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Asian Photography AND IMAGING

Vol. 38 - No. 9

TIPS AND TECHS

**CAPTURING
FESTIVALS
WITH PHONES:
TIPS FOR BEST
QUALITY**

**THE "ONE-
LENS"
FESTIVAL
LOADOUT**

**CROWDS &
LOWLIGHT**

**STREET
PHOTOGRAPHY:
LEARNING TO SEE
THE MOMENT
BEFORE IT
HAPPENS**

PRO-PROFILE

**READING
THE LIGHT**

- Poras Chaudhary

**KNOWING
WHERE TO
STAND**

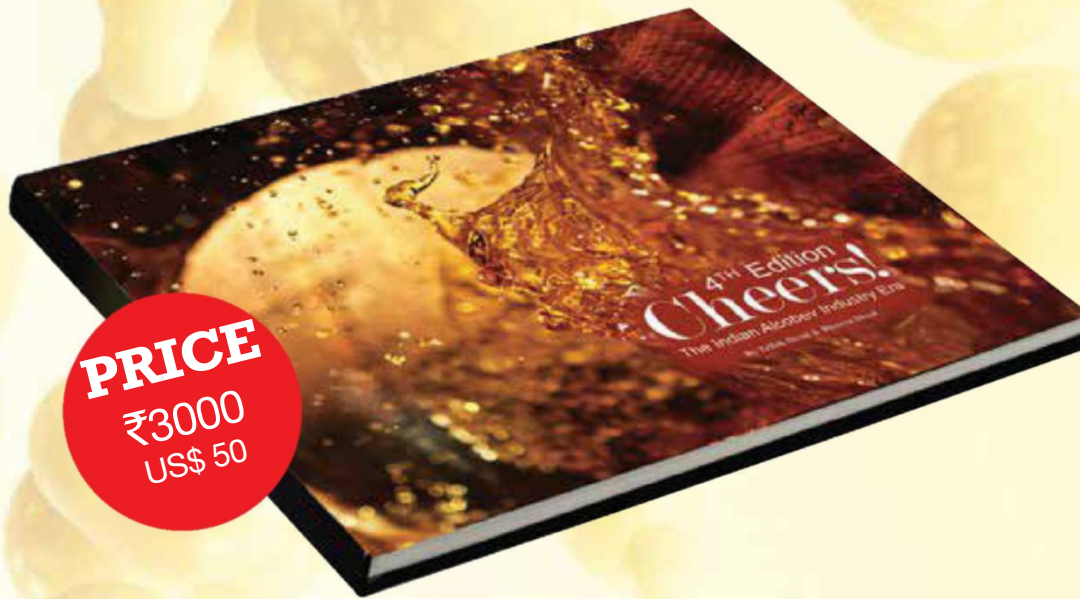
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Bhavya Desai

The Soul of Celebration

There is something about a festival that makes a place look, feel and even sound different. Streets we pass every day suddenly become stages.

Homes are transformed. Ordinary routines give way to ritual, colour, music and gathering. For a photographer, festivals are irresistible—not simply because there is more to photograph, but because there is more to see.

Every festival carries a culture within it. Some traditions are centuries old; others continue to evolve. Each, however, reveals something about the people who celebrate it—their beliefs, histories and sense of community. Photography has a unique role in preserving these moments, offering a record of not only how a festival looked, but the atmosphere and human connections within it.

The spectacle is, of course, part of the attraction: the colours, costumes, lights and crowds. Yet the images that often stay with us are found in the quieter moments. A child's anticipation. A family preparing together. An old ritual performed by a new generation. A pause amid the celebration. Such details bring intimacy to an occasion that might otherwise be defined only by its scale.

This is where the photographer's role becomes more nuanced. A camera offers access, but it also calls for sensitivity. Religious ceremonies, personal rituals and private moments are not simply visual opportunities. They belong to the people experiencing them. To photograph a festival meaningfully is therefore to engage with its context, rather than treating it as a backdrop.

Festival photography sits at an interesting intersection of observation and interpretation. It can document a tradition while revealing how that tradition is lived in the present. It can show continuity, change, community and individuality within the same frame.

In a world where celebrations are photographed, shared and quickly replaced by the next image, there is value in photographs that ask us to pause. The strongest festival images do more than show us what happened. They leave us with a sense of place and the people who inhabit it.

Festivals may last a day, a week or a season. Their visual legacy can endure far longer.

Perhaps that is why we reach for our cameras when the celebrations begin—not merely to record the occasion, but to hold on to something of what made it matter.

So, Until Next Time...

Happy Reading!!!

