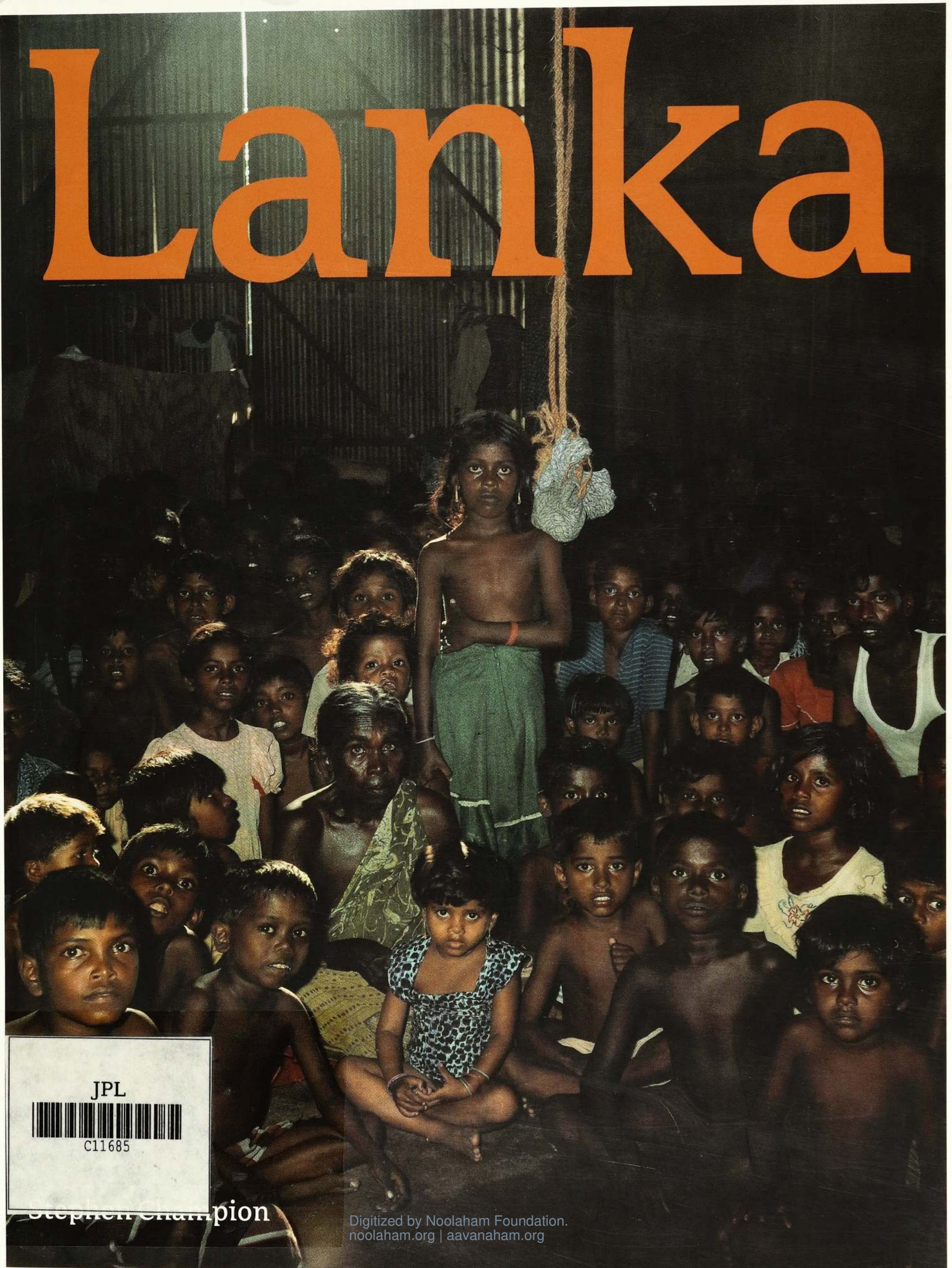


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Stephen Champion

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The intransigence of the Sri Lankan state and the failure of both Sinhalese and Tamil political imagination has locked Sri Lanka into over two decades of civil war. This, compounded with social unrest and repression, has led to enormous pain and suffering amongst our people and to the destruction of our social fabric. It affects the way we live, the way we love and the way we interact with one another. Violence has become the first means of resolving disputes, and tolerance of violence a fact of everyday life. Stephen Champion captures this Sri Lankan nightmare in haunting detail, showing a rich and sophisticated civilisation in the throes of violent upheaval. He reveals the pain in our faces, the material destruction of our environment, and the callousness that has come to engulf our lives.

But all is not lost. For in the midst of this violence, in the intensity of our hatred, the basic humanity of our people still endures. A Sinhalese couple struggled through fire to save their Tamil friend from the violence of the Sinhalese mob, a Tamil man wept openly when the LTTE ordered his Muslim neighbours out of Jaffna, a SLA soldier saved a Tamil baby separated from his parents during the fighting, and a Buddhist priest nurses young boys who have escaped torture. Champion understands this tension between our hatred and our humanity, between our violence and our compassion. That is why his pictures move us in an intimate way. He holds up a mirror to our dark side, hoping that we will emerge stronger, urging us to listen to the voice of our own humanity.

DR Radhika Coomaraswamy
*United Nations Special Representative
for Children And Armed Conflict*



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War Stories

In Sri Lanka, killers take on many guises. They may belong to the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Government Security Forces or to one of the several Tamil or Sinhalese militant political groups. In the past they may have been paramilitaries from the People's Revolutionary Red Army, Green Tigers, Black Cats, or members of the Indian Peace Keeping Force. More recently, they could come from the 'Karuna' faction. They might be desperados, hired assassins, jealous lovers or land-grabbers seeking to take advantage of the chaos of war. They will arrive at any time of the day or night and break open the door and throw you to the ground. They will train their weapons at your head and march you terrified through the thick jungle until you piss yourself. Or they will arrive in an unmarked white van and just call you out of the house. Eventually, your name will appear on some list of the disappeared and the abducted.

An 18-year-old Sri Lankan Army soldier steps on a landmine and blows his legs clean off at the knee. He may go to the village at Ibbagamuwa especially built for army amputees and their families. More likely he will not.

On the way to Trincomalee the old red 1950s bus was stopped at a checkpoint. We were ordered out and searched. They slapped an old man and made us stand in the fierce sun – the ironwork on the bus radiated a blistering heat. After four hours, exhausted, we were allowed to leave. As the bus rolled slowly along the crater-rutted track, we saw half a dozen soldiers standing by the roadside, their rifles pointing at our heads. We ducked to the deck and chickens ran amok in the luggage racks. But there were no shots. Fortune with us, we proceeded.

In a lagoon at Vakarai in the northeast of Sri Lanka there was an underground chamber where Tamil prisoners were tied up and left to drown as the tide came in. At Bathalanda in the south, it is said

that some looked on as Sinhalese boys were tortured. Such hatred between enemies.

Today Sri Lanka's rich traditions and heritage are veiled under a mass of modern constructions and advertising billboards. The north of the country is still a battleground. In the south, however, where massacred bodies of the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) once littered the beaches, brand new tourist developments and temple shrines are sprouting up in kitsch colours and concrete. Forests continue to be razed and waterways diverted as urbanised villages encroach on the landscape. Recently this urban sprawl has been spread further by tsunami relief funds and foreign aid.

At Kandy hordes of foreign tourists are entertained at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth (Dalada Maligawa), said to contain a relic of Lord Buddha. From there they are transported to the green hills of Nuwara Eliya, where they stop to admire the thousands of acres of lush tea – a major foreign currency earner, as well as enslaver of the Indian Tamils who still work the estates.

Planted and overseen by the British until Independence, these estates are now privatised. The new corporate owners mimic their colonial predecessors with rounds of golf and drinks at the clubhouse. In April their numbers are swollen by their urban cousins, who come to the hills to escape the heat of Colombo. Teenage boys drink to hip-hop and *bailla*, prancing around their four-wheel drives and customised saloons. At lower altitudes, down along the southern coastal belt, beach tourists cook themselves red in the sand and ex-pats turned land agents, entrepreneurs and boutique designers flog mud-house chic and elephant polo.

After the tsunami it was quiet for a while. The wrecked buildings along the coast resembled the bombed out homes of the Jaffna peninsula, while the tsunami camps in the south mirrored the Internally Displaced Peoples camps of the north.

