

# 'The real women of India'



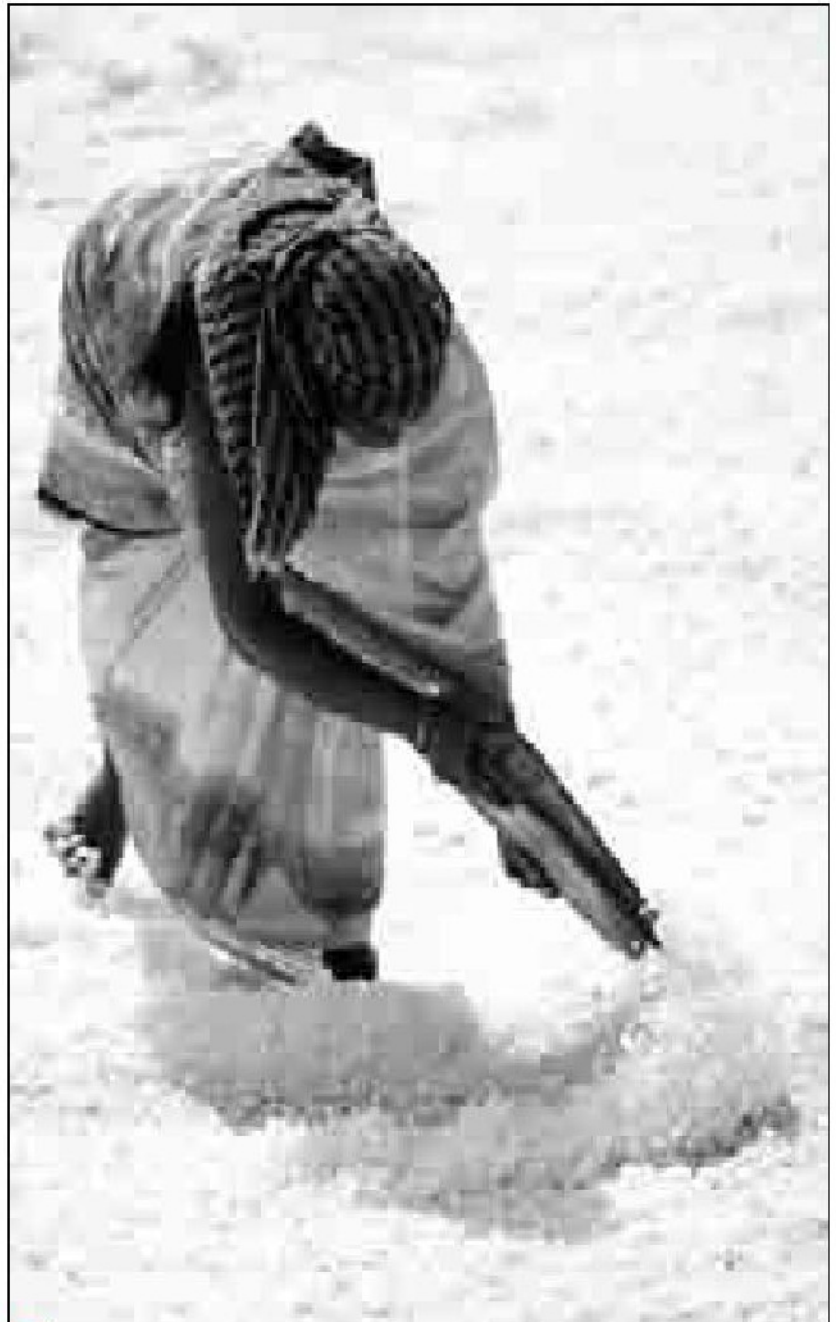
Lesley J Saunders

**W**e all have perceptions which many of us do not think twice about, and when we do stop and think about what our perception is compared to our neighbours, friends, loved ones, even strangers, it can become quite an awakening experience. This is certainly what I was amazed with when I shared my perceptions of the strength of the women of India with a wide spectrum of individuals across the globe. Showing my portfolio of 'The Real Women of India' has stirred many different emotions from a cross section of people. "I live with these people each and everyday and have never recognised this strength", "what a vibrant and colourful country" "you have opened my eyes or" is this true India as my 'perception' is the vision of the Bollywood?" But is this not what a photographer does? Captures an image the way they see it?

I don't believe there is any better way to share what you see and how you feel than through the lens of a camera, capturing that image, your perception of what you are observing and feeling within that split second... but does your audience see the same apparition as you are demonstrating? Again, this was an intriguing exercise when I shared a selection of my photographs with a captive audience, images where I saw beauty, strength and emotion, some of the people had previously only seen a human being challenged with their environment, but studying the images further, they were surprised to see a resilience, strength and pride and in each, a unique emotion. Very often as human beings we are so cocooned in our sheltered lives that we blinker ourselves and do not see beyond.

## Pondicherry

Not having been in India for less than a few weeks, I made a trip to Chennai – partially business and part pleasure. During this trip, I decided to explore a little and visit Pondicherry that so many people had told me about. I started on my adventure towards Pondicherry and after a while enroute, I came across some salt flats. I asked my driver to stop, got out of the car and was astounded to see a huge group of women working



## On Drive !

**Salt Flats. I could not get over the relentless pace at which this woman was sweeping the heavy bulk of salt without breaking a sweat in the stifling heat. She may well have been playing a cricket stroke!**



## Piling it High!

This lady fascinated me by her colourfully adorned well toned body made me envy her. She looked supple yet strong enough to lift that heavy bucket of salt with consummate ease to empty it in the salt pile. The likes of me escape to a gym but I doubt if I could do what this lady was with such dexterity.

on the salt flats. Each of these women were clearly working at a fast pace with determination and pride. Observing this height of activity, I could not help but feel slightly inadequate as they carried bucket loads of salt as if they were carrying baskets of feathers. The scorching sun was blazing down upon them with the salt gleaming like jewels, yet they never slackened their pace. Their faces told a story. Reality of life intermingled with the relief of laughter... ironic, but not an easy existence by any count. Equally fascinating was the pride in which they were dressed. A plethora of colours amid a barren landscape – a photographer's delight though.

As I watched these women pass heavy loads between each other that I and many mortals like me, used to our pampered and sheltered comfort zones would not even be able to lift, I could not help but see the banter going on between



## Salt Of The Earth

En route Pondicherry. Stop at a vast expanse of salt flats and see these hordes of women carrying heavy loads with a smile. Evidently, not the only load in life they carry. Wish I had their strength.

them. Does this make the load lighter? I wonder. What fortitude, yet, I question how many share my perception! I clicked away capturing those scenes. The challenges of the reflection of the sun bouncing off the salt were nothing compared to en-capturing the expression without being noticed which resulted in having to use a 100mm to 500mm telephoto lens. Fortunately, I was able to capture the sentiments before several saw me, then as usual they wanted to oblige and pose, the moment now passed but a new instant, a light relief for the worker. These are my perceptions through my lens.

My next offering of the 'Real' Women Of Indian support of ROKO Cancer will be at the Art Mall, New Delhi on March 8, 2010. Read all about this in my column in the April issue of *Asian Photography*.

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Happy clicking!

— Lesley Saunders

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