Bhavya Desai

Bhavya Desai

bhavya_desai

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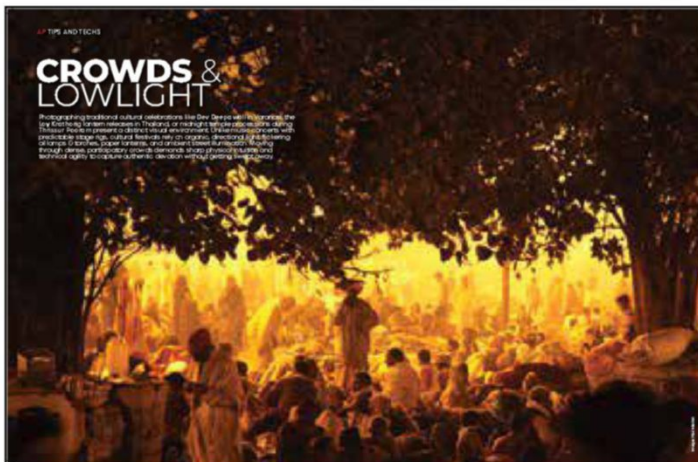
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LETTERS TO EDITOR

Readers' Comments and Suggestions...

Send your letters at apindia.feedback@gmail.com



Dear Sir,

I read the August 2026 issue online and it was really fascinating. The work of the of Zack and Laurin was really great and also the cover was really nice. Seemed symbolic in the current times. Keep up the good work.

**Thanks,
Kirit Doshi**

Dear Kirit,

Thanks for appreciating the work that we do. We work hard on the theme and the photographers that we invite to showcase. Also, each of the topics are selected on the basis of that theme to provide the best value to our readers—so that they can see meaningful work and also learn from the content. We are happy that you liked the issue and it surely pushes us to do more.

Dear Editor,

Photography is undergoing a significant transformation with the rapid development of AI, computational photography, and image-generation technologies. While these tools are opening up exciting creative possibilities, they are also raising questions about authenticity, originality, and the role of the photographer.

In your view, how will AI and other emerging technologies reshape professional photography



in Asia over the next few years? Do you believe these technologies will primarily enhance the photographer's creative vision, or could they fundamentally change what it means to be a photographer?

I would also be interested to know what skills you believe photographers should develop today to remain relevant and distinctive in this rapidly changing industry.

**Thanks,
Pratik Gandhi**

Dear Pratik,

That's an interesting question. AI is the reality that we have to live with for the future. But like every technology it depends on how a photographer uses it. For instance, when Photoshop or Digital Photography became popular, most purists argued if it changes the way we shoot, and like every tech on earth—it could be used to manipulate photos if needed.

But I look at tech like AI, etc. as tools that assist us to make life easier, not as tools that manipulate authenticity and originality. Yes, it is true that there is an increase in the use of such tools to create unauthentic content. But can you stop or change that —No —Can you be more vigilante and do more research to ensure authenticity and originality —Yes.

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

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And that is the approach we should have. Change is inevitable and there will always be some new tech around the corner. When it comes to AI - this only seems the beginning. Every Photographer will need to adept themselves with such technologies if they want to maximise their output and productivity in my view. How you do it, perhaps is your choice.

Dear Editor,

Which Samsung phone will be good under the price of `40,000. I want something which is with a good camera and a good you are UI?

**Regs,
Samarth Shetty**

Dear Samarth,

The best overall phone under this price bracket from Samsung is the S24 FE since it gives you the option of 3x optical zoom cameras — which can be much better than digital options. Also, it gives three cameras at the back which in the same price bracket are good alongwith the processing and performance.

There are other options available from Samsung which offer much higher MP in comparison—but an optical telephoto will stand to have much more resolution than a digital one. Hence this would be my suggestion.





SIGMA

CONTEMPORARY
16-300mm F3.5-6.7 DC OS

FUJIFILM Opens 1st House of Photography in India

FUJIFILM opened its first experience centre in the country naming it the FUJIFILM House of Photography in Andheri West, Mumbai— bringing the company's imaging products, photography experiences and community-focused learning initiatives under one roof.

The centre was inaugurated on the World Photography Day (19th August) and comes as the photographic medium marks 200 years since its invention. It is the 11th FUJIFILM House of Photography globally and is designed as an immersive destination rather than a conventional retail outlet.

The facility aims to provide photographers, filmmakers, visual storytellers and enthusiasts with opportunities to explore imaging technologies, participate in workshops and interact with other members of the photography community.

Yujiro Egarashi, Fuji's General Manager for Imaging Business Division stated, "through FUJIFILM House of Photography, we are delighted to introduce this concept here as part of our long-term commitment to nurturing the country's evolving imaging ambitions."

Visitors can experience the products through guided demonstrations and hands-on sessions. Dedicated areas have also been created for QuickSnap single-use cameras and binoculars. A live instax print bar allows visitors to explore instant photography and printing, while an X Series discovery



table provides an interactive introduction to the company's mirrorless camera range.

A dedicated GFX and lens display focuses on Fujifilm's medium-format system. For the first time in India, FUJIFILM is also showcasing its Z Series projectors through a dedicated experience zone.

TAMRON Lenses Win Two EISA Awards for 2026-2027

TAMRON has received two EISA Awards for 2026-2027, with the company's 16-30mm F/2.8 Di III VXD G2 and 35-100mm F/2.8 Di III VXD recognised in the wide-angle and standard zoom categories.