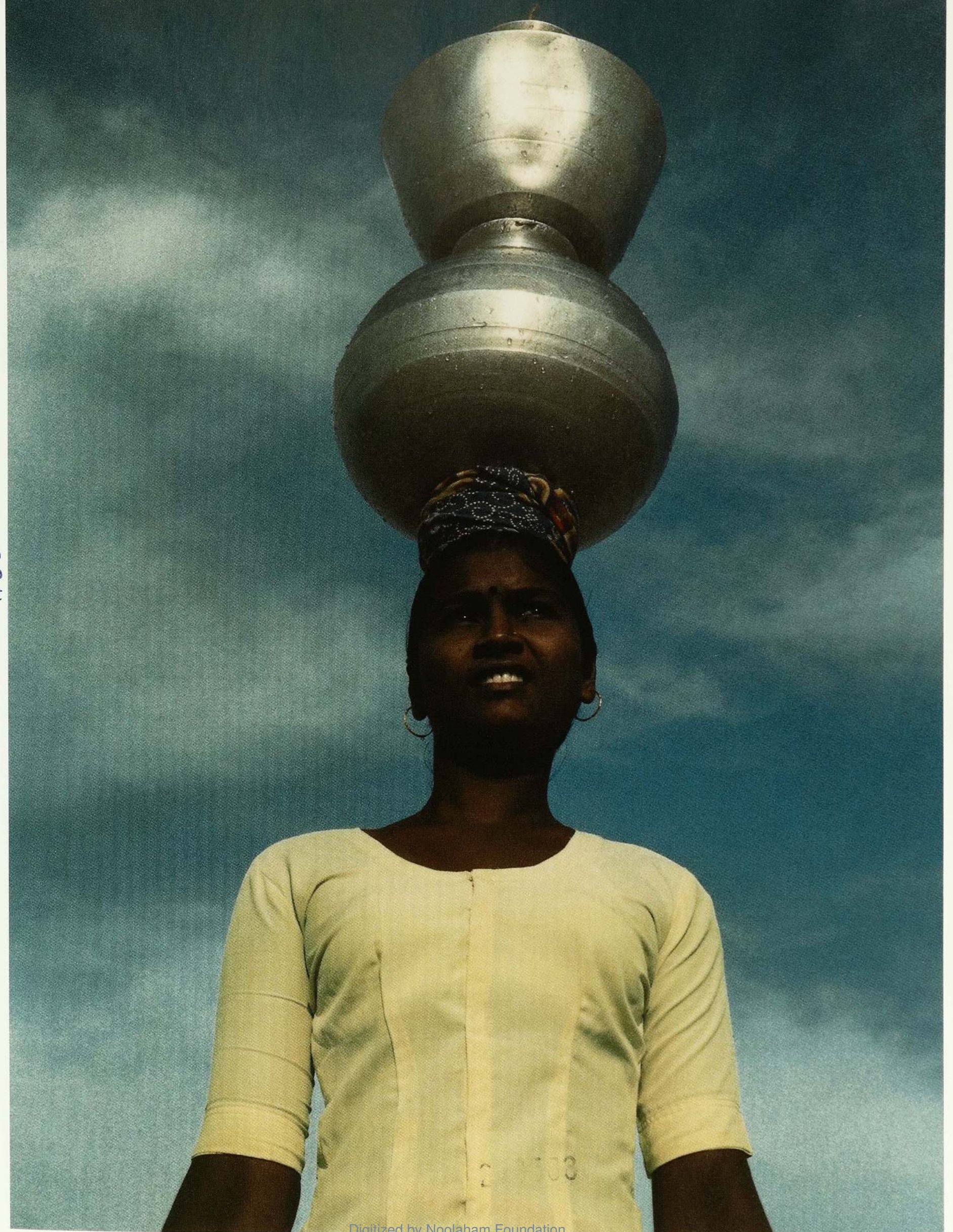






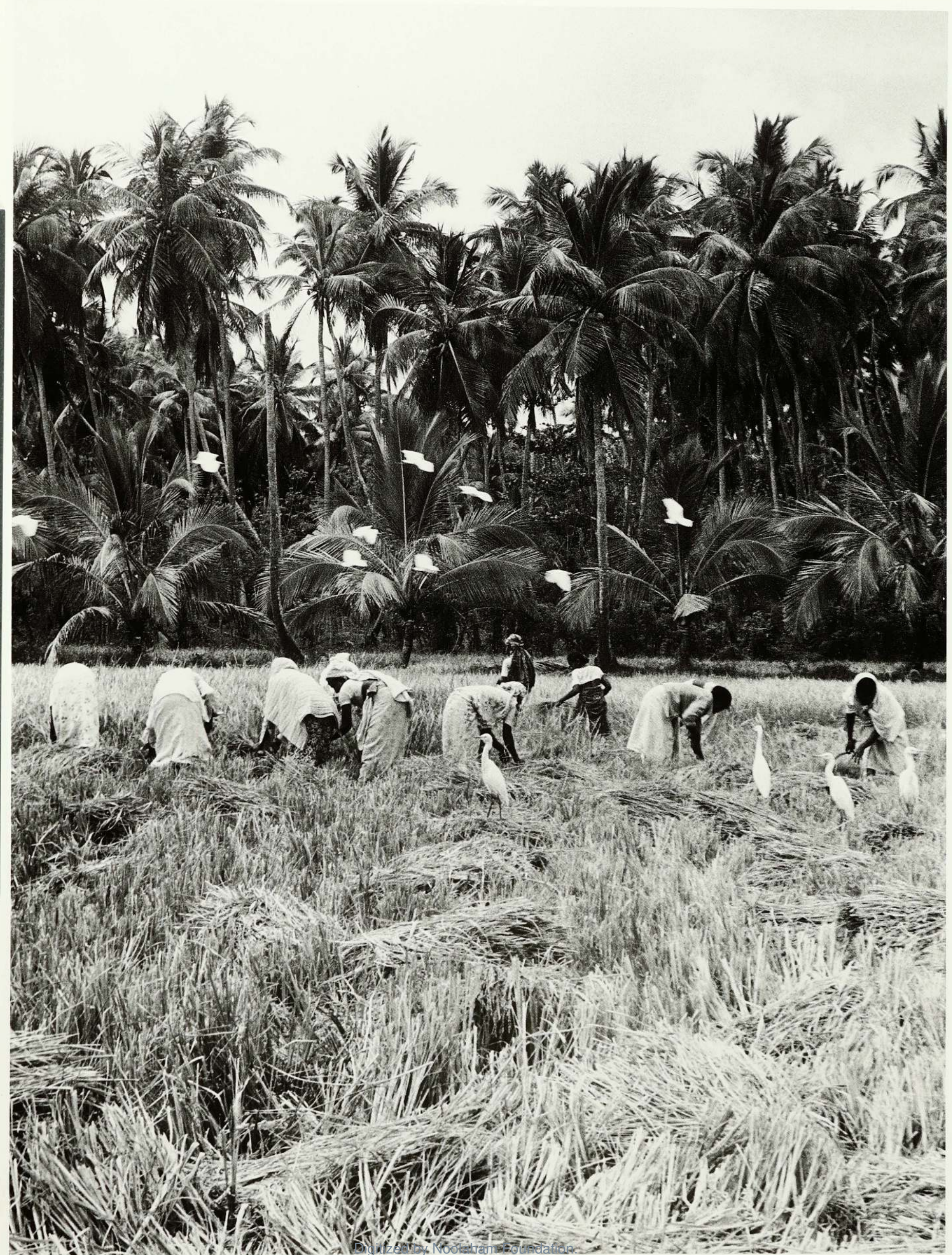












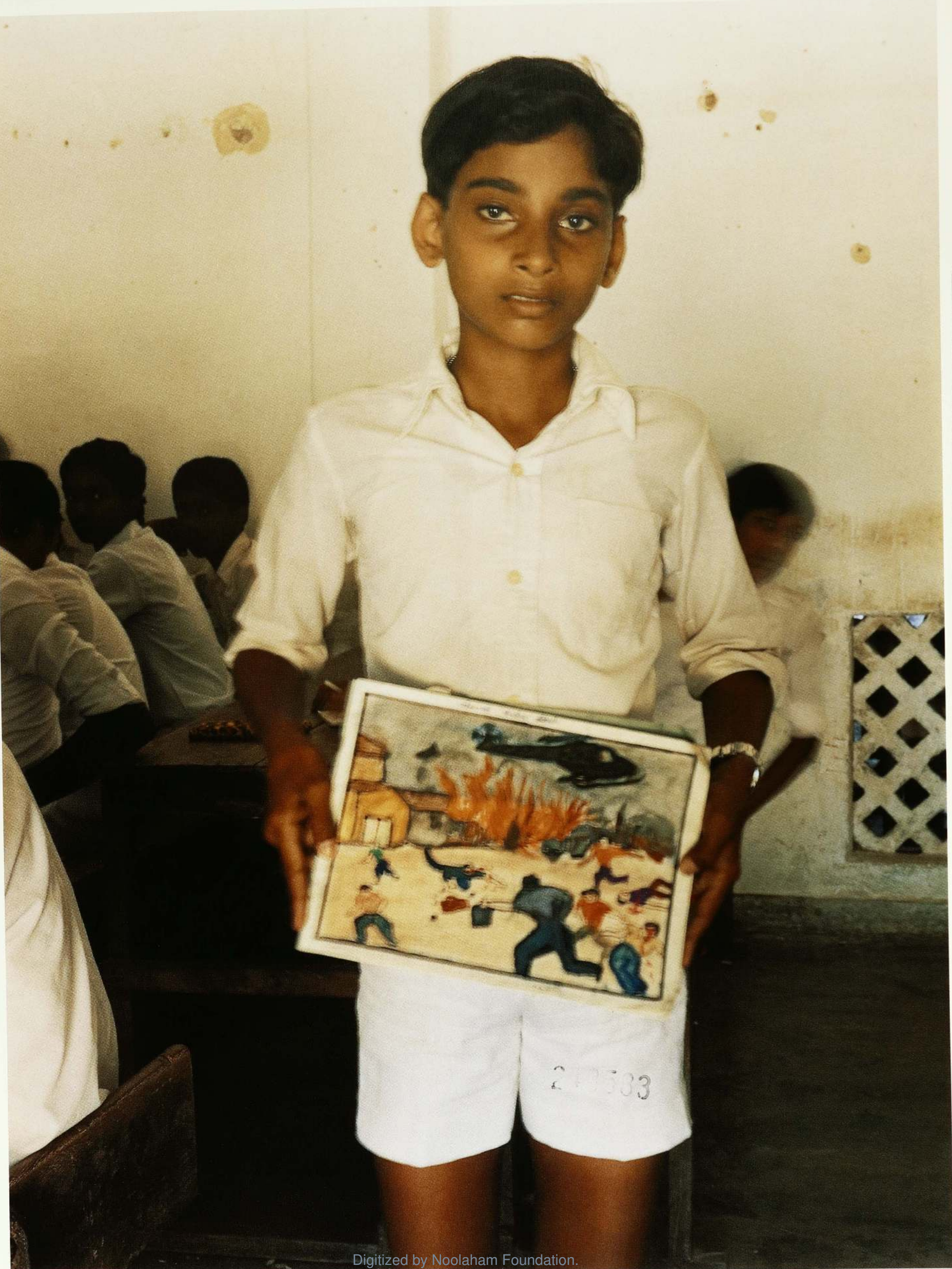




SPECIAL REPORT
JANUARY 2009
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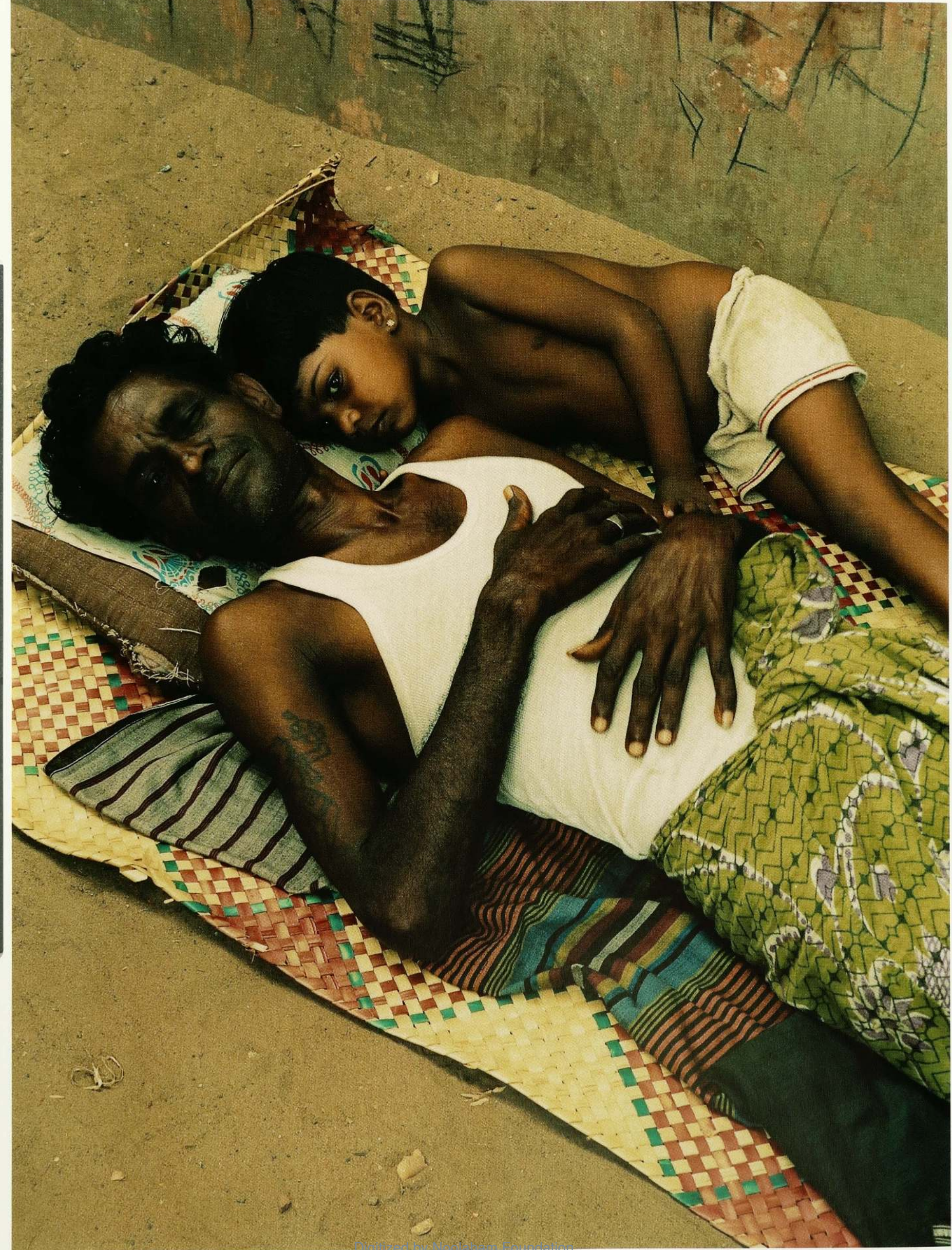




