

HORN PLEASE

THE DECORATED TRUCKS OF INDIA



DAN ECKSTEIN

Horn Please

By Dan Eckstein

Published by



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THE DECORATED TRUCKS OF INDIA

DAN ECKSTEIN

 powerHouse Books Brooklyn, NY



Horn Please is the mantra of the Indian highway. Some version of the phrase is painted on the back of practically every truck on the road. In a place where lanes are a mere suggestion, side-view mirrors are seldom used, and modes of transport range from ox-drawn carts to 18-wheel trucks, the ever-present horn is an essential part of driving etiquette.

Since the creation of the ancient Grand Trunk Road, which once stretched from Afghanistan to Bangladesh, India's roadways have been a vital cultural and economic link across the subcontinent. Modern India is connected by a vast network of highways and rural roads that bring people and goods throughout the country. These roads range from newly built superhighways surrounding Delhi and Mumbai, to single-lane mountain passes that have seen little improvement since India's independence.

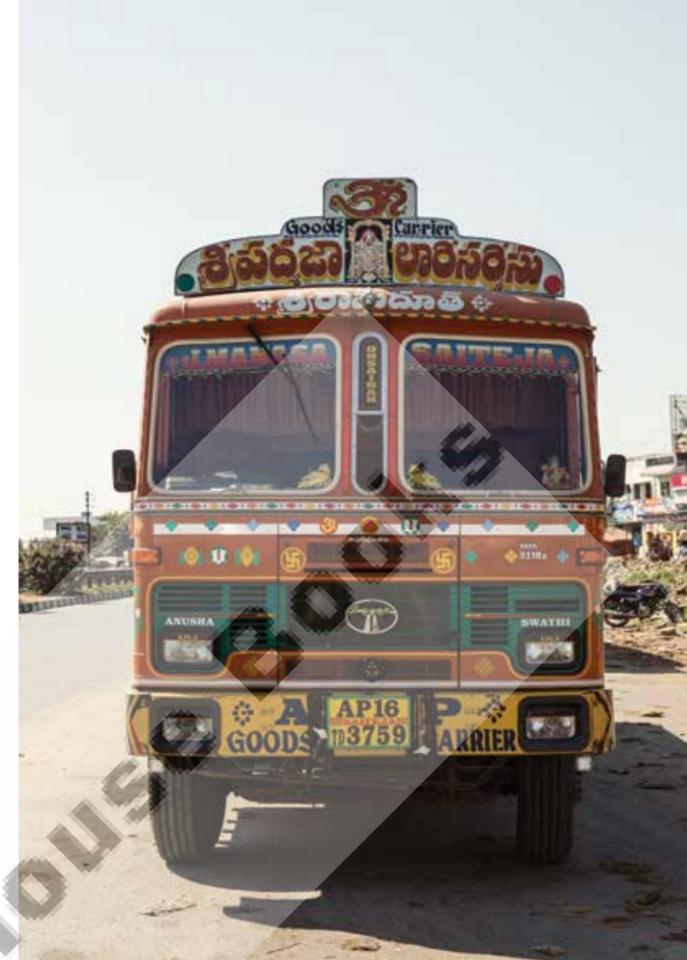
Along the road are innumerable truck stops, restaurants, mechanic depots, and shops mostly catering to the truckers and other drivers on the road. Simple establishments called dhabas are the hub of roadside culture and provide an inexpensive meal as well as a place for drivers to rest and socialize. In the hot mid-day hours, the dhabas fill up with men reclining on cots, drinking masala chai, and eating a simple meal.