The 16-30mm F/2.8 was named "EISA Wide Angle Zoom Lens 2026-2027", while the 35-100mm F/2.8 received the "EISA Standard Zoom Lens 2026-2027" award.



According to EISA's jury, the 16-30mm F/2.8 combines a compact and lightweight design with a constant F2.8 aperture, fast autofocus and close-focusing capability. The lens is designed for applications including landscape, architecture, interiors, travel, video and close-up photography.

The 35-100mm F/2.8 is a standard zoom lens for full-frame Sony E-mount and Nikon Z-mount mirrorless cameras. Its focal range covers commonly used portrait focal lengths from 35mm through 100mm, while maintaining an F2.8 aperture across the range. The lens also features VXD autofocus, support for Hybrid AF and Eye AF, and a USB Type-C port for firmware updates and customisation through Tamron's Lens Utility application.

The latest recognition extends TAMRON's run of EISA Awards to 28 years in total and 21 consecutive years since 2006. The company has now received two awards in each of the 2026-2027 categories announced for its lenses.

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Sony India Unveils the FE 100-400mm F5.6-8 OSS Lens

Sony India launched the FE 100-400mm F5.6-8 OSS, a super telephoto zoom lens designed for wildlife, sports and outdoor photography. The lens covers a 100-400mm focal range, weighs 654 grams and measures 165.5mm in length. With compatible teleconverters, its reach can be extended up to 800mm.

The lens features two Extra-low Dispersion (ED) glass elements and two aspherical elements aimed at maintaining resolution and contrast across the frame. It has a nine-blade circular aperture, a minimum focusing distance of 0.86 metres and a maximum magnification of 0.41x for close-up photography. Autofocus is handled by dual linear motors, providing fast, precise and quiet operation. Optical image stabilisation is also included to support handheld shooting.

The lens also incorporates recycled materials as part of Sony's Road to Zero environmental initiative. More than



41% of the total plastic weight used in the lens comes from recycled material, including over 32% in the lens barrel, more than 89% in the lens hood and over 88% in the lens caps.

Huawei Launches MatePad SE 11 and 11.5 PaperMatte in India



Huawei has expanded its tablet portfolio in India with the launch of the MatePad SE 11 and MatePad 11.5 PaperMatte Edition. Both tablets are now available in the country exclusively through Flipkart and target different market segments: the PaperMatte Edition focuses on display quality and productivity, while the SE focuses on everyday use, multitasking and entertainment.

11.5 PaperMatte

The Huawei MatePad 11.5 PaperMatte Edition features an 11.5-inch 2.5K display with a 120Hz refresh rate. The tablet has a 10,100mAh battery and supports 40W HUAWEI SuperCharge.

SE 11

The Huawei MatePad SE 11 has an 11-inch "comfort" display. The tablet supports the Huawei's M-Pen lite stylus, adding functionality for note-taking and other touchscreen input applications. For audio, the SE 11 features a quad-speaker system. It is powered by a 7,700mAh battery and supports 22.5W fast charging.

Like the larger MatePad model, the SE 11 features a metal finish and is designed to remain lightweight and portable.

Honor Robot Phone With Gimbaled 200MP ARRI Camera Launched in China

Honor has launched its Robot Phone in China, a smartphone featuring a motorised arm supporting its main camera. The device was unveiled on August 12 and is currently available only in China, priced at CNY 9,999 (around ₹1.23 lakh) for the 12GB RAM and 512GB storage variant. The 16GB RAM and 1TB storage version costs CNY 12,999 (approximately ₹1.6 lakh).

The phone has a 200MP camera mounted on a titanium gimbal attached to the motorised arm that can move the camera by tilting, panning and rotating it based on user commands. Honor's 4DoF gimbal system uses a micro-motor mechanism, while three-axis mechanical stabilisation works with an AI-based stabilisation system to compensate for camera movement.

The camera also supports AI-based subject tracking. Users can double-tap a subject to activate tracking, allowing the camera to follow its movement and reacquire it if it is temporarily obscured. Another feature, called AI Spinshot, allows the camera to rotate 90 or 180 degrees while recording.

Honor has also entered into a technical collaboration with German camera and cinema equipment maker ARRI. The companies said the collaboration will focus on applying cinematic imaging technologies to mobile devices.

The company has not announced plans for a launch in India or other international markets.



Apple Launches New Mac Minis and Mac Studios powered by M6 & M5 Pro & M5 Ultra

The new Mac mini is available with the all-new M6 or M5 Pro. The M6 model features a 12-core CPU and 12-core GPU with Neural Accelerators built into every GPU core. Apple claims up to 4x faster AI performance, 2x faster graphics and 40% faster CPU performance compared with the previous-generation M4 Mac mini.