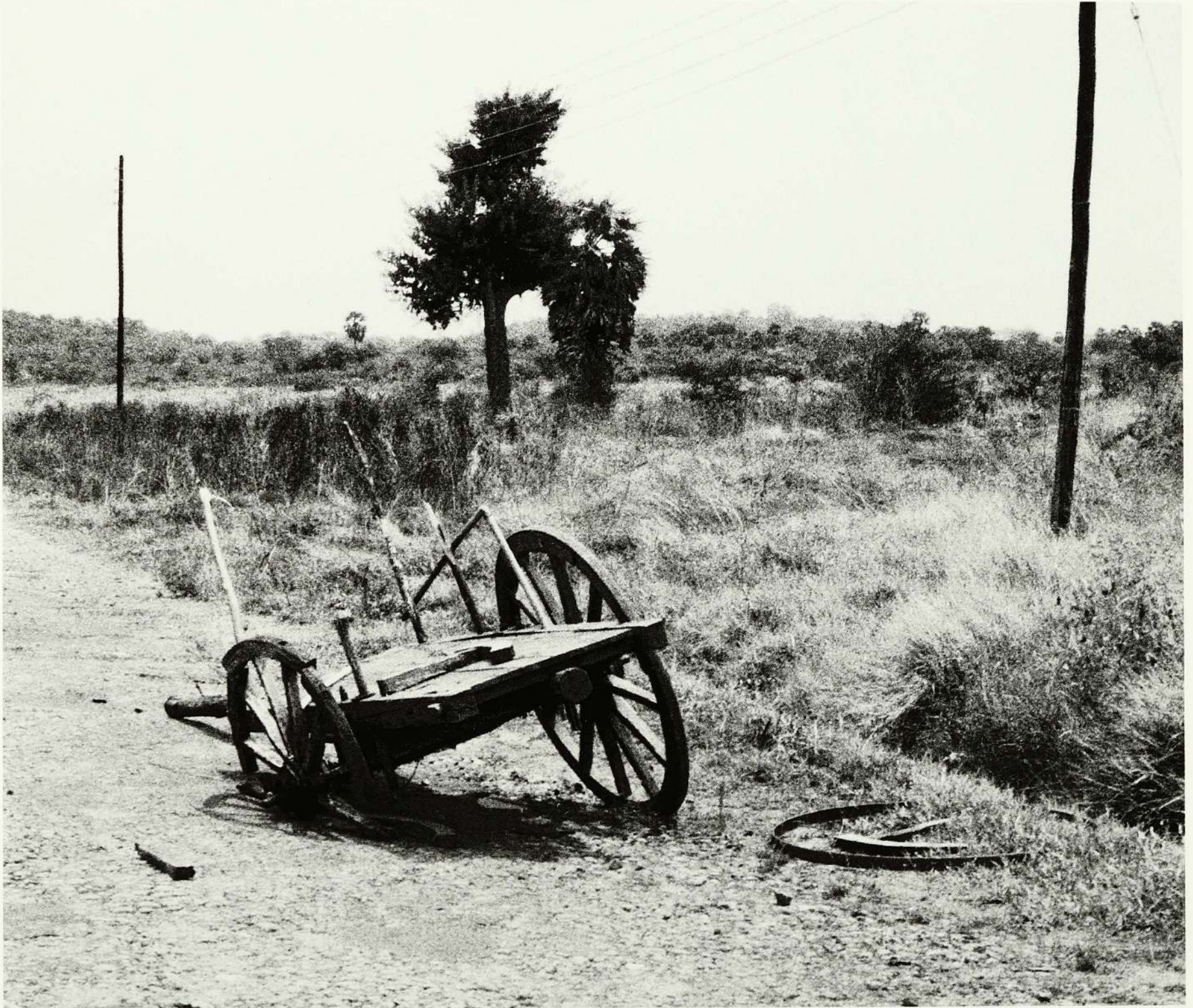


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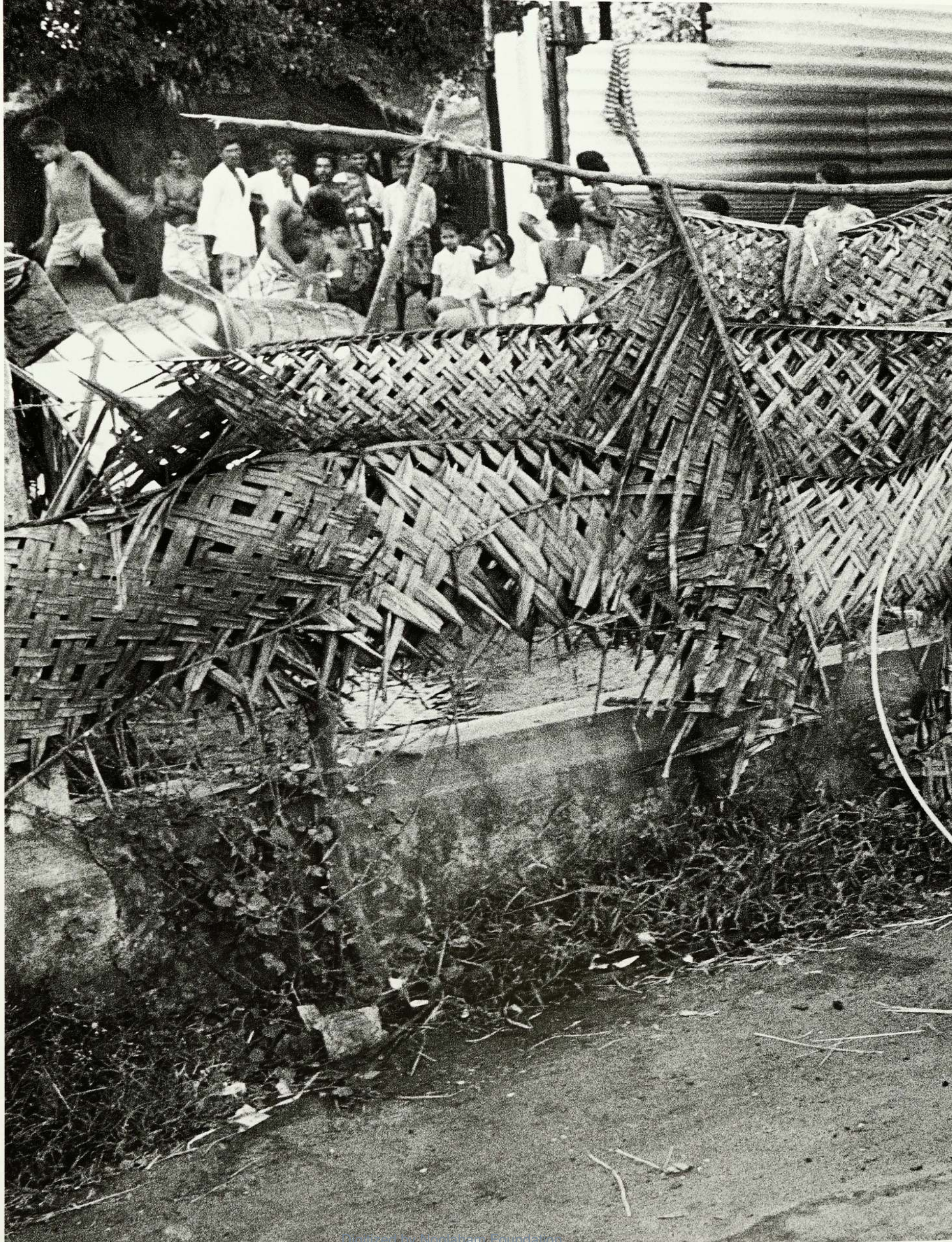




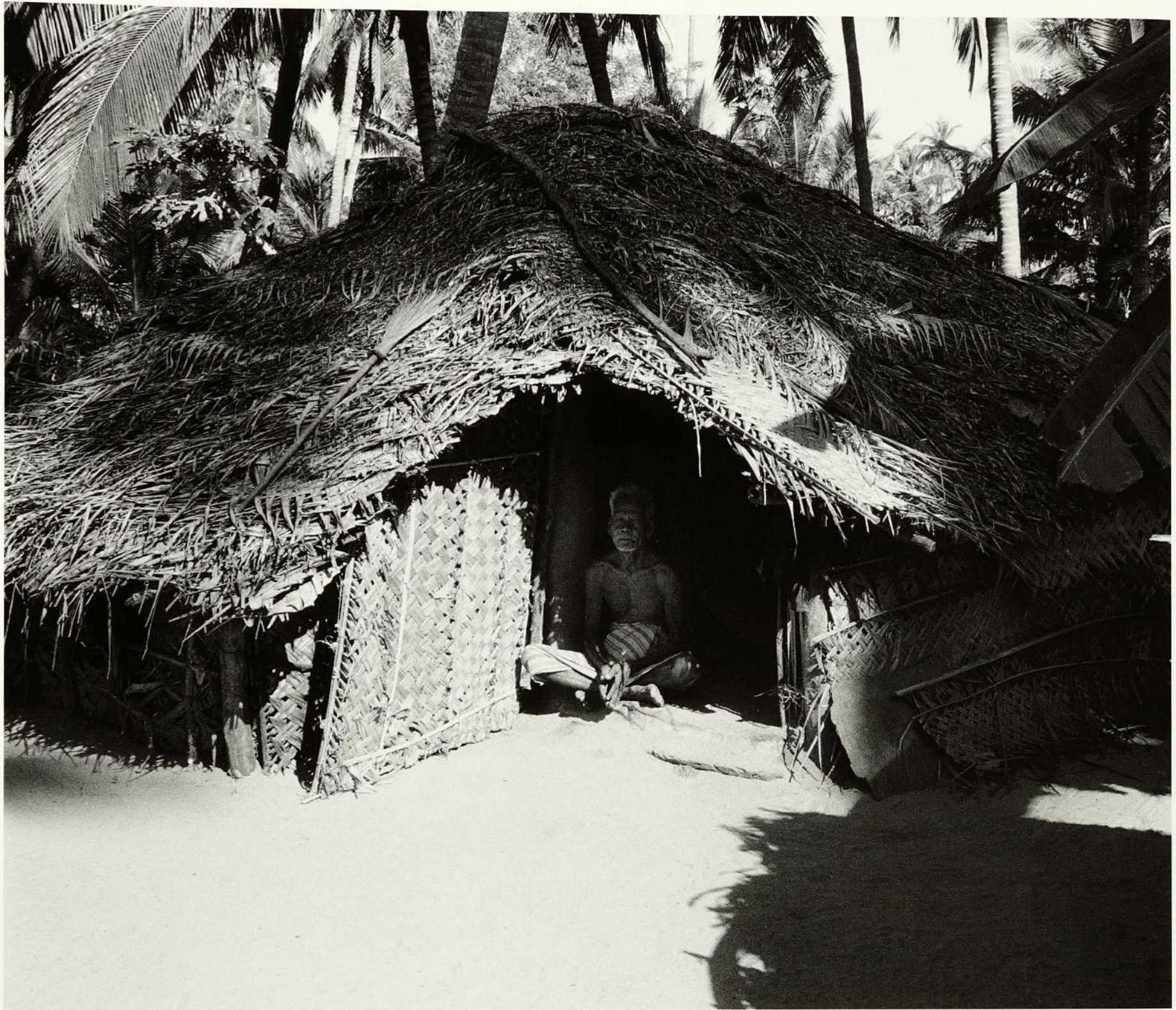




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வணக்கம்!
புறம் பாடும் ஏபண்புல்களின்
தீரன் காண வருவோரே!
உங்களுள் வரவேற்கின்றோம்.

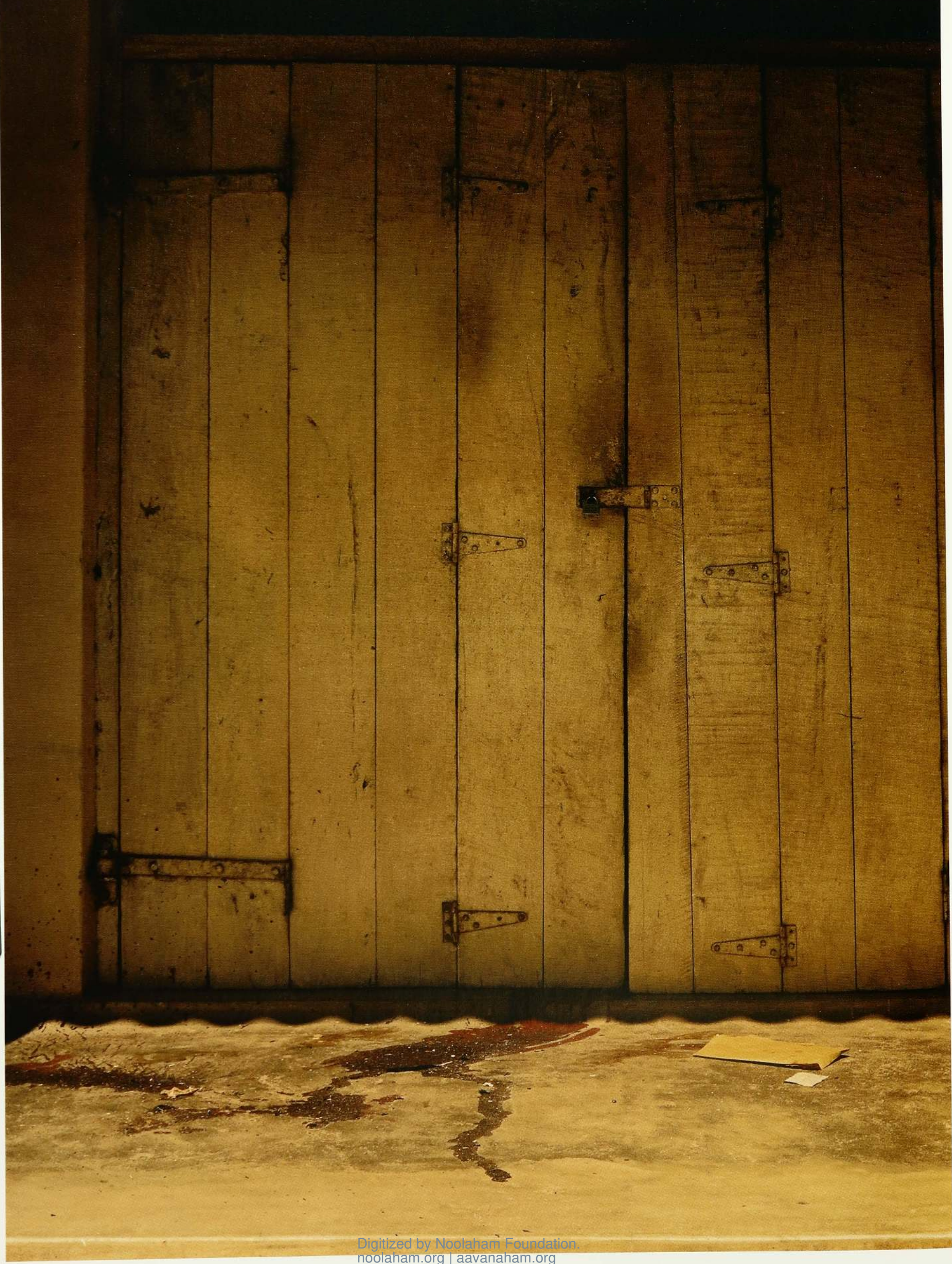


We Enthusiastically
Welcome
Those who step up
to observe the Ability
of the Praise worthy
Brave Women cadres

