

# THE LAST DROP

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Purulia, India

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25 photographs, fine art prints,  
50 x 70 cm / 70 x 100 cm

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Access to clean water was recognized by the United Nations as a global human right in 2010. However, although the UN General Assembly declared the years 2005 to 2015 the International Decade for Action *Water: Source of Life*, the consequences of a growing water shortage are now being addressed as part of the global water crisis. The main causes are culturally defined attitudes to water management and usage, the increasing privatization of water, and climate change. The problem of water availability and distribution is particularly severe for underprivileged population groups.

There are no wells or alternative water storage systems available in almost 300,000 Indian villages. Over 160 million Indians currently have no access to clean water. As a result, more than sixty thousand infants die every year from diarrhoea.

Within the family system, responsibility for procuring water falls to women and girls, whose daily reality often involves many hours trekking back and forth to fetch water from distant wells.

The women carry the water on their heads in aluminium gallon containers. In order to secure enough water to cover their daily needs, the girls are included in the process from an early age, which sometimes stops them going to school. Second wives may even be part of the family structure in some regions of India as a means to ensure that there is sufficient water every day.

In one respect, my work focuses on the reality of life for these women and girls, as well as on globally relevant issues. A staged and surreal mode of enactment, using a prepared vessel—typically used for fetching water—that the women here carry upside down, intentionally covering their heads, directs attention to a fundamental contemporary problem.

The photographs were taken in twelve villages inhabited by the Santal people, an indigenous ethnic group in the northern part of West Bengal. The problems of water scarcity and an insufficiency of drinking water are well known there—especially towards the end of the dry season—and the difficulties associated with this are part and parcel of daily life.