

# The Enchanted Smile

Joy in the most trying times, against all odds. India is a land where the biggest worries make way for a smile that makes everything alright. What is it that keeps up the human spirit? Perhaps the camera has the answer!



Lesley J Saunders

When we stop and take stock of what is happening throughout the world today with all the economic pressures and recent disasters, including earth quakes, floods, unique and extreme weather conditions, we may excuse the gloom and doom we see every day in the faces of our fellow human beings. As I sit and watch the global news channel on my television, my heart goes out to many of these people and before long I feel engulfed in their tragedies. Then I get ready and step out of the door only to encounter a beaming smile of a young woman.

Why is it that the people I meet in India can rise above challenges and still find the time to smile and have fun, if only many of the other cultures I have encountered could learn from this fun loving enchanting nation.

As I walk down the street I find the laughter and smiles infectious and before long I find it easy to temporarily forget about the troubles elsewhere in the world. Is joyfulness inbred in the whole of the Indian community or am I just fortunate to stumble upon positive and exultant individuals?

Throughout my extensive travels in India I have had the opportunity to capture images of people through my camera lens regardless of age, gender, or status. While in Mumbai I watched some young boys riding their bike across the beach into the sunset, ignorant to what was happening elsewhere in the world, the most important fixation at that moment being who could do the best 'wheelie' on their bike. The two monks in Coorg enjoy their precious spare time riding round the town on their motor scooter, a huge smile dominating one of the monks face, what a prized moment to capture. I watched the boy playing happily chasing a spare wheel with a stick, along the river side, not even aware of people around him, totally lost in his own game. I stopped to reminisce about the children back home, no longer did we see children playing with make shift toys but youngsters on sparkling new bicycles or with expensive toys, still keeping themselves amused but were they any happier than this young lad with his makeshift toy? I doubt it!

So now I was on a mission to capture those fleeting moments and tell the story and emotions through my photography. As I strolled along the beach it was impossible not to get pulled into the enjoyment that surrounded me. I became as equally amused when watching the young man experiment with his bubbles as he was blowing them. The group of youngsters laughing at each other's jokes as they strolled along the edge of the beach had not a care in the world. The young girl laughing out loud at the jokes and tales the family were sharing bought a smile to my face.



▲ **Enchanting!** This young woman set a clear example of the enchanting smiles that so often light up the face of this wonderful nation. I wondered if she rose above her daily challenges by thinking of fun!

**Amused!** This young girl was certainly enjoying the jokes and tales being told by her family. Her face was alight with pleasure.



**Bubbles!** The more the bubbles surrounded this young man the more amused he became. I wondered if he was dreaming of flying high above his current situation.



**Catch Me If You Can!** This young boy played happily with his make shift toy, a wheel and stick. I wondered how many of the children back home would be content with such a toy?



It was easy to find such emotions walking along the beach, a typical place for everyone to let their hair down and enjoy the freedom of merriment. Was I going to find the same emotions in the more remote regions of India or would some of the hardship that surrounded some of these people shadow their happiness and quell their high spirits?

As I looked back over some of my travel experiences I soon realised that regardless of where you were in India you came across the enchanted smile. On visiting Araku Valley and the tribal people I felt that smiles were a permanent fixture. Having finished a hard day's work the man was relaxed and happy to share a drink with a special friend. The women working in the coffee plantations displayed a continuous smile. The excitement in one of the tribal villages was fascinating as they prepared for the village dance that was taking place that evening. The whole village was alive with happiness. It no longer mattered to the villagers if they were doing mundane or heavy physical work; they had captured the spirit of the forthcoming event and were cultivating it during their daily work.

It is all too easy to put a smile on your face to please others. How many times do we try and smile, but it never reaches our eyes? What I have observed during my travels is the genuine emotions that are exposed for all to see if you look carefully and closely. To capture these emotions takes time and patience, but is well worth the wait.

Happy Clicking!

— Lesley J Saunders