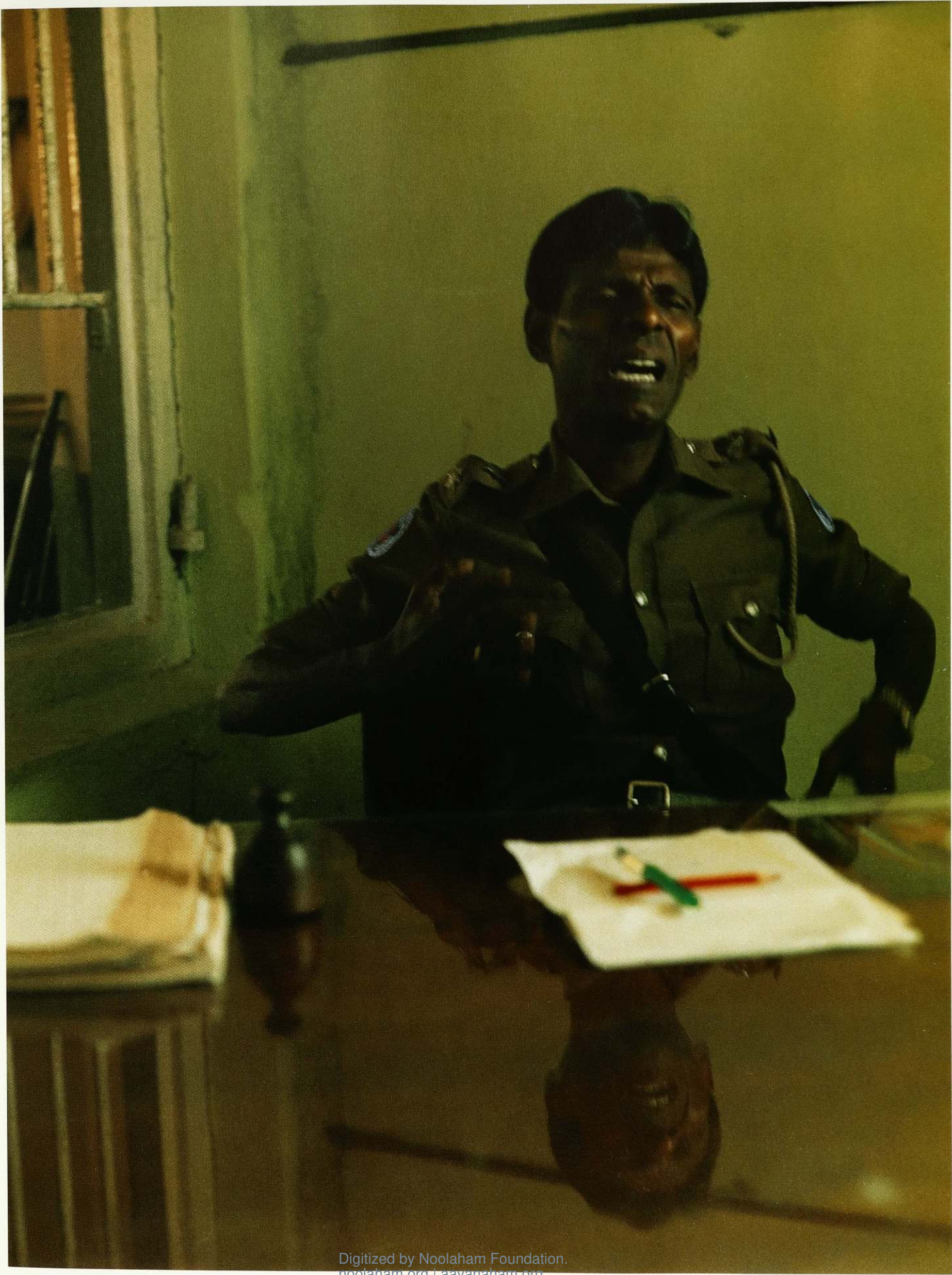














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JANUARY 1988



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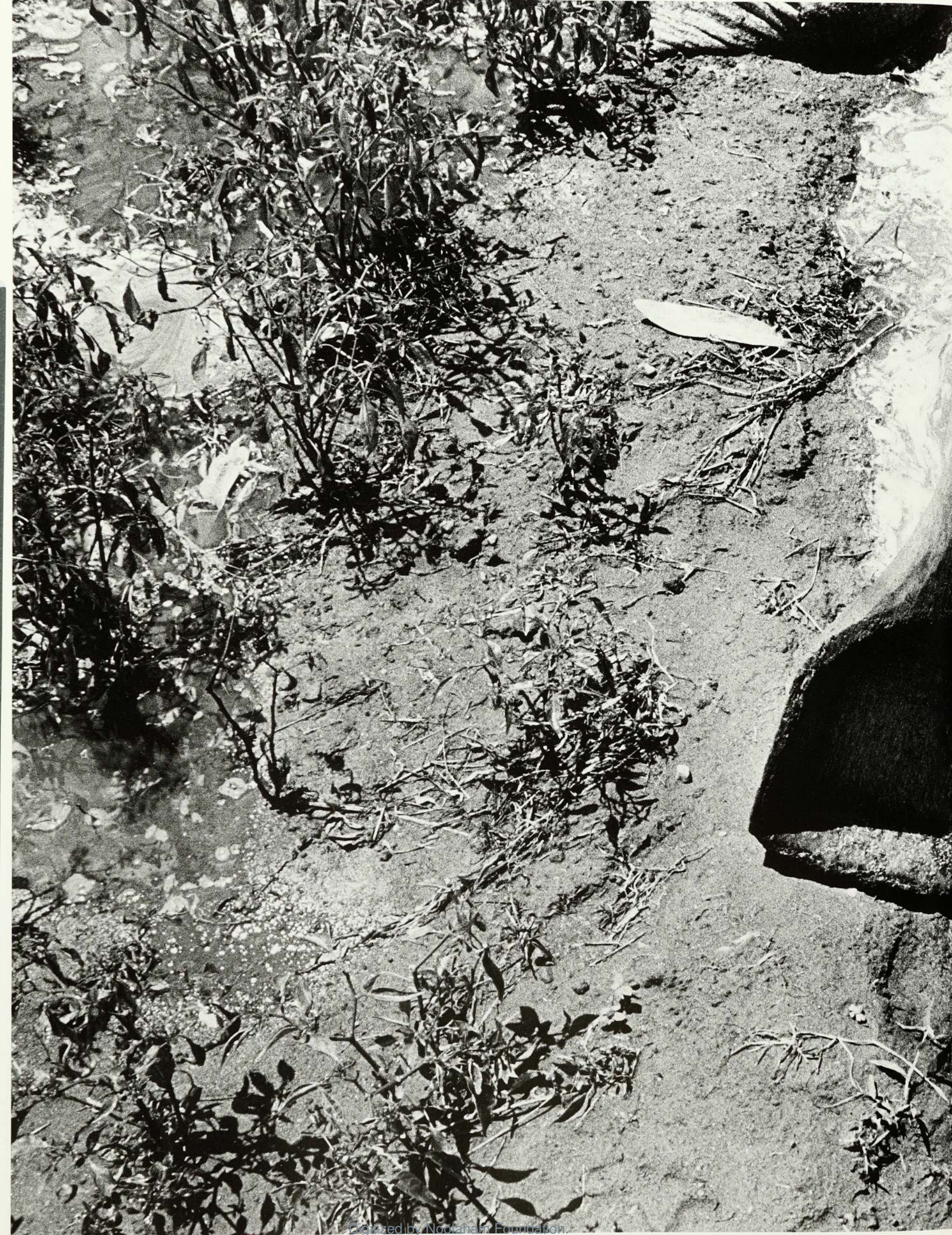









DANGER MINES!
കുതിരപ്പുറം ഭാഗത്ത് മിനകളുണ്ട്!
നിങ്ങളുടെ അപായം!







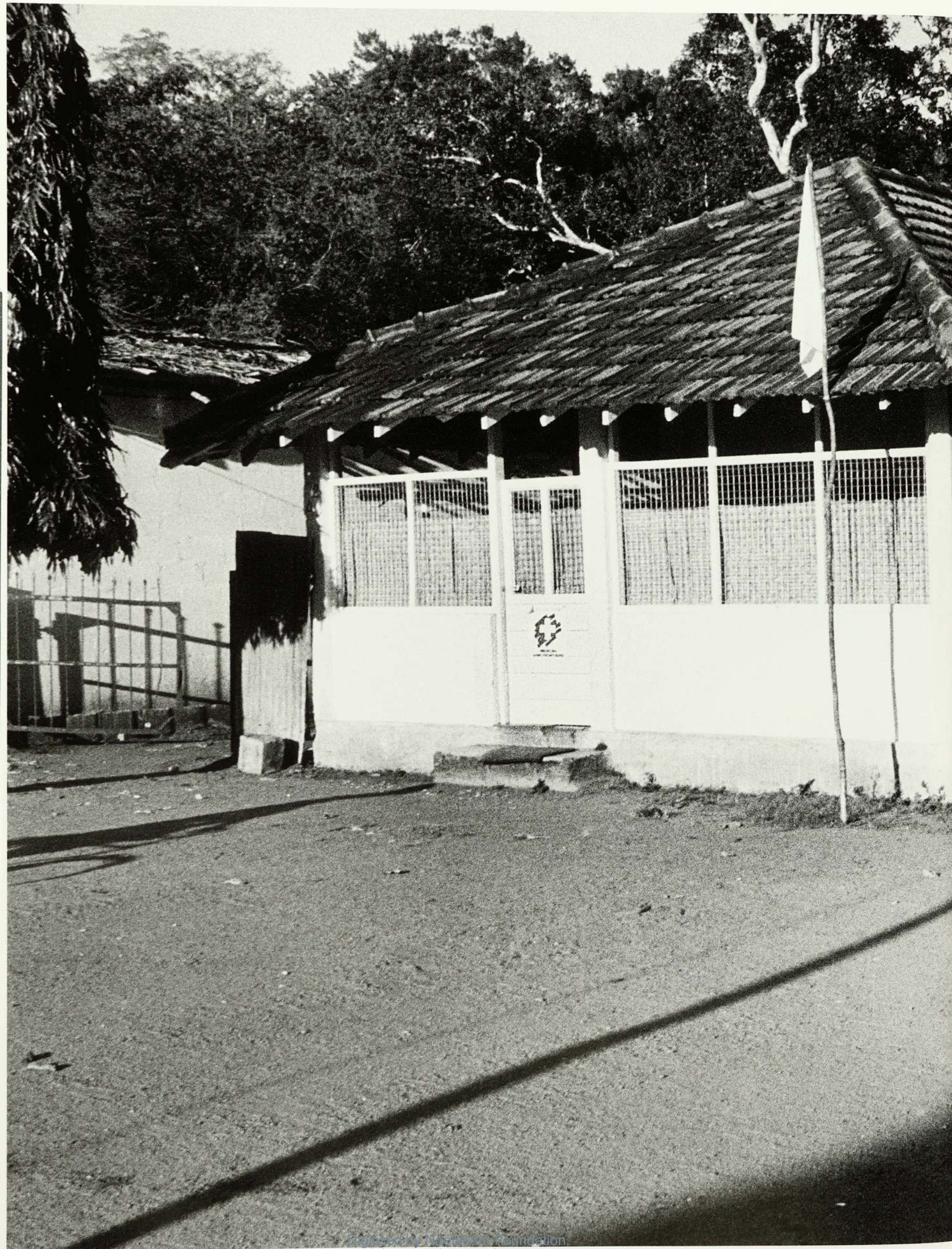












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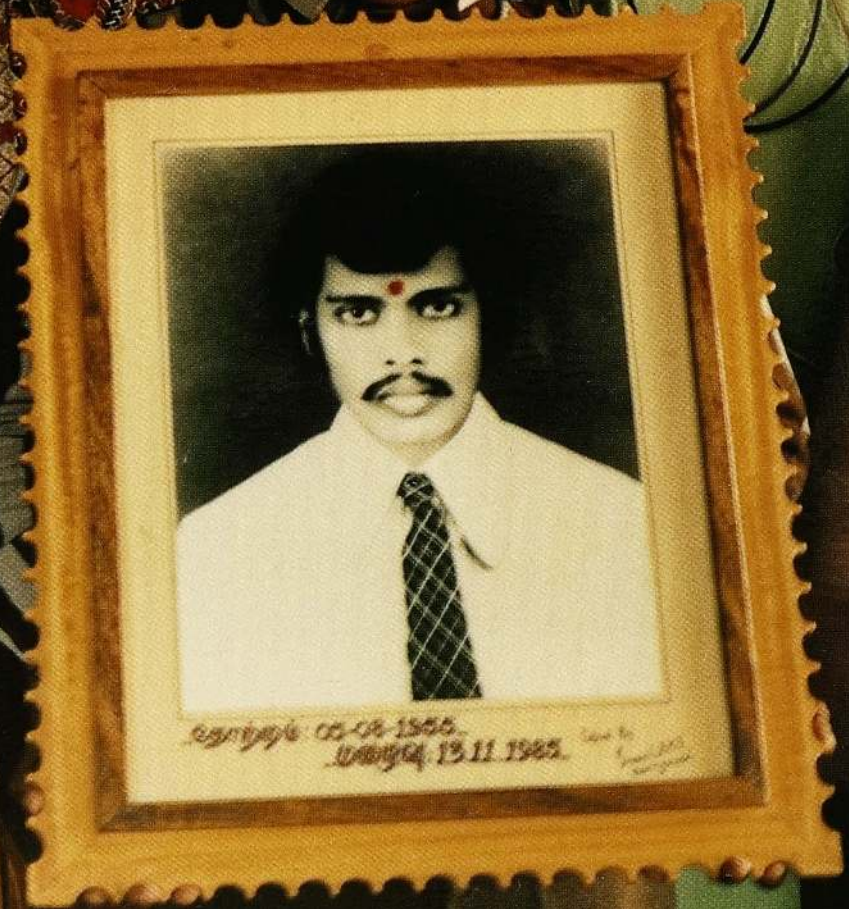
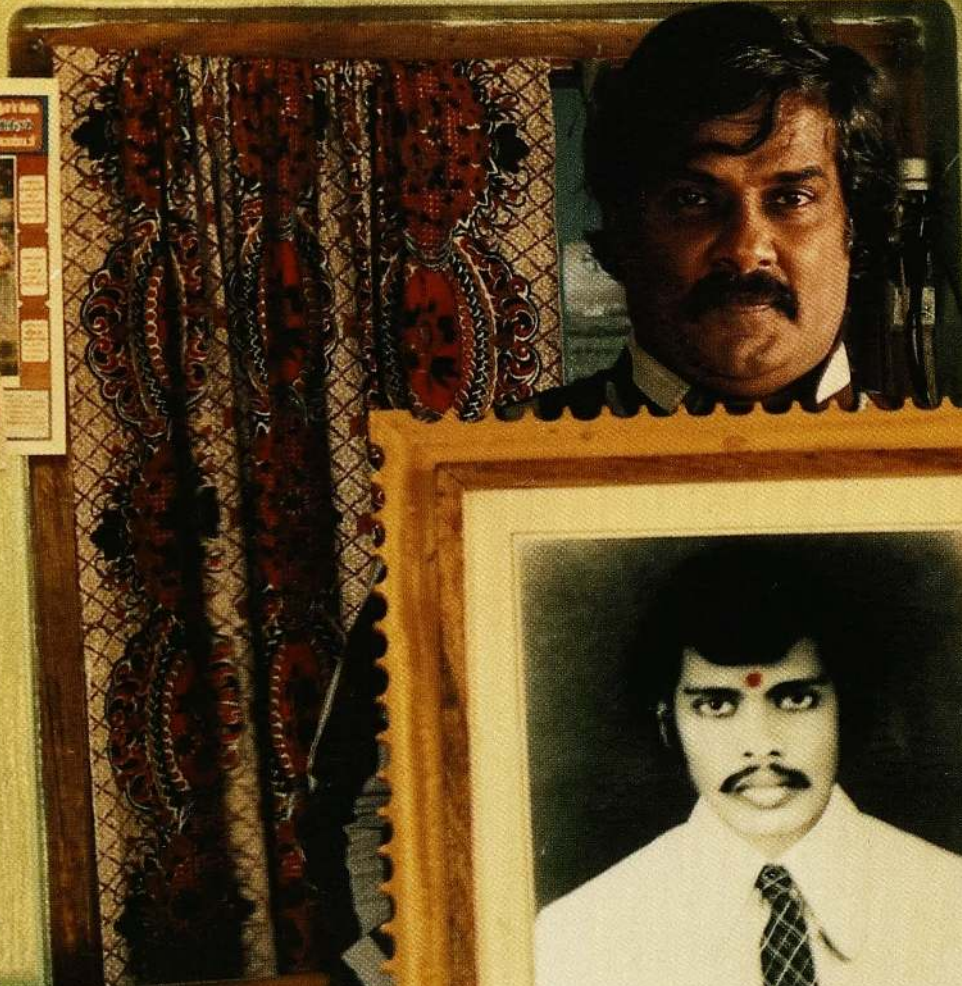


