

# BAHAK

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Kolkata (Calcutta), India, 2012  
68 photographs, fine art prints, 60 x 60 cm  
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PUBLICATION  
Bahak - The Burden of Things  
Revolver Publishing, Berlin 2014  
ISBN: 978-3-86895-313-8

The bengali term for carrier is *Bahak*. No load seems too heavy or too large to be manhandled through the narrow, crowded streets of Kolkata (Calcutta). Whether their burdens are carried on their heads, or on a yoke over their shoulders, on two- or three-wheelers or on a hand-drawn rickshaw, all manner of goods and essentials—furniture, building materials, groceries, books and coal—are all humped, hauled or carted as they are shifted from one place to another in ways that are at times quite risky!

Precisely placed and perfectly balanced, these artfully towering loads are often extremely heavy. Once on the way, every stop becomes a risky manoeuvre, as the carrier then needs to get his loaded vehicle going again.

*Bahak* means a life as a day labourer living at the bottom of the social pile. Exploitation and drudgery for minimum pay; dicing with danger in a daily struggle with the Kolkata streets; little or no appreciation for vigorous physical effort, which can all end in total exhaustion.

Nevertheless, in a mega-metropolis like Kolkata the *Bahak* play a vital role in keeping the gigantic flow of commodities moving!

I set up a makeshift studio along the edge of these streets for a few weeks and asked some of these carriers to pause for a moment so that they could be portrayed individually, detached from the constant commotion of the bustling crowd—an expression of astonished admiration at the visible artistry contained within the motion of things.

The photographic work *Bahak* also makes you aware of the burden of things—far beyond the city limits of Kolkata.