

The splendour of festive India

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Lesley J Saunders



▲ **Patience** — Mumbai, The Holi festival of colour celebrations were about to start as this lady waited with patience. She watched the waves rolling along the beach, oblivious to all the excitement surrounding her. She would take her time and join the fun at her pace only! How many of us have this kind of patience with such activity encircling us?

When preparing to move from the UK to India, almost everyone I encountered talked about the abundance of festivals that was enjoyed all over the country. I was intrigued and excited about the prospect of joining in and experiencing some of the talked about celebrations, but even then I certainly was not prepared for what I encountered. Groups of families and friends enjoying and sharing the joviality of the event, children looking upon the festival with amazement, bewilderment and pleasure— all mixed together. The people of India certainly know how to celebrate, whether it is Dassara, Diwali, Holi or even an annual flower festival. The pride of belonging to such a diverse and yet paradoxical country is shown throughout the onlookers' emotions and mannerisms. The colours of the saris more vibrant than ever, sequins sparkling in the sun, the rich colours dancing in the light framed the emotions exposed during these precious moments. The peals of laughter made it easy to identify the fun-loving individuals

wearing wide beaming smiles, eyes full of amusement. With such a lot of photo opportunities, it became challenging to get the appropriate pictures, the crowds often blocking the vantage point but with patience and a selection of lenses, the task was rewarding in the end.

The young brides-to-be dressed in their finery, waiting to be blessed during the Holi festival of colours. The mixture of vendors, selling their wares to the crowd of people, hoping for a successful business day. The young entrepreneurs offering unique services from weighing clients on their portable scales to embroidering the name of customers onto fobs. Even the young men selling bubbles wore expressions of pride on this busy day. During such events I often thought about back home and struggled to remember when was the last time the whole of my family got together and had enjoyed such a celebration. I believe it was at a wedding!

The fun of the Holi celebrations began with laughter and dance, the entertaining drummers oblivious to anyone

around them. The colours highlighted by the roaring fire as the participants danced around the base. The costumes of the contributors of the Dassara were breathtaking. The crowds screening the parade made it challenging to capture the photographs that I wanted; thank goodness, I had my 100mm – 500mm lens with me. I was pleased to capture many of the members of the parade, the guardsmen with horse hair, dancing characters, acrobats showing their skills and the precision of the rangers who managed the elephants to perfection.

I was in awe of the people who surrounded me during these events. I observed yet again the strength of the women as they kept their families together all dressed in their best outfits, babies soothed through the noise, picnics prepared with love and care. The streets crowded with all ages enjoying the experience regardless to if they had come from a local village or if they had travelled from afar. Looking around the crowds it was like being in various parts of India as you identified people from Rajasthan, North, West and South India; it was a delight to observe such a mixture of individuals in one place.

The flowers in full bloom showing the vivid colours – I had so often experienced in the dress of the Indian women– were complimented by the effervescent colours of the balloons, windmills and bubbles being displayed by the vendors. Although, not a festival like the Dassara, still a family day out with everyone showing emotions of fun and pleasure, an escape from their daily routine. As I observed the young woman selling her balloons, I was mesmerised by the different emotions she was showing in such a short time, attitude... was she warning the customers not to mess with her as she was there for a purpose, to earn enough to feed the family. Perplexed... had someone annoyed her, maybe they hadn't bought the balloon after all and had wasted precious time! What I couldn't capture was a smile not even a small grin crossed her face, she was there for a specific purpose and nothing was going to distract her. The bubbles being displayed by the young man were catching everyone's attention especially the children, a look of success when the bubbles flowed fluently, lit up his face followed with smiles as the children chased the bubbles. The windmills spun with the wind



▲ **Strength of Stripes!** — Mysore, The Mysore Dassara was well underway with shouts of glee coming from the audience as they were entertained by the performers. The colourful costumes adorned by the performers reflected the mood of the observers. I hadn't expected to see such amazing entertainers I was so pleasantly surprised.

showing a kaleidoscope of colours complimenting the colours of the proudly dressed women.

There is no wonder that I am passionate about photographing India and especially the strength and beauty of the women of India, where else in the world is such diversity mixed with pride and strength displayed? As shown by the emotions and the carefully selected colourful attire, there is a clear message being sent out to all the country and indeed other parts of the world... India is brilliant, vibrant and colourful!

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*.

Please visit my website www.elleje.com to see more of my portrayals and to know more about ROKO Cancer.

Happy Clicking!

—Lestey J Saunders



▲ **Deep in Thought** — Mumbai, The festival preparations were underway. Vendors selling their wares as many people enjoyed the sun and sea. I was struck by all the different emotions, children playing pranks, grownups paddling in the sea, reflections dancing in the sand. Yet this lady was so deep in thought she appeared to be oblivious to the excitement that surrounded her. I'm sure I would not be able to control my thoughts under such gaiety.