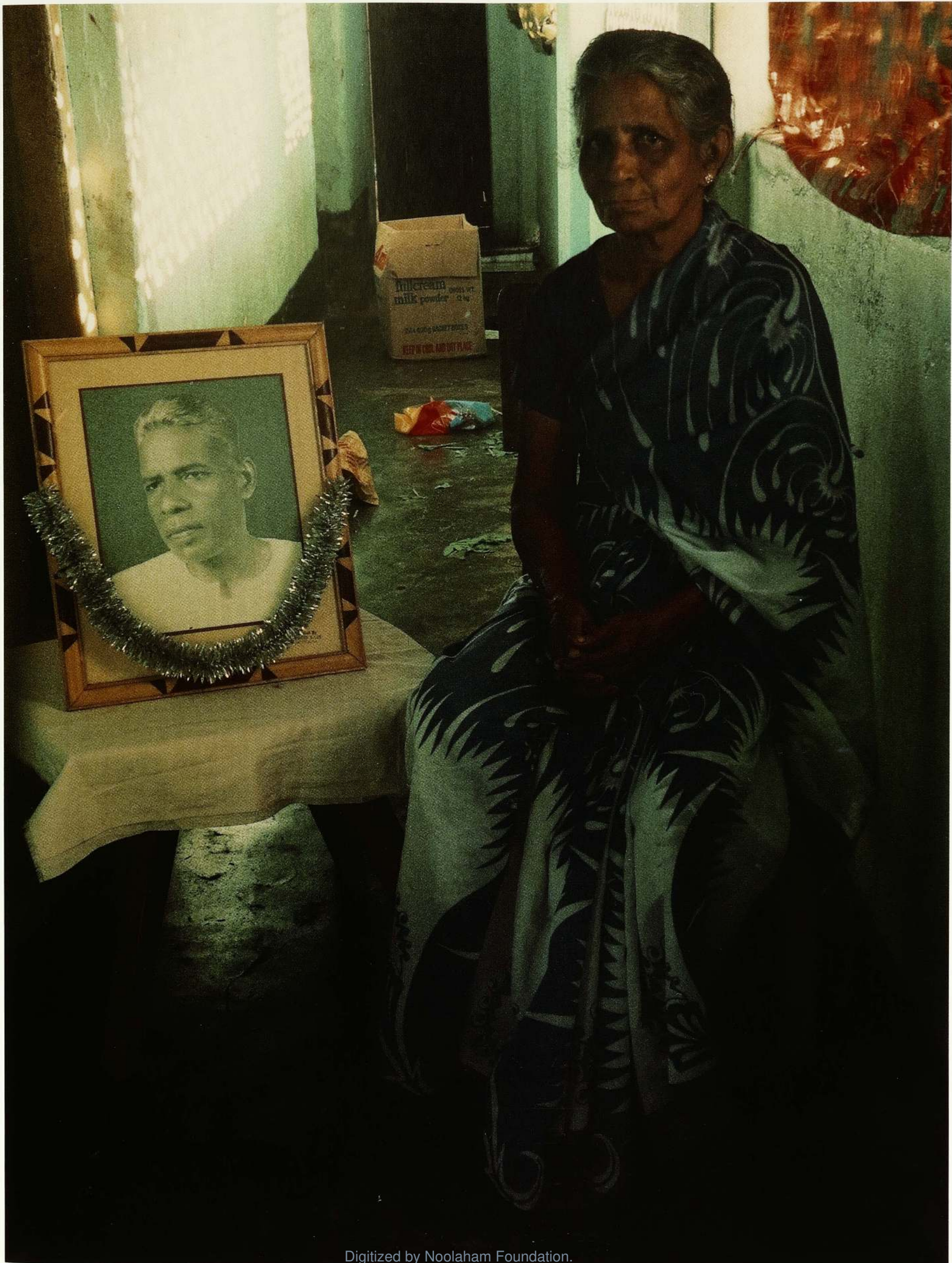


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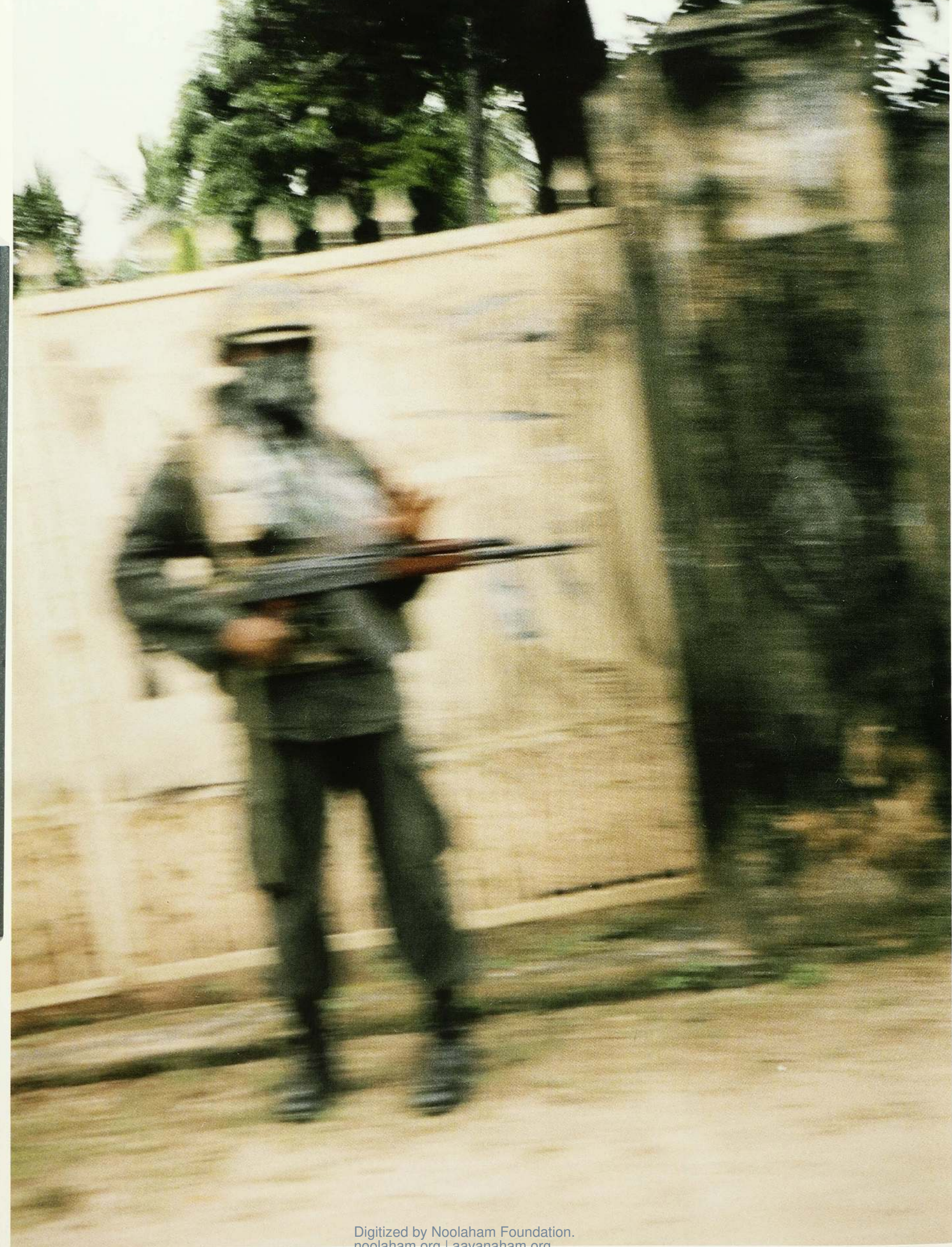
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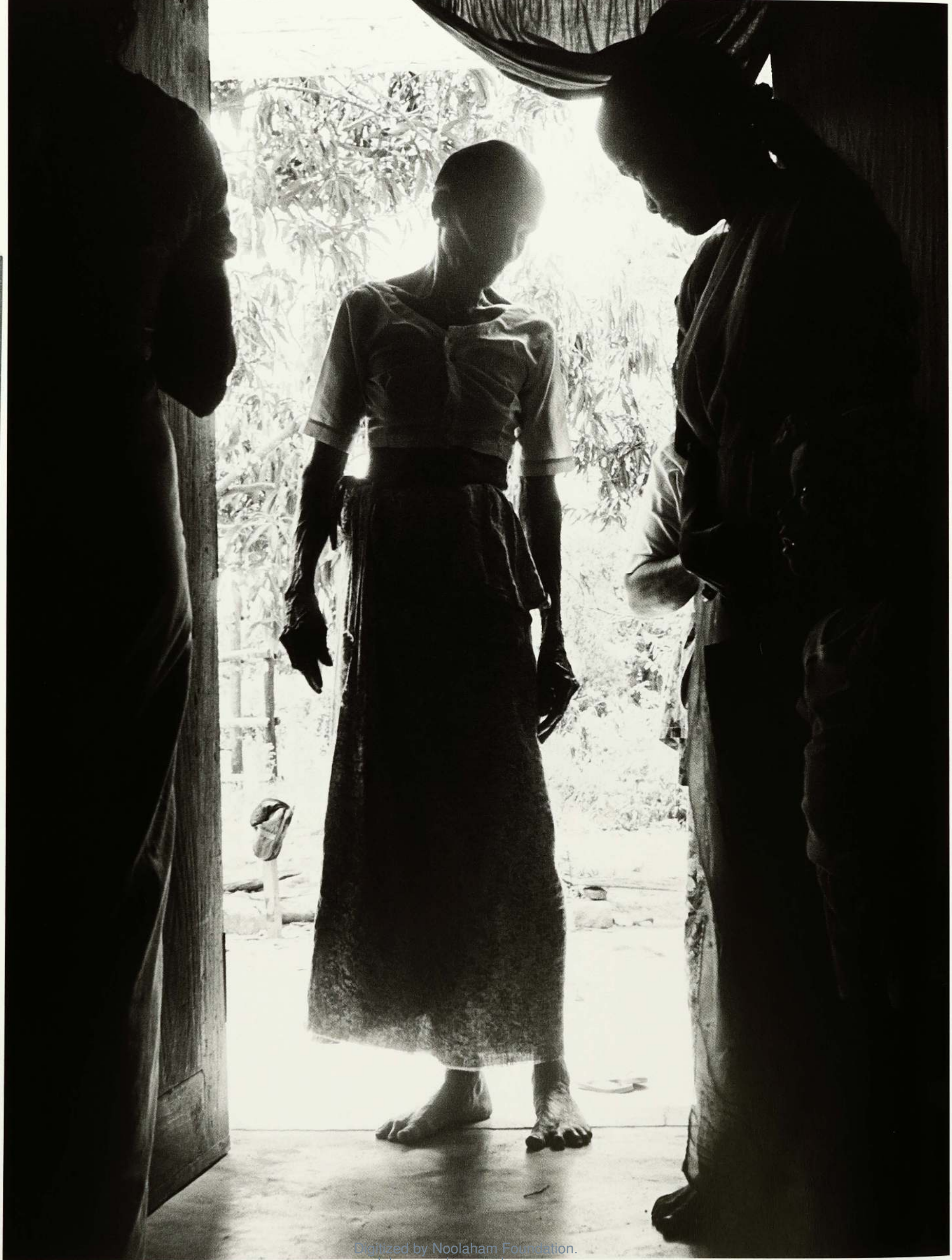