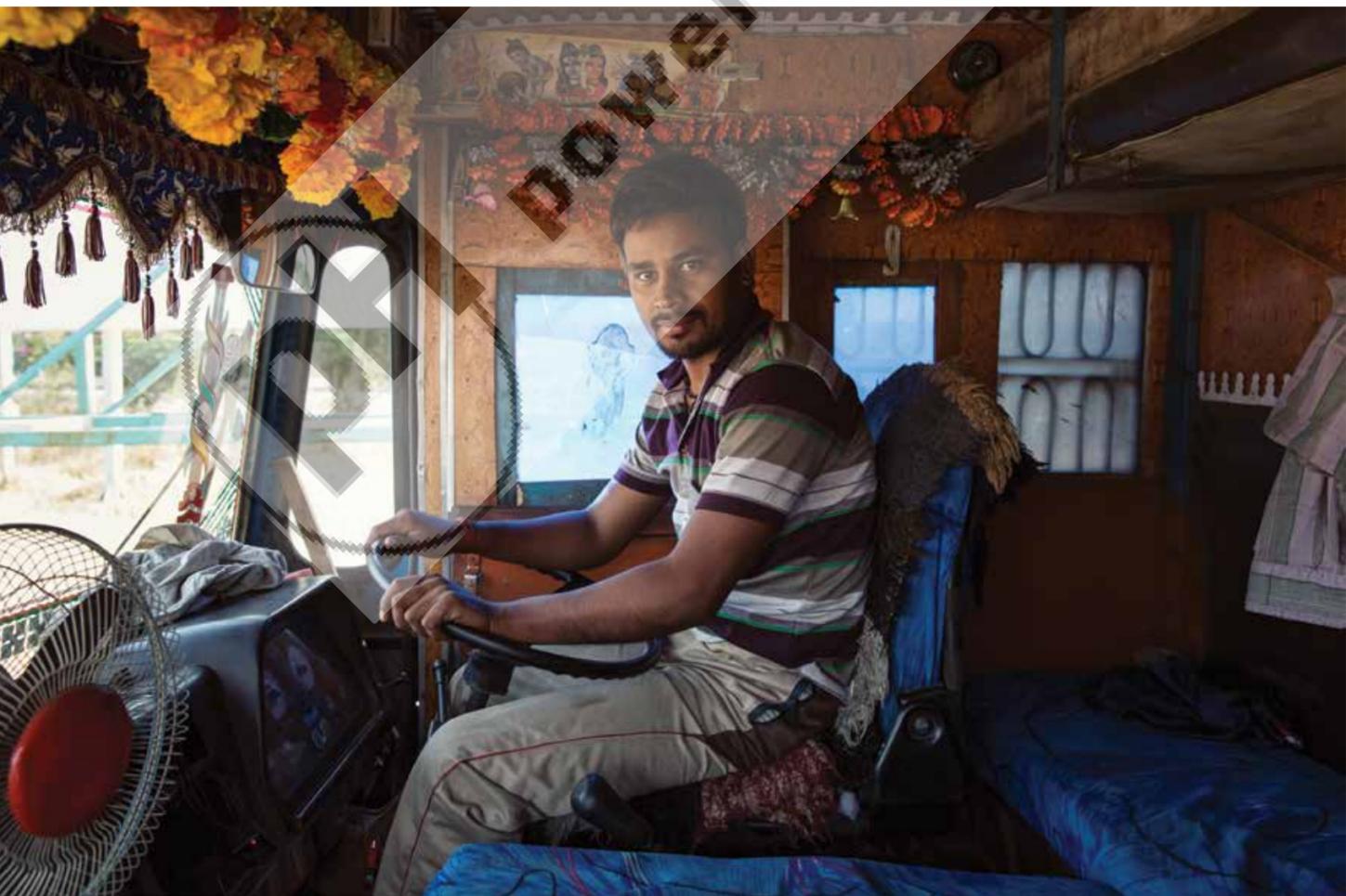
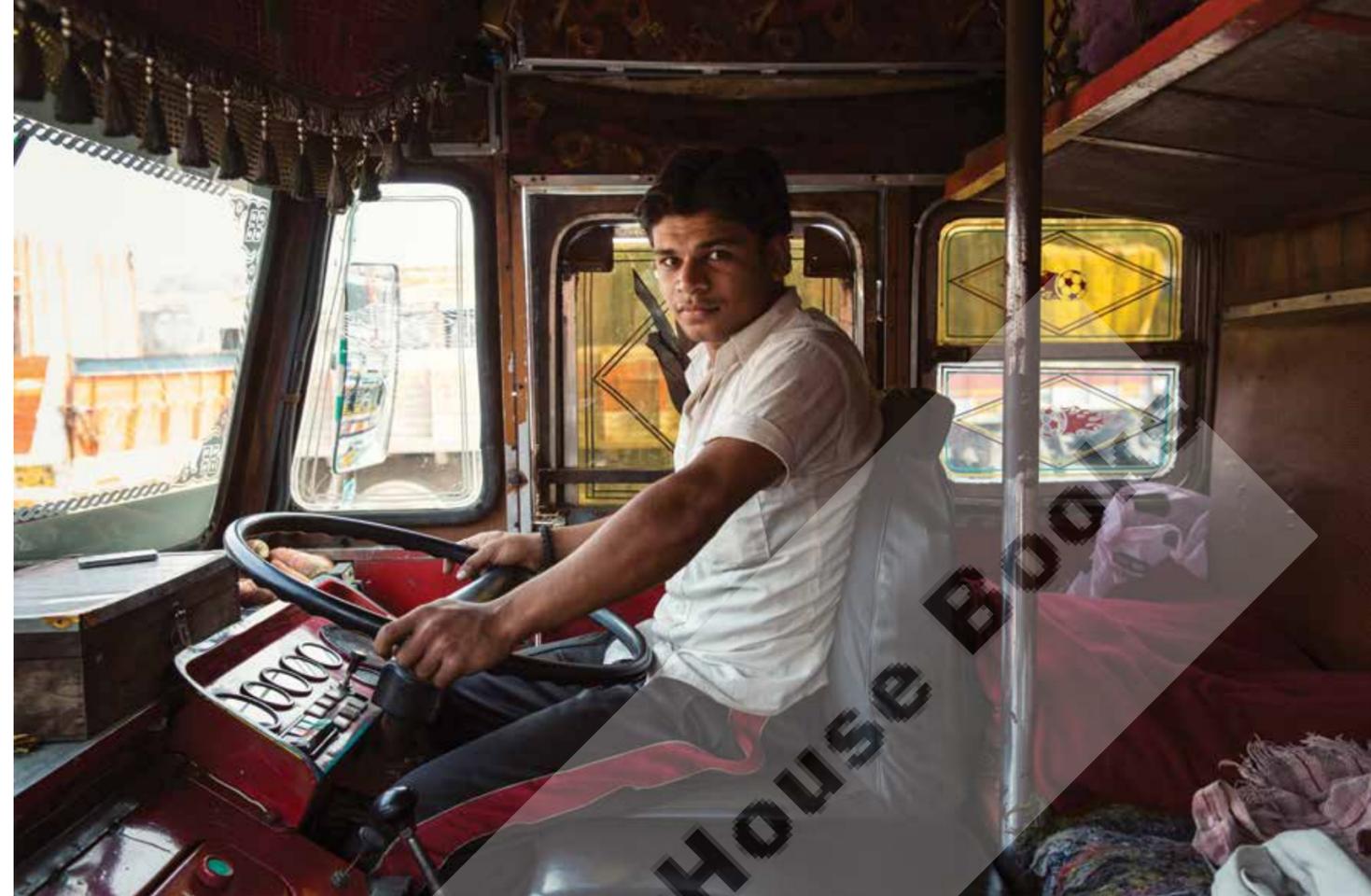
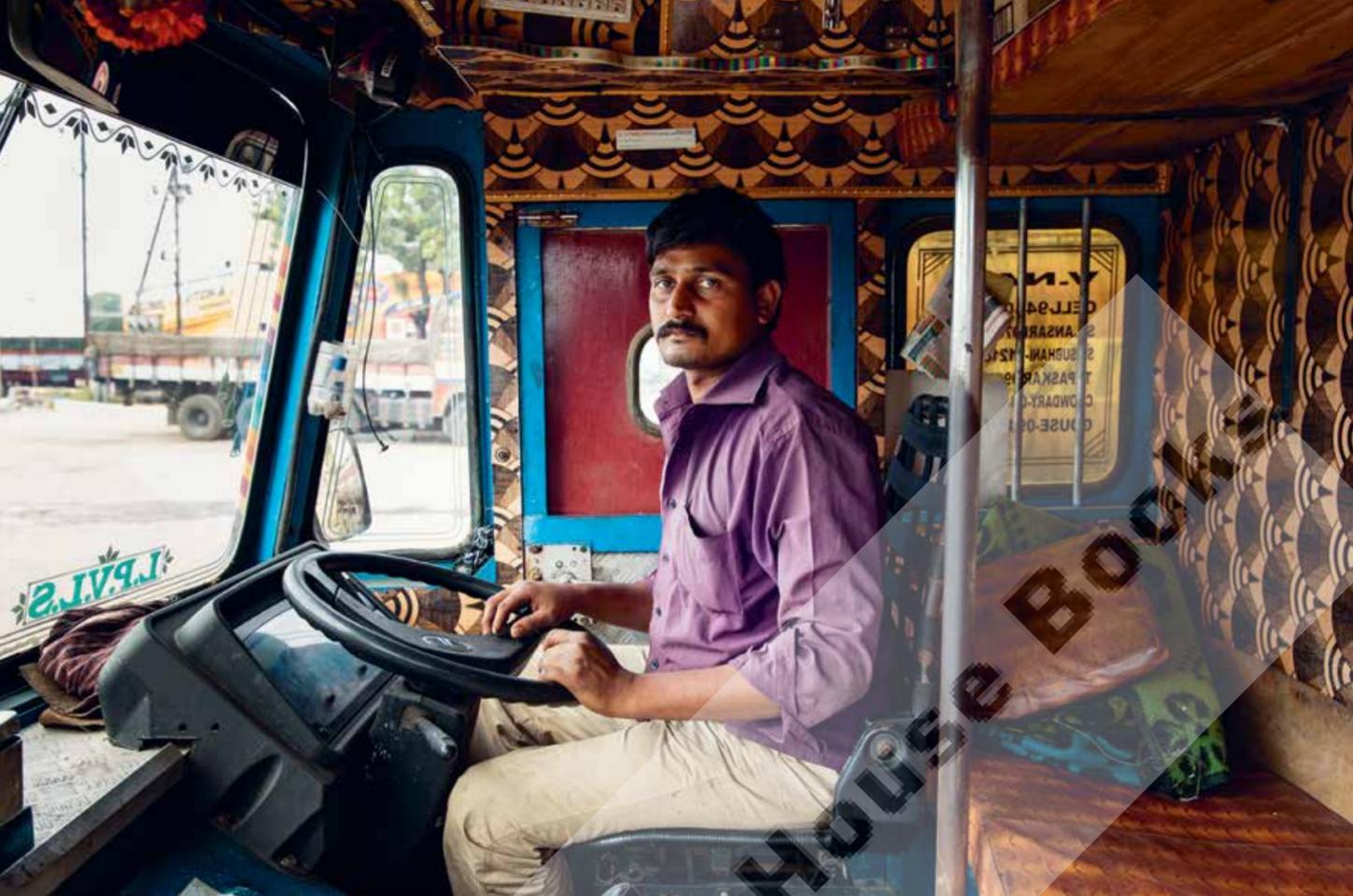
Brightly decorated trucks are a fixture of the highways' visual landscape. Their drivers spend long hours on the road and the trucks serve as a second home. They are not only a means of transport—they are a place to cook, eat, and sleep—and the drivers take great pride in them. The interiors and exteriors of the trucks are colorfully decorated with elaborate paintings, stickers, garlands, tassels, and shrines. The ornamentation can indicate everything from the driver's caste and religion to the cargo they are carrying to the route they are driving. Certain motifs and talismans wishing the truck and drivers safe passage and offering protection from the evil eye are often repeated. The truck design varies greatly from region to region and is a unique form of Indian folk art.

