A DEPARTURE FROM THE OBVIOUS

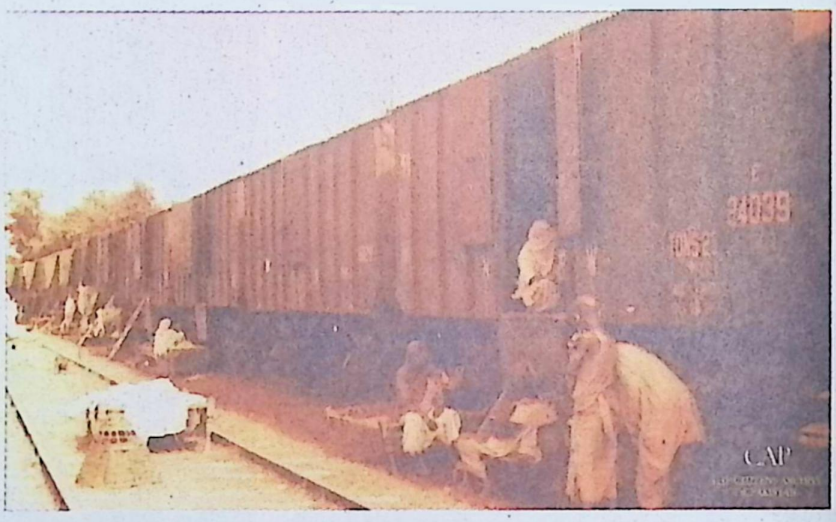
AMITAVA KAR



The Flag of Independence by Haroon Habib.

The September 21-26 photo exhibition at the Liberation War Museum was air-conditioning for the eye, and if you are susceptible to history, the soul. It showcased an unusually interesting mix of photos, giving a sense of what museums and art galleries can do when they depart, even a little, from the usual.

Take for example, *Home is Where the Train is* — a photograph illustrating a decommissioned train on the tracks of Walton Station in Lahore in the post- partition days in 1947. It shows refugees relaxing on wooden cots next to their makeshift home in the abandoned cars of a train. Their carefree attitude at this particular moment is as true as the horrors and needless bloodshed of the partition.



Home is Where the Train Is.

Lived Stories, Everyday lives is a travelling exhibition of some 27 digital image reproductions of photographs and prints from various private and institutional archival collections in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It showcases images from private collection highlighting the art of archiving and its intrinsic value to daily life. The theme: looking at history through the lens of the lives of the common man.

This art of finding the 'extraordinary' in the 'ordinary' is captured by *Faiz's Letter*, a reproduction of fragments of a letter Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote to his wife from jail where he was incarcerated in the early 1950 for his role in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy. The letter touches on personal relationship, all the while never forgetting Faiz's role as a man of historical destiny.

The Learned Sisters of Agra is a photograph of seven sisters from Agra, , born between 1935 and 1946, holding their degrees with pride. At that time, women were photographed in this manner to prove that they were educated. Some of these images were used as matrimonial pictures. Sarita Ramamoorthy, programme manager of the Hri Institute for Southasian Research and Exchange, which in collaboration with the Liberation War Museum organised the exhibition says, "We did two exhibitions in India and one in Nepal. In India we took the exhibition to a small village in Ludhiana where people were excited to have something like this in their village. A lot of people showed up."

These photos tell stories of people who are often bypassed by the 'great' narratives of history offered through history books, and the media. *Uncle Bunnu and His Sisters*, a photograph from around 1910 shows Alec Cordeiro, a Goan Christian and his sisters who lived in Karachi. The sisters left Karachi right before the partition in 1947