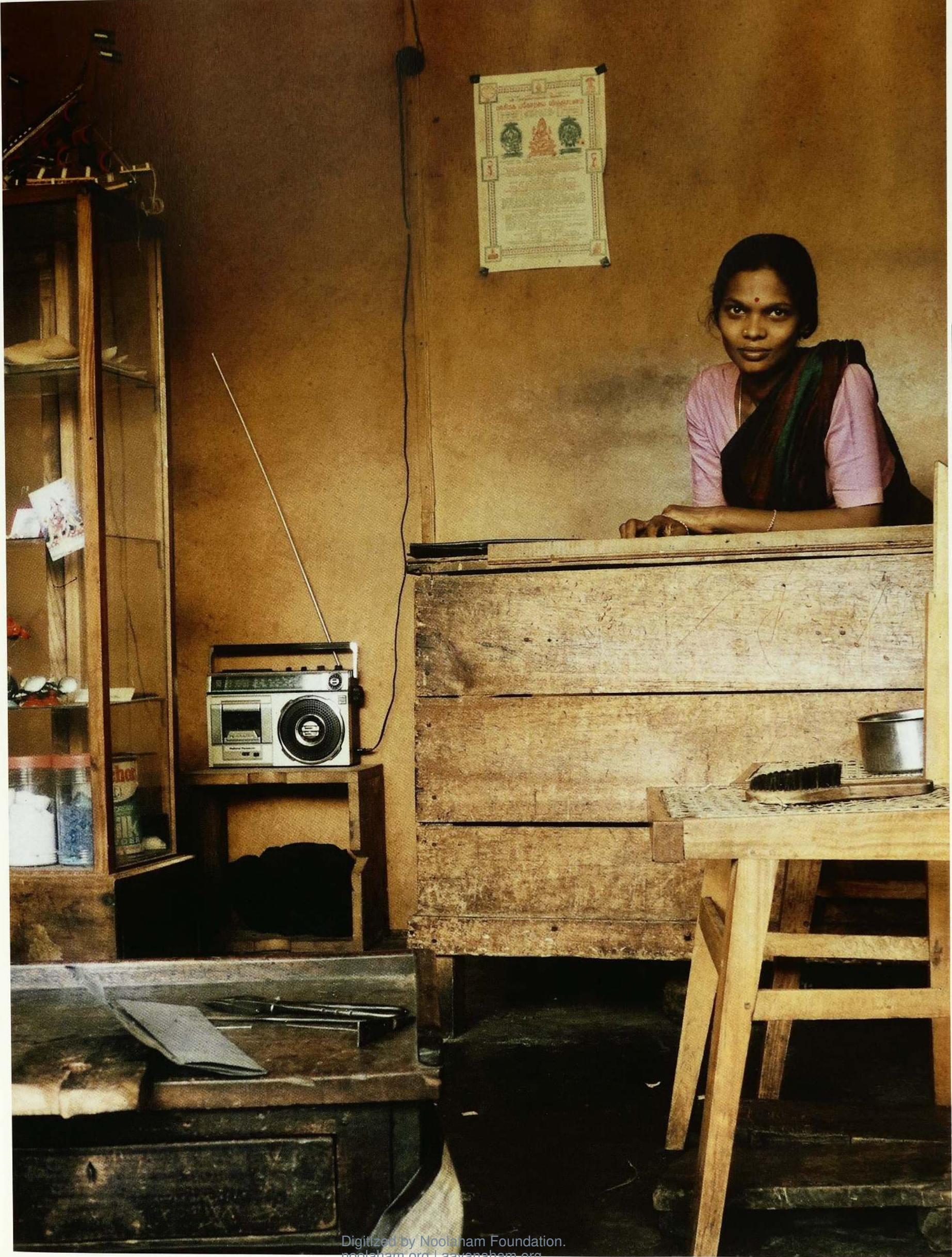


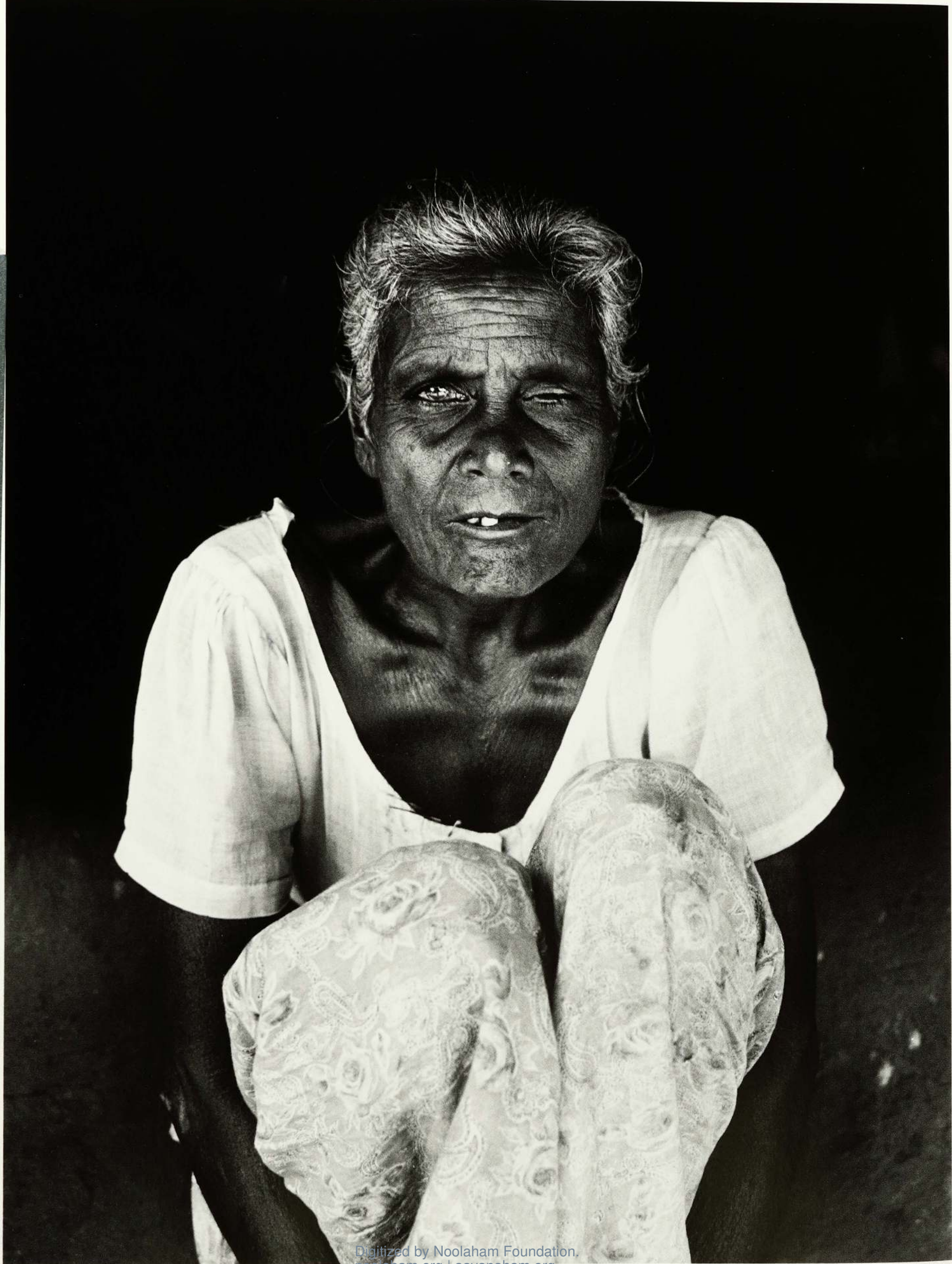




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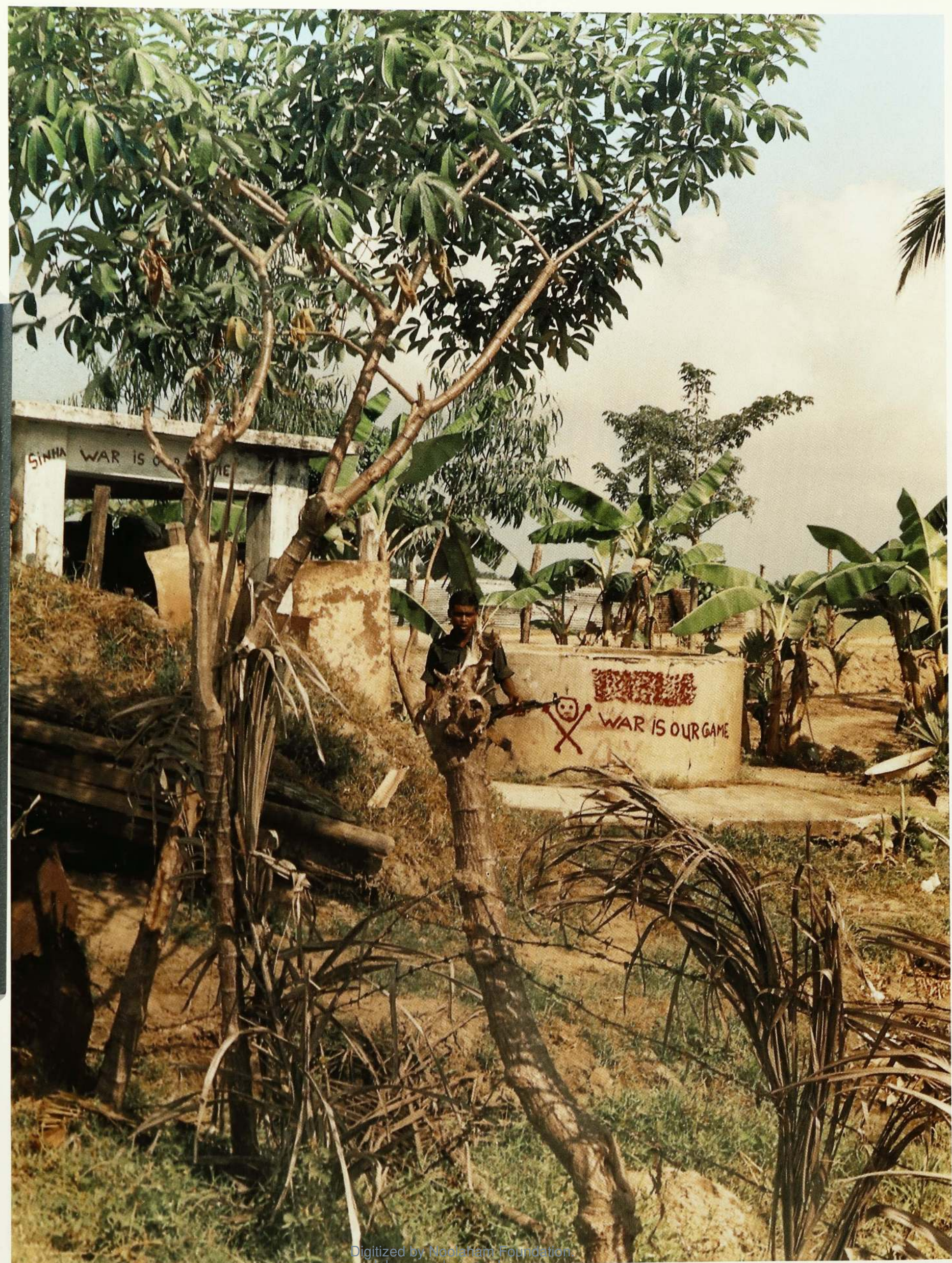
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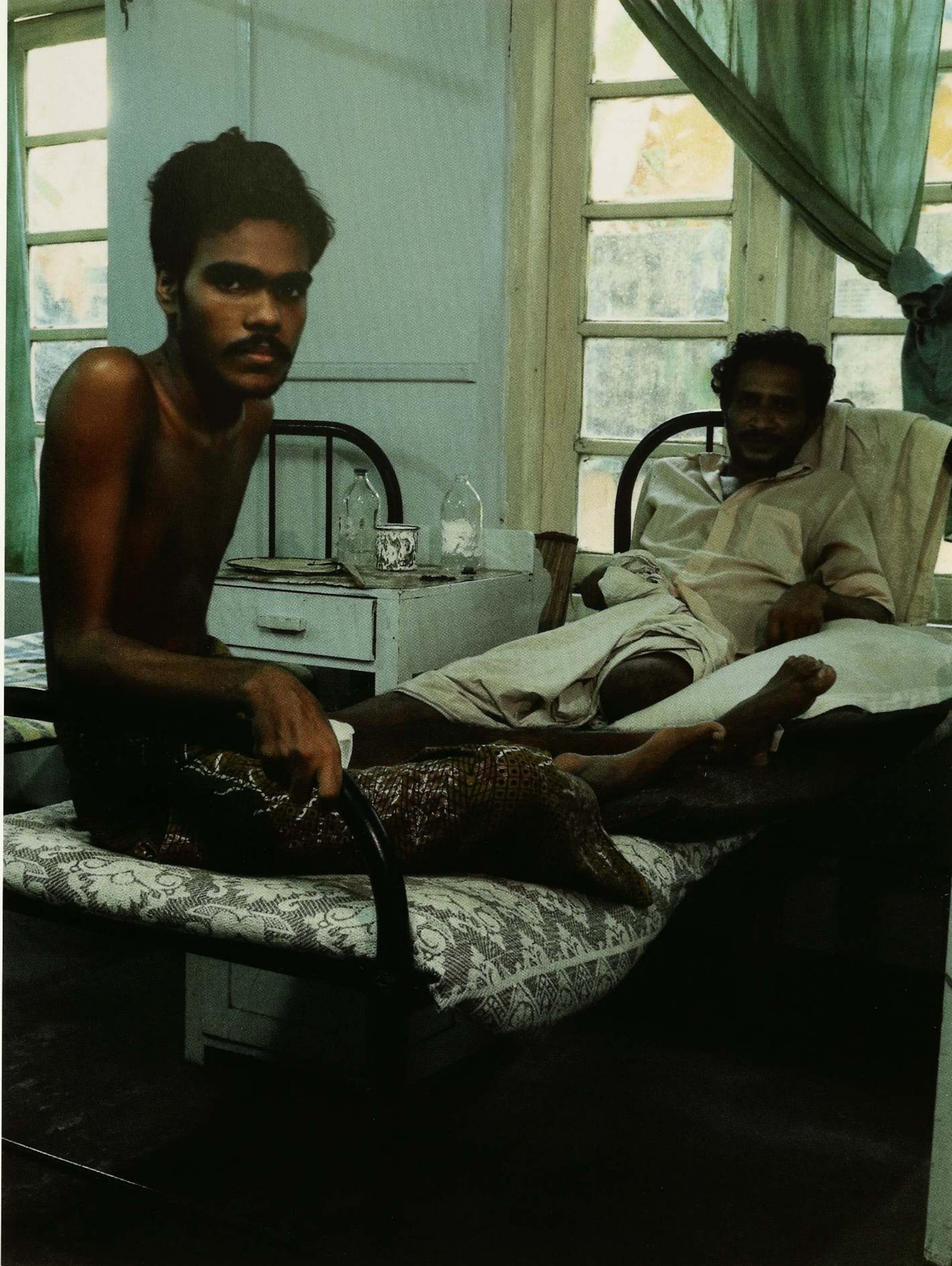








