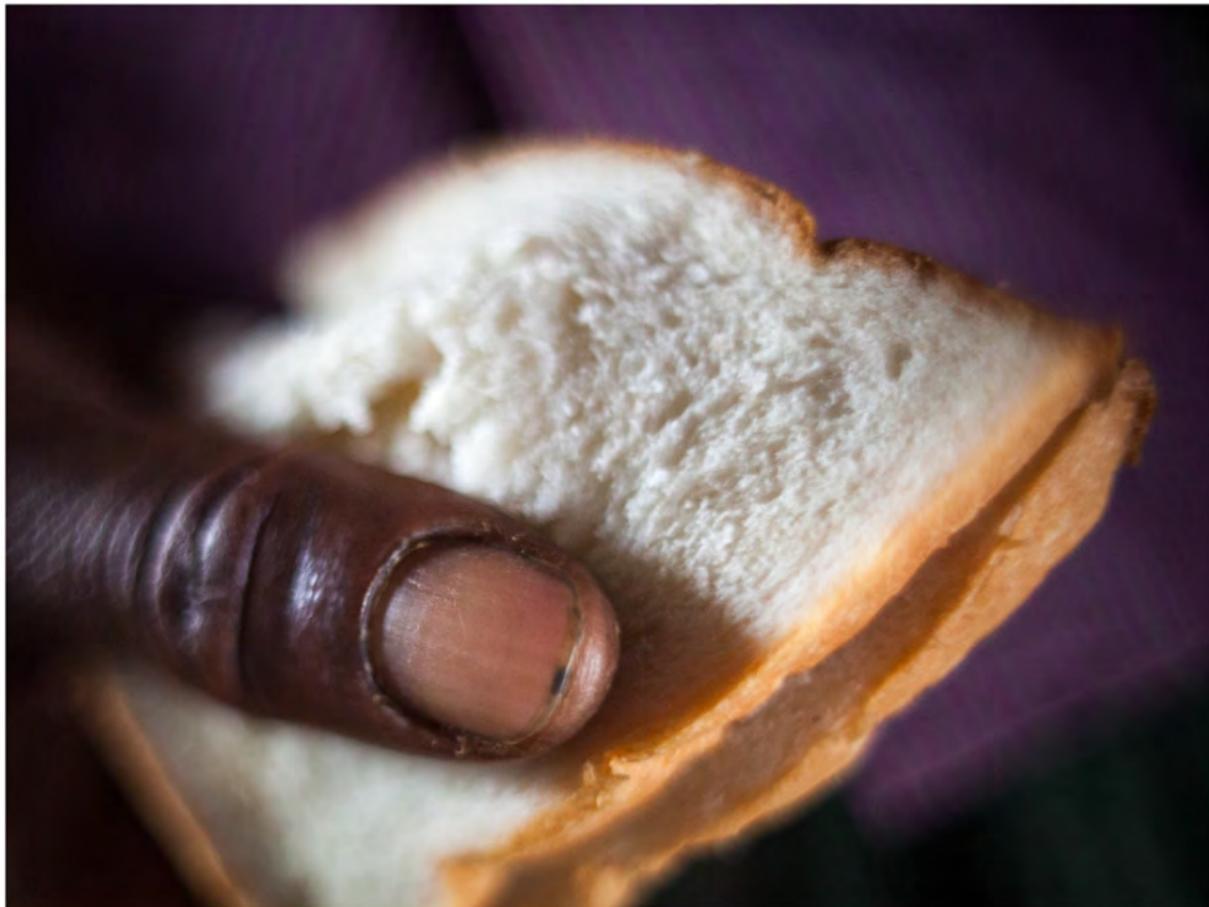




The dreams













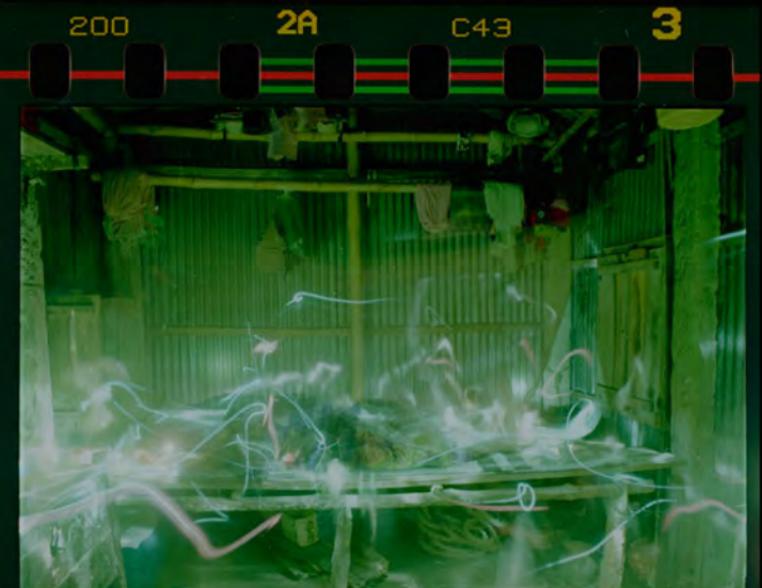




Dark Nights

From 12th -16th December 2013 Bellal Bhai had no money to buy kerosene for his lantern, so they spent the week using the light from his mobile phone. – December 2013.







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Life on 2.2 X 2.7

Nujahan Khala, with her husband Ali Hossain Khalu, three children and two grandchildren share a 2.2m x 2.7m room in a Dhaka slum. Five of the family members work for their living: Ali Hossain Bhai (pulling a rickshaw/day labour), Nujahan Shabi (housemaid), their daughter Sabina and Rokhsana (garment worker) and son Shahabuddin (factory worker).



































Life on 2.2 X 2.7