The Mac mini with M5 Pro scales up to an 18-core CPU, 20-core GPU and 64GB of unified memory, targeting workflows including video production, game development and AI applications. Both models feature Wi-Fi 7, Bluetooth 6 and 2.5Gb Ethernet, with 10Gb Ethernet available as an option.

Meanwhile, the new Mac Studio brings M5 Max and the all-new M5 Ultra to Apple's highest-performance desktop. The M5 Max version offers up to a 40-core GPU and 128GB of unified memory, while M5 Ultra scales to a 36-core CPU, 80-core GPU and 512GB of unified memory. Apple says the M5 Ultra delivers up to 4.3x the peak AI compute performance of M3 Ultra. The Mac Studio also gains Thunderbolt 5, Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 6, while multiple systems can be clustered for distributed AI workloads.



Both product lines support macOS 27 and Apple's next-generation Apple Intelligence features. Pre-orders began August 25, with availability from September 22. Mac mini starts at \$899 which is up from \$599 from the last M4 Mac mini, while Mac Studio starts at \$2,499 for M5 Max and \$5,499 for M5 Ultra in the US.

Sony India launches RX10 V All-in-One Camera with 24-600mm Lens

Sony India has launched the RX10 V, the fifth-generation model in its RX10 series of all-in-one cameras. The camera combines a 24-600mm ZEISS Vario-Sonnar T* F2.4-4.0 lens with a 1.0-type stacked Exmor RS CMOS sensor and BIONZ XR image processor.

Designed for applications ranging from everyday photography to wildlife and sports, the RX10 V features AI-powered Real-time Recognition AF that can identify humans, animals, birds, insects, vehicles, trains and aircraft. The camera can shoot continuously at up to 30fps with full AF/AE tracking and blackout-free viewing.

For video, the RX10 V supports 4K 120p recording, Active Mode image stabilisation, S-Cinetone and S-Log3. It also features AI-powered Auto Framing and supports up to 16 user LUTs.

The camera has a 0.5-inch Quad-VGA OLED electronic viewfinder with approximately 3.68 million dots, alongside a 3.0-inch LCD monitor with approximately 1.62 million dots. It uses Sony's NP-FZ100 battery, offering up to approximately 630 still images per charge.

The RX10 V also includes dust and moisture-resistant



construction, 2.4/5GHz Wi-Fi, USB Type-C connectivity and support for Sony's Creators' App.

The Sony RX10 V will be available in India from September 2, 2026, through Sony-authorized outlets, Sony Center, major electronics retailers, and e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Flipkart. It is priced at Rs. 2,45,645.

HP Launches DesignJet XT870 Large-Format Printer in India

HP has launched the DesignJet XT870 24-inch large-format printer in India at Photo Video Asia 2026, targeting photographers and photo-printing businesses seeking a more accessible professional printing solution.

The XT870 joins HP's existing DesignJet Z6 and Z9+ series, offering businesses an entry-level option for applications including photographs, posters, glossy prints, canvas and CAD drawings.

The printer features an integrated input tray for multi-size printing from A4 up to 24×36 inches, eliminating the need to manually switch between roll and sheet media. It uses HP Flex Tech pigment inks and supports print speeds of up to 21 seconds per A1/D page.

HP Click software provides print previews, automatic error detection, driverless printing, nesting, drag-and-drop functionality and automatic media-source selection.

The printer is also designed with sustainability features, including at least 45% recycled plastic and 10% recycled metal. HP claims up to 60% lower energy consumption through automatic on/off scheduling and up to 95% less ink usage during routine printhead cleaning.



The HP DesignJet XT870 is priced at an MRP of ₹2,09,988 and is available through authorised HP channel partners in India.



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Olympus is now OM SYSTEM

Fujifilm's Big Bet on Experience

Opens House of Photography in Mumbai – with no sale concept

Fujifilm's newest space in Mumbai is not designed to be just another camera store. In fact, it isn't really about selling cameras at all. Located in the middle of Mumbai's buzzing production and creative ecosystem, the new Fujifilm House of Photography is a deliberate move away from the traditional high-street retail model. **Bhavya Desai** sat down with **Arun Babu, Head, Imaging Devices Business at Fujifilm India**, to talk about the thinking behind the new space, the changing camera consumer, the growing role of Gen Z and millennials, the revival of nostalgia-driven photography.

Fuji's Mumbai House of Photography space features not only cameras, lenses and Instax products, but also a studio, a library, a large screen, workshops, exhibitions and spaces where creators can simply spend time with the brand. The thinking, as Arun explains, is simple—the way people discover cameras has changed. And Fujifilm wants to be part of that journey much before the consumer decides to make a purchase.

While Mumbai is a natural choice—I was surprised by the choice of the area. Conventionally, brands globally prefer staying close to the camera market. But Arun explains that the area around the new store is surrounded by production houses, rental companies, small studios and young creators learning animation and filmmaking. “A lot of shoots happen here,” – I point out, having spent enough time in the neighbourhood myself. That, Arun says, was precisely the attraction.