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FEMALE'S SEARCHING
POINT



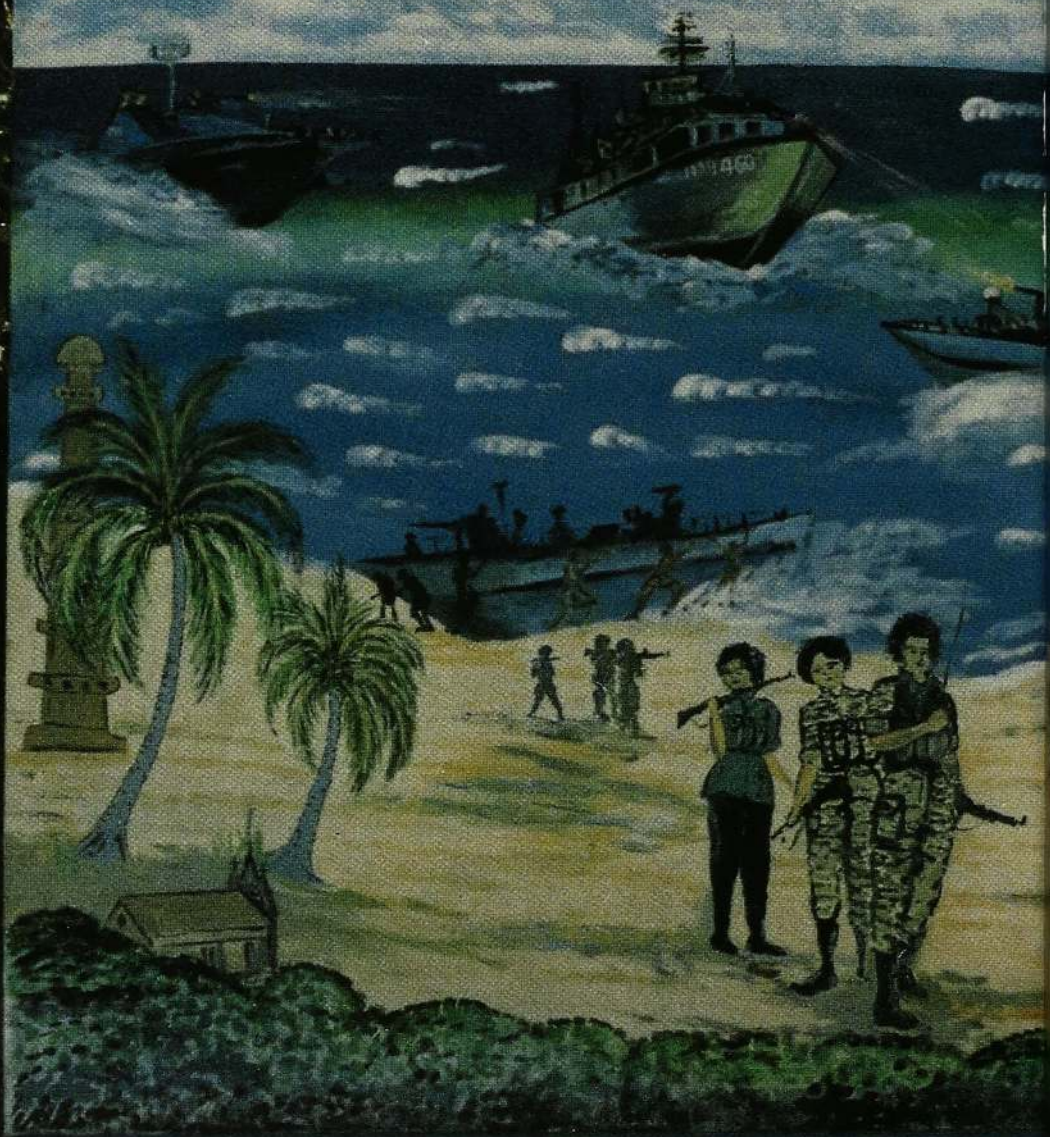




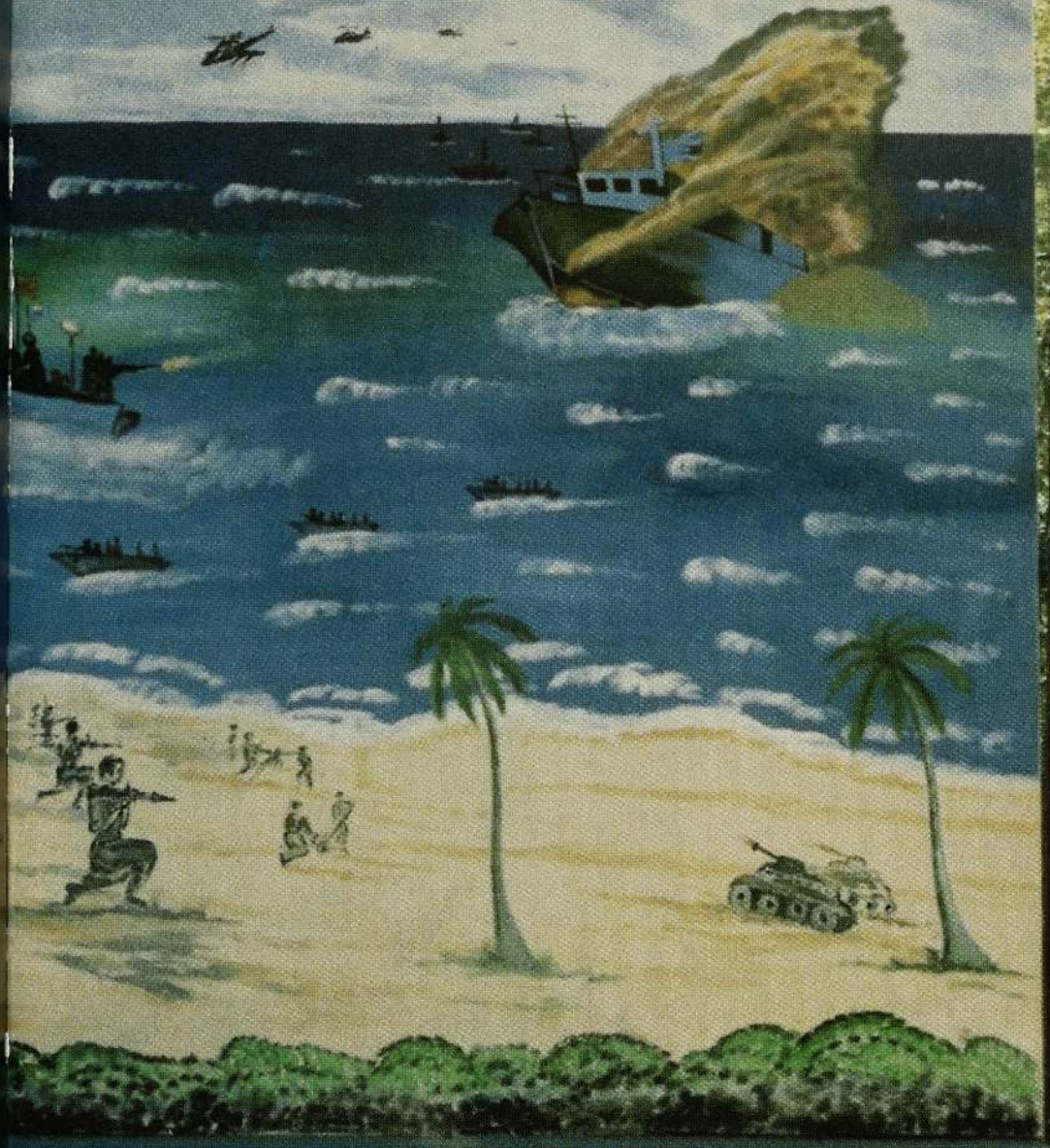
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நிலையம் | நாள் நிகழ்வரங்கு



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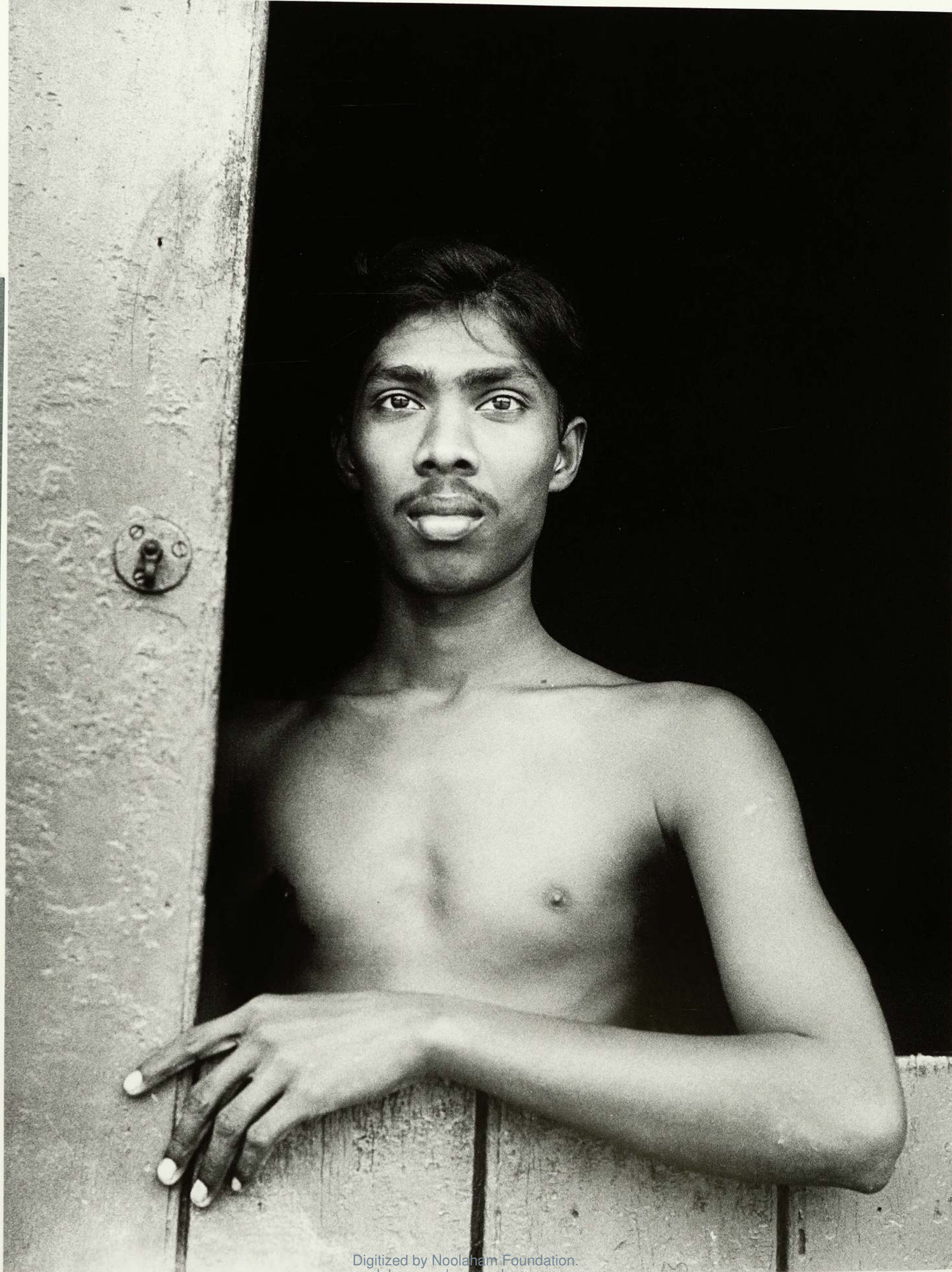
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The Political Landscape of Sri Lanka

The outline of Sri Lanka is said to resemble the shape of a gemstone, or perhaps a teardrop. For some the island is paradise, for others a living hell.

