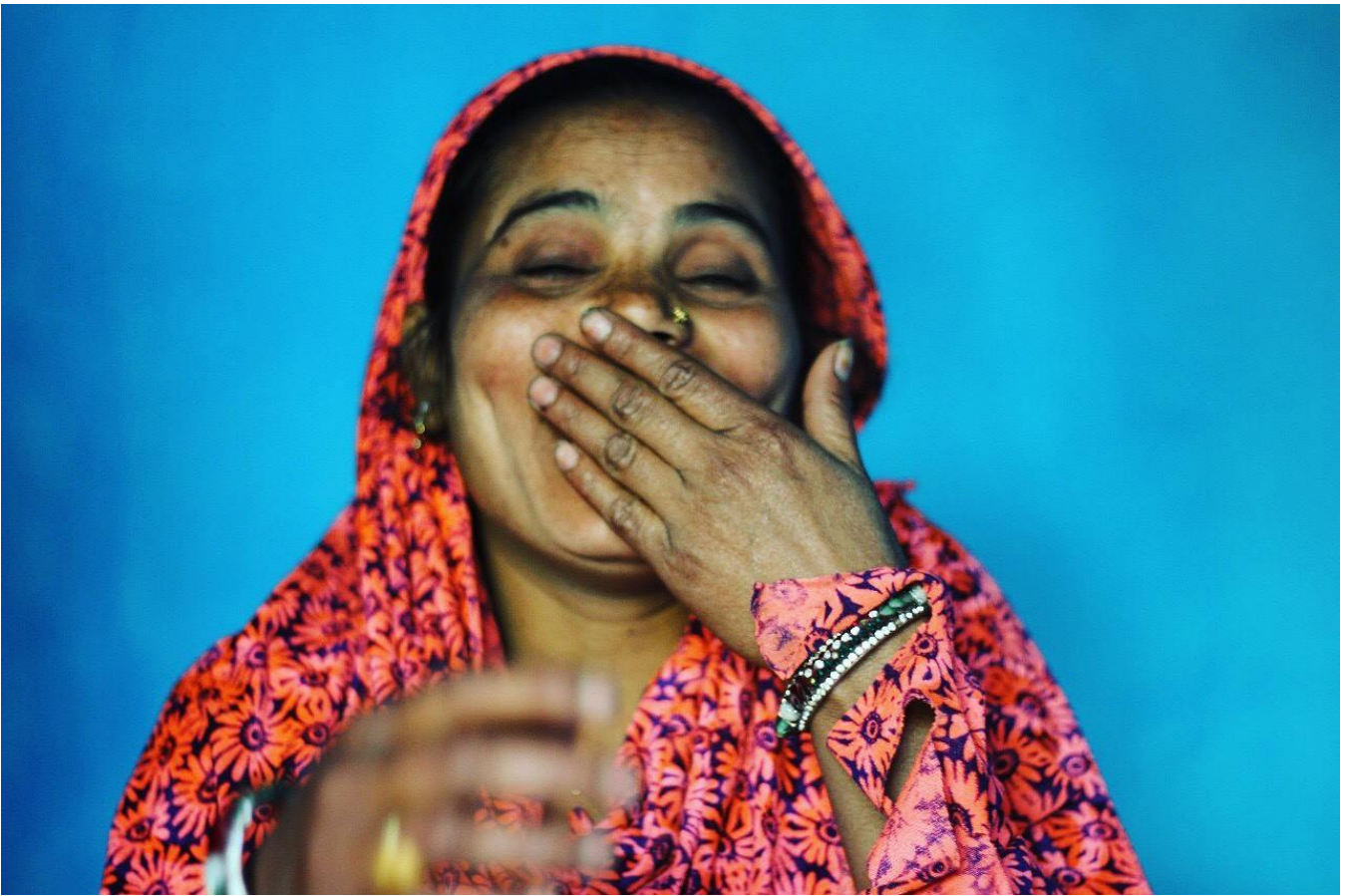




Meet the Women of Bhalaswa

stories beyond waste

WomenOfBhalawa was launched to celebrate the women living at Bhalaswa, one of the three Delhi landfills. Beginning on International Women's Day, these stories hoped to deconstruct the sole identity of these women as wastepickers, and to document a small snapshot of their human experiences which are defined by the many roles they play and many identities that they hold. The idea was to give them complete agency, give them as much control as possible to decide what they want to say and how they want to say it. As with any project, there is bias in translation and photography, but we hope that this is transcended by the connection established between the storyteller, and you the reader.



Khatun

"I've always admired how a teacher walks into a classroom, all dressed up and sits in her chair. It has been a dream of mine to become a teacher. You know, if I dress properly and go out, people won't be able to tell I am uneducated. But I know that if I was educated, things would be different. Once you have an education, you can become anything. Even at the age of 35, I still dream of becoming someone, a teacher. At the end of the day, it is human beings only who have to become something, so why can't I?"



Rubeida

"I have six children: 5 sons and 1 daughter. Out of them, only my eldest son came to work with us on the landfill. Why should I lie to you? At that time, we were so poor, that we did not have any other option. After my in-laws passed away, we faced a lot of hardships. There were times when we were hungry for six days in a row. Even then, me and my husband did not leave our children. The people who lived in our lane would say how did you stay hungry for 6 days and not tell us? I told them, that the first day I would ask you for help, you would give us food, but what about after that. I never let my daughter, Shanno, work on the landfill. It's not safe. There are boys there. I want her to study and get a job, but even that scares me. There are so many girls that get raped as young as 12. You know, she wants to be a dancer. I even sent her for dance classes, but I had to stop because my brother told me that people would get the wrong idea of her. For the poor, our respect is all we have. But she's very good and now teaches herself by copying the steps on tv."



Saira Banu

"Everything I have done, I have done to keep my children away from a life in trash. Even we have dreams of wearing good clothes and eating good food. At night I would tell my children, 'just go to sleep tonight, tomorrow I promise I will give you meat or mutton'. For a long time, I was the only earning member in my house. I started saving, slowly. I ate one meal a day and saved the rest. With these saving I was able to send two of my sons to a hostel for their education. I wanted to keep them as far away as I possibly could from these landfills. I could not live a life of dignity with my head held high, but my children still can. My eldest son is like gold. He is so obedient and loves his family. His dream is that all the sadness we have seen in our life, his brothers and sisters should not have to go through the same. My second son is now a motor mechanic earning 6000 rupees a month! I remember, even for Eid I was not able to give my children new clothes. But now, my son insists anywhere I go, I wear something new."

[See more #WomenOfBhalaswa posts on Chintan's Instagram](#)



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