

The Exquisite Bride

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Lesley J Saunders

My fascination with India continues to grow, just like my passion for photography. Each time I think I have experienced the most amazing encounter and there can be nothing more wonderful, lo and behold! There, facing me, is yet another astonishing surprise. The beauty and culture of India is like a bottomless pit... never ending. On my tours through Karnataka, I suddenly heard music and saw a lot of people around. Being very inquisitive, I quickly questioned what the music was in aid of, only to be told that it was a wedding. In a rural area of Karnataka, not a tourist in sight and a wedding - too much for a photographer to miss. Jumping out of the car, armed with my camera and lenses, I tried to discreetly position myself at a good vantage point, not wanting to miss such a wonderful opportunity. I was quickly noticed however, and was slowly pushed to the front of the bridegroom's procession. Before I realised what was happening I had become part of the wedding party. So here I am taking photographs of the wedding party but the most amusing point was the 'wedding' photographer taking photos of me. What a turn around!

The laughter in the air was infectious, but nothing compared to the warmth of these wonderful people. I was promptly invited to the wedding ceremony and although my attire was not apt for such an important event, the thought of capturing such a beautiful moment through my lens was too much to miss. So I politely accepted the invitation. The floral head dress of the bride was stunning. Obviously a lot of patience had gone into the creation of such an ornate accessory. It acted as a picture, framing the various expressions that the bride displayed through the ceremony. There were fleeting glimpses of apprehension, delight, coyness, bewilderment and disbelief showing on her face, and once again I found myself admiring the strength of Indian women. How many weddings I had attended where the brides just gave in to their emotions! Yet here I witnessed a true strength of self-control. It was such a delight to capture these emotions and add to my portfolio, 'The Real' Women of India. Not only was I able to portray her emotions but also the beautiful attire worn by everyone there. I was excited to capture some of the wedding rituals such as the pouring of milk and honey over the coconut, through the hands of the bride and bridegroom. Throwing rice over the married couple, the generosity of gifts given by the guests - breathtaking actions I was able to witness.



▲ **The Future Bride!** Was this young girl so bewildered because she wasn't sure what was happening or was she in awe of the pretty bride? We will never know. One thing we can be sure of is that this is one of the future brides of India!



▲ **Concentration.....** I stood and watched this bride, thinking at first that she was deep in thought. Then I realised that she was concentrating on the wishes that were being offered to her. Obviously a daunting moment. Was she overwhelmed by all the activities surrounding her?



▲ **Modest.** Having observed this strong, confident bride was I now seeing a new emotion? Had modesty crept in? How many of us often show confidence, but are actually taken off guard. Are we also a little reserved?

What an amazing experience! Having taken some telling photographs, it was time to continue on my way.

Continuing on my travels I was amazed when I came across yet another wedding. This was turning into one lucky tour. The crowd of guests disembarking a truck, were happy and obviously elated to be part of this special day. As they purposefully made their way to the ceremony, their brightly coloured saris glistening in the sunlight. Once again I was welcomed with open arms as I made my way towards the bride. Dressed in vibrant red and adorned with her floral head dress and garland, the bride stood out amidst the crowds. There was no mistaking the most important person there but again, I observed a mixture of emotions just like the first bride. The children dressed in their best clothes watched in bewilderment as the ceremonies took place. One day in the future it would be their turn. I felt privileged to be so openly welcomed on this special day of their life and as I sat back and thought through the events, I found myself amazed again at the diversity of this wonderful country and the beautiful people.

Several days later as I continued with my travels, I came upon another wedding. This time the ceremony had already taken place

and the wedding party and guests were enjoying the reception which was taking place in a field. The bride was dressed in a white sari, wearing a beautiful garland of vibrant orange flowers in her hair. Her beautiful jewellery sparkled in the sun with the colours of the gems complementing her outfit. It was obvious that this bride had taken great pains to look her best. On this distinctive day she was a delight to photograph. Her eyes danced with laughter as she shyly fed her new husband. Proud, and amused at the same time. Although I captured her at one point in deep thought, the uncertainty I had seen in the previous brides was not evident in this bride.

My perception of these women living in remote rural villages is not only of their strength, but are also how transparent they are - unafraid to show their true feelings. How many of us try and hide our true feelings?

You can read more about my perceptions and experiences, and why I choose to capture the images that I do in my travels, in further editions of Asian Photography.

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— Lesley J Saunders