The store itself has been designed with two distinct audiences in mind. The ground floor is more consumer-facing, while the upper floor opens the space to the professional and business community. Commercial photographers can try out Fujifilm's GFX systems and lenses, cinematographers can explore the equipment, and the space can host workshops, exhibitions and creator gatherings.

That makes the Mumbai store different from Fujifilm's other global retail locations, many of which are more



L to R: Arun Babu, Haruto Iwata, Yujiro Igarashi, and Koji Wada

conventional B2C stores located on high streets.

The decision to make this an experience-first space is also why Fujifilm isn't directly pushing sales here. With an extensive portfolio across cameras, lenses, Instax and printing, Arun says it is difficult for any regular retail outlet to showcase the entire Fujifilm ecosystem in one place.

And the House of Photography is meant to solve that problem.

The idea – simple – come in, try the products, attend a workshop and may be learn from other creators. And when you're ready to buy—buy from wherever you want—online, offline or through a Fujifilm retail partner.

The objective is not to close the sale inside the store. It is to create the experience before the sale.

That is increasingly important in a category like cameras. Unlike an impulse purchase, buying a serious camera is often a long journey. Consumers may spend months attending workshops, borrowing equipment, trying out cameras or speaking to friends before finally deciding what to buy.

So why not give them that experience directly?

That philosophy also reflects a bigger shift that Fujifilm believes is underway in India: the return of the camera.

For years, the smartphone appeared to have won the battle. Entry-level digital cameras disappeared, mobile photography exploded and the market increasingly became divided between smartphones at one end and expensive professional cameras at the other.

But according to Arun something interesting is happening now.

The consumer who grew up shooting everything on a smartphone is beginning to look for something more. Not necessarily a bulky professional full-frame camera, but a camera that offers a different experience, better creative control and, in many cases, a certain sense of style.

That is where the mid-segment and APS-C cameras are finding fresh momentum he says.

Arun sees Gen Z and millennials at the heart of this shift. Many are travellers, hobbyists, content creators and photography enthusiasts. Photography, he points out, has itself become a serious hobby for a large number of people.

And the camera is becoming part of that lifestyle.

Fujifilm's research and consumer engagement suggest that these younger audiences are increasingly willing to experiment with mirrorless cameras. They may start with an entry-level model and move up depending on what they want to do—whether that is travel, content creation, wildlife, videography or eventually professional photography.

The migration does not necessarily have to lead to full-frame. Although not everything that he states feels on point, but there is surely logic in that argument.

Fujifilm's argument is that consumers today are choosing based on the outcome they want rather than simply following the old hierarchy of entry-level, APS-C and full-frame. The portfolio allows a user to move from an entry-level camera to more advanced APS-C models and, for those who need something entirely different, into medium format.

It is less about pushing consumers up a traditional ladder and more about giving them options as their interests evolve.

The company's confidence in this shift is coming from more than just sales data. Fujifilm has been taking its products and experiences around the country through events and workshops. At a recent event in Ahmedabad, for example, the audience was overwhelmingly made up of Gen Z and millennials—even heavy rain did not stop hundreds of people from turning up.



Fujifilm is seeing renewed interest in products such as QuickSnap and film photography, particularly among younger consumers. And the irony is hard to miss. The generation that grew up with digital technology is now rediscovering the appeal of analogue experiences



That, Arun says, is an important signal.

Young consumers may no longer visit the traditional camera markets that once dominated photography retail in every major Indian city. The old streets where generations of photographers bought cameras and equipment are losing relevance for a new audience that is more likely to shop online, visit a modern retail outlet or discover products through an event or a community.

The challenge, therefore, is not necessarily a lack of interest in photography. It is about meeting consumers where they are.

That is also where Instax plays an important role in the Fujifilm ecosystem. The brand has become synonymous with the revival of instant photography, but Arun believes the appeal today goes much beyond simply clicking a picture and getting a print.

Even more interesting is the return of nostalgia.

Fujifilm is seeing renewed interest in products such as QuickSnap and film photography, particularly among

younger consumers. And the irony is hard to miss. The generation that grew up with digital technology is now rediscovering the appeal of analogue experiences.

From film cameras to instant prints, older formats are finding a new audience precisely because they offer something that smartphones do not.

At the same time, Fujifilm is not limiting itself to the consumer and enthusiast market. Its professional and medium-format business continues to be a very different proposition.

Here, the approach is far more hands-on.

For a wedding photographer or cinematographer considering a move to a medium-format system, a conventional marketing campaign may not be enough. Fujifilm works directly with potential users, allowing them to shoot real content and judge the output for themselves. A single lead can take months to convert.

For cinematographers and directors of photography, the company has used screenings and content shot on its systems to demonstrate what the equipment can actually deliver. The audience is niche, the conversations are technical and the marketing is completely different from what Fujifilm does for a young consumer buying their first camera.

The new Mumbai House of Photography sits somewhere in the middle of all these worlds.

It is a consumer space, but it is also a professional space. It is about Instax and mirrorless cameras, but also medium format, printing and optical products. It is a place to learn, experiment, create and connect.