The men who drive these trucks do not have it easy but clearly take pride in their work. They spend long hours in dusty and dirty places but seem to revel in the camaraderie of the other drivers and the excitement of the open road.

—Dan Eckstein











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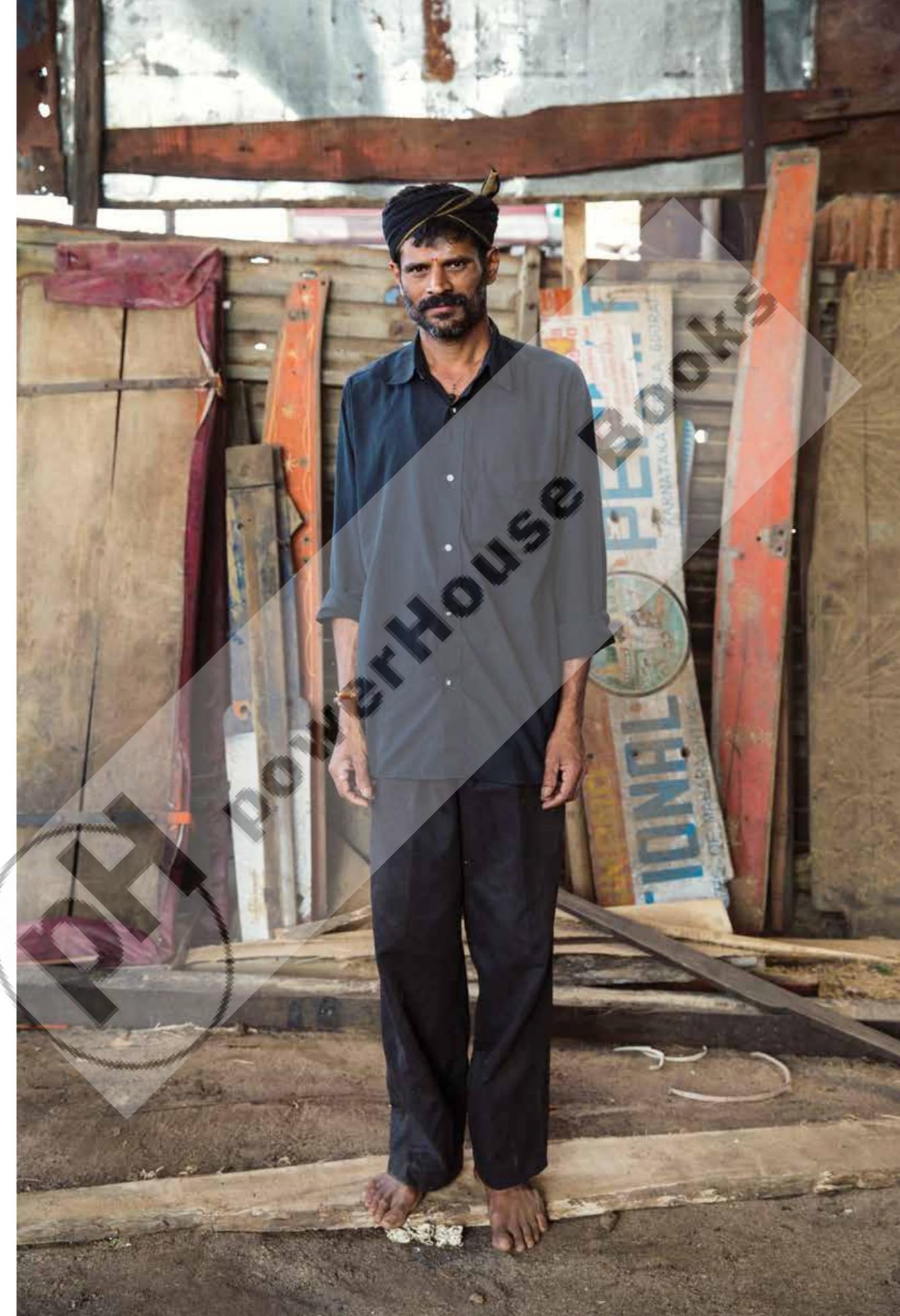
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