For many centuries, merchants, scholars, writers and artists have been drawn to Sri Lanka. Her ancient names reflect the natural beauty and cultural wealth for which she was so famed. 'Lanka', or 'Ilankai', means a shining point or visible point of light and 'Dharmadeepa', island of balance. The Arab world knew her as 'Serendib', origin of the words serendipity and serene, and the Greeks called her Taprobane, from the Sanskrit word 'Tamraparni' meaning copper-leaved.

'Ceilao', 'Zeilan' and 'Ceylon' were the successive variations of the Latin name Selan, given to the island by her colonial rulers – the Portuguese from 1505, the Dutch from the 1660s, and finally the British from 1796. Colonial rule was met with continuous rebellion throughout the island. As a means of maintaining control, the British pursued a policy of divide-and-rule. The majority Sinhalese community was largely marginalised, while minority Tamils and Burghers were promoted to prominent positions in the civil service and judiciary, and Muslims excelled in the art of trade.

The British shaved the hills of valuable timber and replanted them, first with a coffee crop that failed, then with tea. The caste-conscious native Sinhalese and Tamils refused to work in the plantations, considering the conditions to be undignified. The British response was to ferry in large numbers of Indian Tamil labourers from Southern India to work the estates in their place.

Historically, the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims of Sri Lanka had little interest in ethnic differences, absorbed as they were into the interdependent family of caste, where everyone had a specific role to play. One hundred and fifty years of British rule changed all that, leaving the country divided along ethnic lines.

In the decade following independence in 1948, the Sinhalese majority—who make up 74 percent of the population—moved quickly to reverse years of Tamil minority prominence. The new socialist government gave massive state support to Sinhala culture and in 1956 made Sinhala the country's official language, at the expense of Tamil. The language policy was bitterly disputed by the Tamils, who began to press for autonomy for the north and east of the country, where they formed the majority.

Many Sinhalese had grievances too, stemming from the lack of jobs, inadequate educational opportunities, and the growing divide between rich and poor. The Sinhalese and Marxist People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or JVP) was founded in the south of the country in 1965. In April 1971 it launched an unsuccessful insurrection in which between 15,000 and 20,000 of its followers – many of them teenagers and young men – are thought to have died. Ironically, the army that crushed them was made up mostly of Sinhalese conscripts hastily put together and armed and trained with substantial international assistance. In the north, the separatist LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) was founded in 1976. In 1978, a new position of Executive President was created, with almost dictatorial powers – the incumbent was both head of state and head of government. In 1981, in reprisal for the killing of three policemen at a Tamil political rally in Jaffna, the police and their thugs sacked Jaffna library and burned it to the ground, destroying many rare Tamil books and documents and etching ethnic division more deeply into the Tamil psyche.

In July 1983, the death of thirteen Sinhalese Sri Lankan army soldiers in an LTTE ambush triggered anti-Tamil riots throughout the country. Sinhalese mobs burned and looted Tamil property, and hundreds of Tamils were killed. The riots marked the start of the civil war, and sparked an exodus of some of the most educated

and powerful Tamil families to India, Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. Over time, more than 750,000 Tamils would leave.

India became involved in the conflict in the 1980s, partly because it was concerned that the clamour for autonomy would spread to its own Tamil communities. In July 1987 a peace accord was signed by the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President JR Jayawardene. The Sri Lankan government made a number of concessions to the Tamils, including devolution of power, amalgamation of the north and east provinces and official status for the Tamil language. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was sent to the north and east provinces and Tamil militants were granted an amnesty in return for surrendering their weapons. However, the accord proved to be frail. Within a year, the LTTE and the IPKF were engaged in battle. In Tamil areas the IPKF earned itself the unenviable nickname of 'Indian People Killing Force'.

The accord was also deeply unpopular with nationalist Sinhalese in the south. The JVP mobilised its reformed militia, the DJV, to carry out a campaign of terror against the Sri Lankan government as well as the armed forces and their families. In response the government deployed the Sri Lankan Armed Forces to crush the JVP. Sinhalese fought Sinhalese and terror was unleashed throughout the island. For months on end corpses appeared in rivers, on beaches, by the roadside and in scrub jungle. People refrained from eating fish, in the knowledge that the fish were feasting on the dead bodies. A generation of Sinhalese youth had been silenced. Between 40,000 and 60,000 are thought to have perished.

The IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka in March 1990, ordered home by the new Indian Prime Minister VP Singh; a year later, an LTTE female suicide bomber assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in

India in retribution for the IPKF's transformation from peace-keepers to soldiers at war.

The IKPF was replaced by the Sri Lankan army, flush with its recent military success in the south of the country. Through the early 1990s little changed as both the GOSL and the LTTE built up their military arsenals and fortified their positions, but in the latter part of the decade battles raged with unprecedented ferocity. In 1996 the LTTE bombed the Central Bank in Colombo, brutally killing 90 civilians and wounding 1,400 more. In 1998 they targeted the Buddhist Dalada Maligawa Temple in Kandy. There were heavy casualties on all sides, and IDP (Internally Displaced Peoples) Camps swelled under the pressure.

In 2002 a ceasefire was agreed and for a brief period Sri Lanka flirted with peace. Highways in the north and east were repaired, de-mining squads cleared the main roads, and a few dared to hope. But the peace process soon came under pressure as extremist Sinhala groups refused to contemplate any sort of deal with the Tamils, and often corrupt and opportunistic politicians proved unequal to the task of halting the violence. The LTTE, for its part, showed that it was prepared for another protracted military campaign to achieve its goal of self-determination, if need be.

In December 2004, just as Sri Lanka was on the brink of returning to all-out civil war, the Asian tsunami hit the island, claiming more than 40,000 lives. The disaster temporarily checked the upsurge in killing, but in the scramble to secure international aid money many of the tsunami survivors were ignored, and much of the tsunami cash vanished into private enterprises.

Since 2005 there has been a disturbing increase in paramilitary-style abductions and killings. The unmarked white van – the abductor's vehicle of choice during the late 1980s and early 1990s – has made a re-appearance. The Sri Lankan armed forces

have launched air, sea and land attacks in an attempt to weaken the LTTE. Death threats to many local journalists have increased, as has the harassment of some of their foreign colleagues. A countrywide police and military cordon has severely restricted the free movement of civilians. The present government, like its predecessors, has been accused of human rights violations, cronyism and corruption. The accusations have made little impact. Military hardware continues to pour into Sri Lanka from all over the world, so that the little island now has the dubious distinction of being the most militarised nation in South Asia. The overall death toll from nearly 30 years of conflict in the northern battlefields was reported to have exceeded 80,000 in 2007. The country has seen little peace during this time.

All parts of the country – from the palmyrah groves of the north and east to the ancient forests of Sinharaja in the south and the coasts beyond – have been affected by the violence. As a result of the conflict, Sri Lanka's economy has become dependent on international aid money and short-term investment and its infrastructure is in disrepair. The north and east of the country is carpeted by military camps. There are countless miles of razor wire, millions of landmines and unexploded ordinance scattered through the soil and barely a building that does not bear the scars of war. The toll upon the people is incalculable. There are child soldiers in both the LTTE and the government-backed 'Karuna' paramilitary unit. Many young men and women have been conscripted into the LTTE; many others have joined the Sri Lankan armed forces through economic necessity – there are few other employment opportunities.

Over the past decades, in the name of war, scores of politicians have been assassinated, monks and priests of each of the local religions have been murdered and temples of all faiths have been

desecrated. Tens of thousands of combatants have been killed or maimed, hundreds of thousands of people made homeless. Women have been raped, villagers massacred, civil representatives eliminated, innocents of all ages tortured and slaughtered. There is no official overall death toll for the conflicts, but estimates put the numbers killed at more than 150,000 from a total population of 20 million. For all this, the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE occupy much the same territory as they did 20 years ago.

It has been suggested that the violence will continue until Sri Lanka reasserts her ancient cultural values of sharing and tolerance. In order to achieve this, her people will have to acknowledge the truth and support reconciliation in an attempt to expunge the greed, envy and hatred that is tearing the island apart. The relative success of the peace initiatives in Northern Ireland and South Africa may offer hope to Sri Lankans as they strive to free themselves of war. But until the killings cease, and the weapons are laid down for good, this culture of violence will remain.

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The photographs in this book were created in Sri Lanka between 1986 and 2008, spanning more than 20 years of the conflict. In this book I share my thoughts on the consequences of waging war and the recurring violence that remains, often veiled from the outside world. My thanks to my friends and family and all those who have supported me over the last two decades photographing in Sri Lanka.

Special thanks to: Stuart and all at SMITH, Pamela Johnston, Manik, Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy, Nicolo Antonio Maestri and DarkSide photographic.

None of these photographs have been electronically manipulated.

SPECIAL COLLECTION
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The Sri Lankan water buffalo provides a creamy milk from which delicious curd is made. The indigenous Kithul palm, when tapped, exudes a rich syrup or honey. The combination is known in Sinhala as *Kiri Pani* and in Tamil as *Tayirum Teynum*.

This most delightful of mixes is inseparable; you can't take one without the other. So all must come into the mix, in order that we might co-exist in our tiny little world as brothers and sisters, in all our forms and tribes.

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Stephen Champion gained his BA in photography at the Bournemouth and Poole College of Art (now Dorset University) and his MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute during the early 1980s. He then became a freelance portrait photographer in London.

From 1986 he developed new works in Sri Lanka, receiving three British Council Awards. He completed three touring exhibitions during the late 1980s and early 1990s and several independent shows. His Sri Lankan photographs have appeared worldwide in magazines, academic research papers, and newspapers as well as in several films. His previous book *Lanka* was published in the UK in 1993. Champion has been visiting lecturer at several UK universities and his work is in both private and public collections.

His forthcoming book *Dharmadeepa Sri Lanka Island of Balance* is soon to be published.

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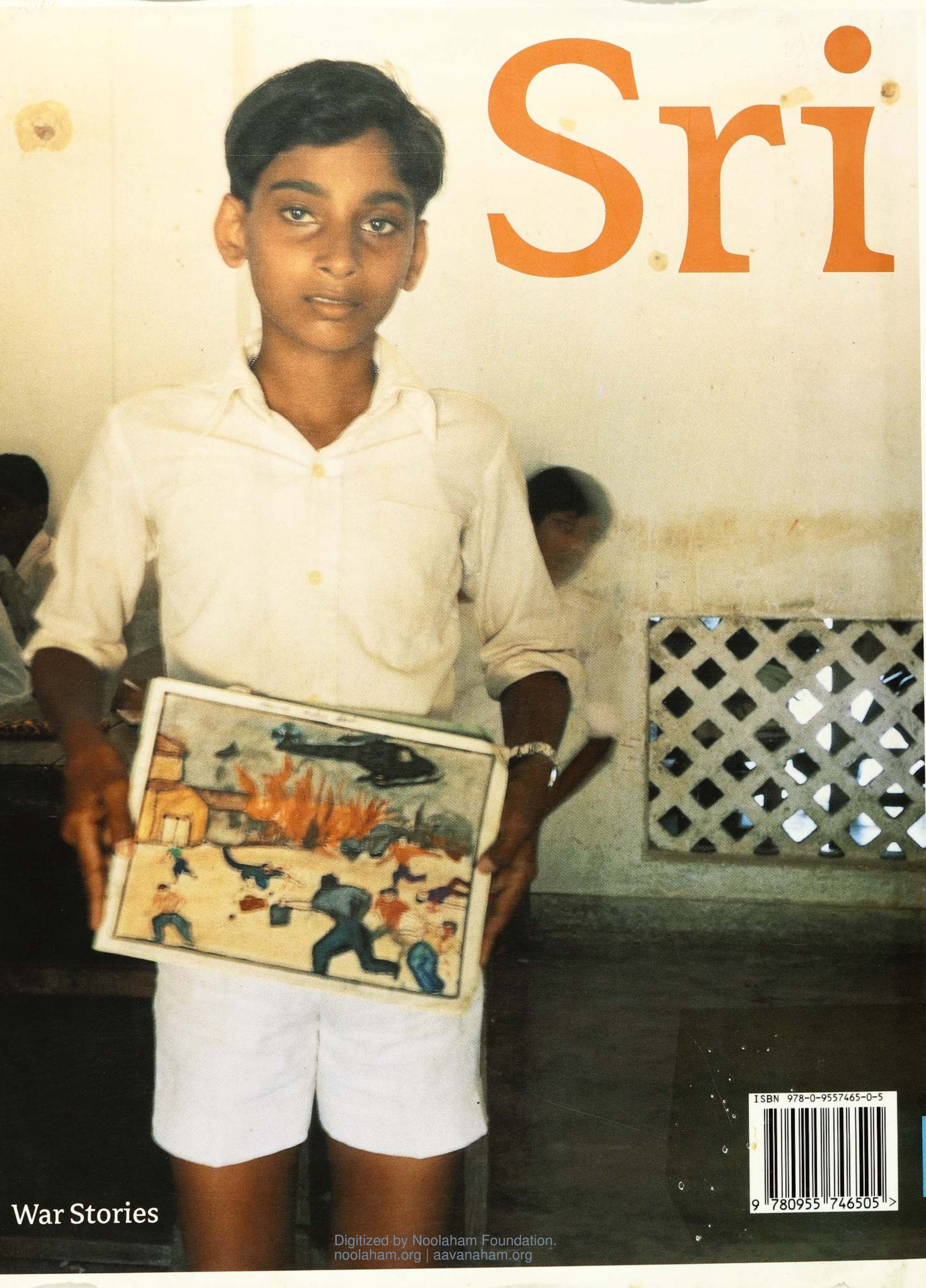
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