That is perhaps the biggest statement Fujifilm is making with the new store. That the consumer wants experiences before they make a purchase.

And Fujifilm's bet is that if you can create that relationship early enough, the sale will eventually follow. And in a market where smartphones were once expected to kill the standalone camera, the company is betting on something even more interesting—the desire to create may just be bringing the camera back!



Sammya Mullick

ARCHIVING BENGAL

Sammya Mullick is a visual storyteller renowned for his immersive documentation of Indian culture, street dynamics, and traditional heritage. Through a rich portfolio centred heavily on Kolkata and West Bengal, as well as broader cultural landscapes across India, Mullick captures both the grand scale of sacred festivals and the quiet, introspective gestures of everyday life. Grounded in a documentary ethic that privileges research, patience, and ethical engagement over sensationalism, his work serves as an enduring visual archive. Drawing inspiration from masters like Raghu Rai and Steve McCurry, he approaches every project with a commitment to depth, visual harmony, and deep respect for the communities he frames. **Asian Photography** spoke with him about being the face of Bengali festival photography, discipline, storytelling principles and more. Excerpts:



The question of how to document hometown traditions while keeping a visual perspective fresh year after year is rooted in long-term responsibility and continuous historical discovery for Sammya. Documenting cultural heritage across West Bengal spanning major events like *Durga Pujo*, *Kali Pujo*, *Jagaddhatri Pujo*, and *Saraswati Pujo* to regional observances such as *Charak* and *Gajan* is an endeavour

he views as both a privilege and a sustained commitment. Rather than framing these festivals solely through their most obvious or visually dramatic highlights, Mullick dedicates significant time to researching their histories, rituals, and surrounding communities. By speaking with local residents, festival organisers, artisans, priests, and participants, he gathers contextual insights that allow him to uncover lesser-known, relatively undocumented facets of each celebration. To prevent his visual approach from becoming repetitive or influenced by current social media trends, he returns to



recurring events with specific questions, new areas of focus, or alternative visual methods. Inspired by the philosophy of Raghu Rai, he places equal weight on quiet, everyday gestures and fleeting human emotions alongside grand public spectacles, ultimately building a multi-year visual archive that charts how regional traditions naturally evolve over time.

When asked about his strategy for stepping into intense devotional energy while keeping his frames grounded and composed, Mullick emphasises proximity without causing



disruption to the surrounding environment. His approach relies on acquiring a thorough prior understanding of demanding rituals—such as the *dhuno porano* ceremonies of *Durga Pujo*, *Jagaddhatri Pujo*, *Manasha Pujo*, and *Kali Pujo*, the intense dances of *Bama Kali*, or the physical devotion seen during *Charak* and *Gajan*—which enables him to anticipate key moments rather than react hastily. While he moves close to the action when appropriate, he prioritises respect for the devotees and sacred spaces above all else. He experiments with diverse angles and techniques, ensuring these choices never cost him the decisive moment or disturb the flow of the ritual. In instances where an individual expresses discomfort or objects to being photographed, Mullick refrains from arguing, acknowledges their boundary, and redirects his attention elsewhere. Staying grounded in chaotic settings relies on patience, emotional sensitivity, and self-possession; by remaining calm amidst surrounding intensity, he allows scenes to unfold naturally before his lens while focusing on subtle interactions and expressions that reflect the underlying meaning of the celebration.

Choosing gear that enables mobility through chaotic festival processions involves stripping down equipment to absolute essentials to maintain total focus on the present





moment. For Mullick, navigating dense crowds is defined by carrying only what is necessary, as heavy bags and excessive lens choices restrict physical movement and inconvenience surrounding devotees. He avoids frequent lens changes during active rituals to preserve his observational rhythm and prevent missing fleeting occurrences. Once he determines that a specific ritual or location has been adequately covered, he consciously yields the space to others, moving continuously to seek alternate vantage points and fresh variations within the event. Even when utilising specialised equipment like drones, he ensures that technology does not dictate the narrative, completing ground-level observation and photography before considering aerial perspectives. This reliance on a minimal setup ensures agility, unobtrusiveness, and heightened attentiveness, keeping him fully prepared to capture unexpected, unscripted moments as they occur.

“The photograph is never more important than the person or the ritual in front of my camera. Authenticity is meaningful only when it is achieved with dignity and respect.”







Regarding the curation of a festival series for digital or print platforms, the search for a unifying narrative thread beyond individual high-impact shots requires looking at the complete cycle of an event. Whether documenting regional traditions such as *Theyyam*, *Puli Kali*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, and *Holi*, or celebrations closer to his home base, Mullick structures his photo-stories to reflect the entire journey—from preliminary preparations and mounting anticipation to core rituals, intimate interactions, and the eventual conclusion. He seeks out ordinary human details and quiet moments that may lack immediate social media appeal but remain critical for contextualising the tradition as a whole, aligning his process with the documentary principles popularised by figures like Raghu Rai and Steve McCurry. To maintain objectivity during curation, he enforces a cooling-off period of at least one week after shooting before initiating the editing phase, allowing emotional attachments to fade so he can evaluate images based on their narrative connections. The final selection is then unified through consistent tonality, pacing, and visual language, ensuring every frame advances the overarching story without unnecessary gaps.

