

The Charming Tribals of Andhra Pradesh

On my tour of South India, I decided my next stop would be Araku Valley in Andhra Pradesh. We drove through rivers and trekked through the valley to reach remote, rural villages that belonged to selected tribes. With approximately thirty three different tribes in Andhra Pradesh, I was fortunate to meet with over a dozen assorted tribes including the *Valmikas*, *Kondadoras*, *Koyas*, *Gadabas* which are classed as important groups. Equipped with my cameras I happily followed my guide into the first village where I was greeted with a mixture of sentiments - from wide beaming smiles, to coyness, to apprehension. Soon news of my arrival spread throughout the community and I was surrounded by an abundance of children, no doubt wondering who this female, taking photographs, is. My objective was to capture the life of the tribal villagers through my lens and hopefully have images that clearly

expressed not only the emotions of these wonderful people, but also their way of life. Their daily routines continued around me as I blended into the background, giving me the opportunity to absorb the paradox of the life that currently surrounded me.

As I clicked away I became more aware of the closeness of the people around me. The men and women busily working together making mango sweets. The females spreading out the corn for drying, the men making banana leaf plates, a young woman grinding flour and a man sitting stringing beads. As I stealthily moved through the village, I became increasingly aware of the cheerfulness of this community. The children danced and ran with glee and before long I felt like the 'Pied Piper' from the fairy tale, not only was I being followed by the children, but the adults as well.

I was amused to see a group of five children framed by a window, clambering



Lesley J Saunders

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Pride at work This young woman took great pride in her work as she busily ground the rice. She had a glow on her face which showed contentment.



Bangles Galore!
The tribal women happily exhibited the bangles that they had so painstakingly made. It was a wonderful experience watching the creations of the Cottage Industry of many of the tribal villages. The joviality of the women selling their wares was infectious.



I'm Watching You! As this woman dressed in her brightly coloured attire busily carried her load, I couldn't help but be amused by her supervisor...a dog! Watching the action the animal obediently followed the workers and watched their every move. Certainly a man's best friend!

together to monitor what I was doing. The huge glowing smiles made me stop and ponder for a moment; these were obviously happy contented children who entertained themselves with each other's company. Yet when I think about the children back home they have become so reliant on computer games, play stations and technology in general that I wonder if we are allowing them to grow up too quickly! Would they be able to entertain themselves if we took away all their expensive and luxurious toys and games?

Moving through the different villages gave me the opportunity to observe the life of the tribals both inside and outside their village. The farmers busily working on their land, men and women working together in coffee plantations and vendors selling their wares at the weekly market. At a construction site women carried the sand and bricks laughing amongst themselves and I found myself asking the same question that I always do: where do these petite fragile females find the strength to carry such heavy loads? Once again I was amazed at the true team work.

As I trekked through the fields towards the next village, I encountered a group of females going about their daily chores, washing pots and clothes, chattering amongst themselves. The banter continued as young women carrying pots of fresh water passed

by. On arriving at the village I was met by the school children - all smartly dressed in their uniforms. They generously gave me flowers and garlands as a token of welcome, I felt honoured to be a guest at their village. I was given a guided tour of the village and as it was later in the day most of the villagers were back from their work in the fields and plantations. Many enjoying a well earned rest. One particular picture that stays in my mind is that of a weary man resting against his wife.

Having witnessed the life in a tribal village I found myself comparing the different lives and cultures I had come across so far, and how different they were! The tribal people live for today, respecting each other and sharing amongst themselves. Although as an outsider I see some areas of concern, I can also say that I envy the closeness and laid back attitude that these villages have. I am sure that the stress levels here are much less than those of us who endure the corporate world and fast city life. Have we conveniently forgotten some of the values that these beautiful people demonstrate?

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*.

Happy Clicking!

— Lesley J Saunders