



▼ **Harmony!** I was fascinated to watch this family working in the fields in perfect harmony. Their timing such that success was guaranteed. Team building exercises could certainly be modelled on this display of workmanship!



Lesley J Saunders

All for One

Experiences with the Great Indian Community

As I sit contemplating the experiences I have enjoyed in India so far, I keep circling around to one word 'community'. I have never encountered such a sense of belonging as I have found throughout India. It doesn't matter if you are in a 'Tier A' city or a remote village; the closeness of the family is quite remarkable. Within the UK, the sense of community throughout the towns and villages are no longer experienced as they used to be. In many instances, you do not even have the time of day to share a word with the neighbours. It is a great loss and is indeed sad that life today is too fast and intense to allow for this kind of quality time that was enjoyed many years ago.

The most amazing 'community' experience I had the privilege to encounter was when I visited some of the remote tribal villages in Andhra Pradesh. The sense of true kinship was displayed so openly throughout the rural community. This closeness was not just

amongst family, but extended to neighbours and members of the society in general. The drudge of daily chores is relieved with chatter and laughter as the people shared their jokes and experiences amongst themselves. I was welcomed with broad smiles and hellos as I entered the villages and found that everyone had time to spare as they stopped to say 'Good Day'. The children peeked from behind structures, the curious females stepped out of their homes and the proud young mothers came forward displaying their babies. There was no evidence of hostility, just a warm welcome. It wasn't long before all the village members had congregated to the centre of their village to display their pleasure of receiving a visitor from the Western World. I felt honoured and humbled to be welcomed in such a manner and to be allowed, although for a limited time, to experience the feel of a true community.

As I watched the potter artistically creating



Amused! The amusement was evident in this young girl's eyes as she watched with interest all the activity around her.



Earthy Matters! This proud potter was happy to show his skills to not only his fellow villagers but also strangers like myself. On reflection I wonder how many of us show this kind of satisfaction with our work!

his pots using a crude manual wheel with such expertise, I thought about the latest technology that would be used in the Western World and marvelled at the ease that this artist displayed in his work, all his own creation, including his tools! Again I was fascinated to see the support he received from his fellow neighbours. I happily clicked away not only capturing this artistic moment but also depicting the emotions that this group of people exhibited. Sentiments which included pride of their friend, joviality, coyness and inquisitiveness flashed across their faces; what a delight!

It was evident that the females, bejewelled with their golden rings, necklaces and bangles were proud and happy to be part of this community. Stopping their daily chores, they were pleased to share what they had been busily occupied with. Some industriously making mango sweets, others engaged in manual work such as transporting building materials or urns of water. Nothing was too important to prevent them from halting what they were doing for a few moments.

As I stealthily moved through the hamlet carrying my camera equipment, I was amused to see the children giggling amongst

themselves. They were finding it most entertaining to have a visitor that was armed with a camera, many of the children posing to have their photograph taken, some shy and using structures and trees to hide behind.

I could not believe how fortunate I was to experience such an amazing journey as I sat admiring the dancers who had kindly put on a wonderful display of their traditional dance. The fire flickered as the dancers performed their act sharing their talents with the audience. The air was filled with laughter, the whole community enjoying the evening fun. Many of the young people had dressed for the occasion and as they circled and snaked their way on the dance floor, their tricky steps immaculately in time with each other, I witnessed again the closeness of these families and friends.

As I travelled from village to village, I encountered on the way members of the local parishes, working in the fields. The skill that they showed as they successfully separated the grain from the husks due to working in harm only intrigued me. I felt I had to capture this 'picture' without disturbing the emotions that were evident, so I positioned myself at a safe distance and used my 500mm telephoto lens to ensure that I could portray the falling grains.

Arriving at the next village I encountered the local medic busily preparing his potions. Regardless of how busy he was, he still took the time to welcome me to his village. He

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was obviously pivotal in his community and respect for him was evident in the faces of the villagers. I was soon aware that he was happy to allow me to share his space as he gladly posed for a photograph to be taken. As I continued to walk through the maze of tiny lanes peppered with dwellings the closeness of the community was very apparent.

Neighbours clustered together having discussions amongst themselves, waving and smiling as I passed by, the proud parents bringing their children for me to admire.

This tribal community only further confirmed the importance of families and friends, a true strength of these beautiful people and the diversity of this astonishing country. It also reinforced just what we have lost due to material expectations. Many of the western communities could learn such a lot from the culture of the Indian communities.

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