The principles guiding the boundary between capturing authentic moments and respecting a worshipper's personal space rest on recognising when to step forward and when to withdraw. Understanding that festivals represent deeply personal experiences for participants, Mullick maintains that access to intimate moments must be earned through respectful behaviour rather than assumed. He focuses on candid, un-staged interactions, noting that the authenticity

of documentary work depends on spontaneous truths that cannot be recreated through direction or posing. Pushing too far into a devotee's personal space during sensitive or intense rituals risks causing discomfort and disruption, which he actively avoids. When individuals request not to be photographed, he honours their preference immediately and without debate, holding that no image takes precedence over the dignity of the person or the sanctity of the ritual being observed.

Looking ahead to the legacy and emotional impact his body of work might leave for future generations of street and documentary photographers, Mullick envisions his output as a comprehensive visual path for discovering historical traditions. While his primary focus remains centred on Kolkata and West Bengal, his work extends to lesser-known traditional festivals across India, where he relies on primary research and direct community interaction to record complete cultural narratives. He notes that maintaining this patient methodology is increasingly challenging in crowded environments where content creators and attendees compete for space, reinforcing his commitment to returning to subjects over multiple years rather than rushing a narrative in a single visit. Additionally, he chooses to dedicate his attention entirely to a single medium while working, opting to photograph wholeheartedly rather than dividing focus with video capture. Ultimately, he measures the success of his long-term archive by its ability to inform and connect future viewers with traditions they might not otherwise have known.

Text: Anirudh iyer



Hari Menon

KNOWING WHERE TO STAND

Acclaimed Indian travel and documentary photographer **Hari Menon** joins us for this conversation with a career spanning over two decades and known for his mastery of natural light and authentic storytelling. His body of work encompasses celebrated long-term projects such as *Invisibles*, an extensive visual documentation of India's lesser-known tribal communities and a detailed series capturing the ritual art form of Theyyam in North Kerala. Over the years, he has collaborated with state tourism departments, commissioned projects for the Government of India's Incredible India campaign, and partnered with global brands including Fujifilm, Samsung, and Vivo, while also sharing his expertise through masterclasses across the country. **Asian Photography** spoke to him about getting the photographic eye, the process, strategies and more. Excerpts:



When reflecting on the fundamental shifts every photographer experiences as their artistic vision matures, Menon identifies the transition away from purely reactive shooting as his single most significant evolution. Early in his career, his primary focus was centred on reacting directly to whatever action unfolded immediately in front of his lens. Over time, however, he realised that truly compelling photographs only materialise at the intersection of acute observation and active imagination. Rather than rushing to capture a scene as it happens, he began dedicating substantial time to studying the environment, observing the behaviour of people, reading the subtleties of natural light, and anticipating upcoming moments. Today, his visual philosophy relies on observing his surroundings first and conceptualising the final image well before the moment actually occurs. By looking beyond what is immediately visible on the surface, he strives to anticipate how disparate elements such as ambient illumination, architectural elements, and human activity will ultimately harmonise within the edges of his frame.

This maturation process also required unlearning the rigid technical habits and compositional crutches that often govern early photographic work. Menon firmly maintains

that photography cannot be reduced to a strict adherence to traditional compositional rules or the pursuit of a technically flawless frame. From his perspective, the primary creative challenge lies in taking a composed structure and infusing genuine vitality into it. He considers people, fleeting facial expressions, organic movement, light, and underlying emotion to be the essential components that breathe life into a static image. Mastering the ability to bring these volatile elements together in a natural, unforced manner has proven to be the single greatest transformation in how he observes and photographs the world around him.

Translating this refined artistic philosophy into commercial assignments presents a distinct set of challenges, particularly when tasked with capturing a region's raw visual identity while meeting the polished commercial expectations of state tourism destination marketing. Menon notes that commercial projects inherently come with rigid client briefs, clear expectations, and often pre-visualised frames that dictate what must be delivered. His process begins by thoroughly absorbing the client's underlying vision and establishing a clear understanding of the overarching story the destination authority wants to communicate. Once that foundational clarity is locked in, he integrates his personal photographic language and professional experience to fulfill the assignment without compromising visual quality.





However, Menon is careful not to let the restrictive nature of commercial briefs dictate or permanently define how he perceives his broader craft. To maintain his artistic independence, he habitually transitions into an autonomous travel photographer once an assignment officially concludes, exploring the surrounding region on his own terms. He views open communication as an indispensable tool in photography, especially when documenting human subjects in unfamiliar cultures. By taking the time to converse with locals, understand their daily realities, listen to their personal histories, and learn about the local heritage, he uncovers deeper context that directly informs his work. These spontaneous interpersonal connections consistently guide him toward photographs that feel significantly more authentic, spontaneous, and deeply rooted in the true spirit of the destination.

This dedication to authentic exploration underscores a vital lesson regarding patience and environmental awareness that only extensive field experience can impart. According to Menon, one of the most transformative insights gained over his career is understanding precisely where a photographer ought to position themselves within a space. While finding the correct vantage point sounds elementary on the surface, choosing the right spot completely alters the dynamic and narrative flow of the final frame. He recalls documenting Kerala's famous snake boat races during the era before aerial drones became ubiquitous; to capture a unique





perspective, he would arrive at the venue hours in advance to secure a high position on an overhead bridge. This deliberate positioning allowed him to capture an elevated, almost aerial view of the high-speed race, instilling in him a lasting appreciation for meticulous spatial planning and environmental analysis before any action commences.

Over decades of field practice, Menon has learned that spending time carefully analysing light, spatial geometry, and the movement patterns of crowds eliminates the need to frantically chase fleeting moments. Once a photographer identifies and claims the ideal physical position, they can simply wait for the necessary elements to align naturally within the pre-selected frame. He notes that several of his personal favourite photographs were created precisely through this deliberate methodology. For Menon, patience in documentary photography is not merely a passive act of waiting around; it is the strategic discipline of knowing exactly what specific combination of light, action, and emotion you are waiting for.

Knowing where to stand and what to wait for becomes exceptionally critical when navigating cultural festivals, which are notoriously fast-paced, crowded, and visually dense. Rather than attempting to capture every visual spectacle unfolding simultaneously, Menon intentionally slows his pace to resist the overwhelming sensory chaos. Given his long-

standing affinity for candid photography, he treats festival grounds as ideal environments because participants are naturally absorbed in the celebration and uninhibited by the presence of a camera. By stepping back and observing quietly, he actively seeks out spontaneous interactions, subtle facial expressions, and quiet contextual details that reveal the true character of the event, firmly believing that deciding what not to frame is just as crucial as deciding what to include.

This selective framing strategy proved particularly vital during the creation of his series *Invisibles*, which focuses on documenting lesser-known tribal communities across India. Menon found that festive periods offered unprecedented access to these communities, as individuals were emotionally connected, relaxed, and deeply immersed in their ancestral traditions, allowing for remarkably unfiltered documentary portraits. A prime example occurred while photographing the Brokpa community in Ladakh, whose traditional birthday celebrations take place only once every twelve years and span three continuous days. By purposefully ignoring the obvious surrounding commotion, Menon concentrated his lens on intimate moments where community members completely forgot the presence of outsiders and lost themselves in the ritual. By filtering out excess visual noise, he consistently uncovers the quieter, highly nuanced stories hidden beneath the surface of grand cultural events.

Photographing these dynamic cultural events inevitably exposes a photographer to volatile physical conditions, ranging from heavy crowds and unpredictable monsoon downpours to airborne coloured powders. To adapt to these harsh environments on the fly, Menon places immense emphasis on thorough pre-production planning before ever stepping foot on location. He relies on pre-visualising the specific types of images he hopes to create, which allows him to strip down his gear setup to only the absolute essentials. Carrying excessive equipment in dense crowds or severe weather acts as a physical hindrance that slows down reaction times; keeping his kit lightweight ensures he remains agile and ready to pivot instantly as conditions change.

Furthermore, working in the heart of extreme festivals requires a fundamental shift in mindset regarding equipment care. Menon accepts from the outset that photographing within the thick of a celebration means his cameras and lenses will inevitably get wet, muddy, or coated in pigments. Attempting to keep gear completely pristine while working inside a chaotic crowd is practically impossible and ultimately distracts from the photographic process itself. While he takes sensible precautions beforehand, once he enters the field, his focus shifts entirely to the frame rather than the safety of his equipment. He believes that capturing the authentic energy of an event demands a willingness to step directly into the environment and experience the intensity alongside the subjects being documented.







Reflecting on the vast array of cultural events he has documented, Menon identifies certain assignments as pivotal creative turning points that permanently redefined his understanding of documentary photography. Specifically, covering the monsoon festivals of Goa—most notably the mud festival of *Chikhhal Kalo* and the vibrant celebration of *Sao Joao*—served as a major catalyst in his artistic evolution. The raw combination of torrential rain, deep mud, vivid colours, strong community bonds, and uninhibited joy created a dense atmosphere that could never be artificially staged or replicated in a controlled environment.

What impacted Menon most during these Goan monsoon traditions was the effortless manner in which participants embraced the adverse weather conditions, fully integrating the rain and mud into their communal celebration. Capturing these scenes forced him to realise that documentary photography extends far beyond merely recording an event or making a factual visual record of what occurred. Instead, its true power lies in conveying how human beings feel within a moment and communicating the underlying cultural meaning of that experience. This realisation redirected his focus toward human expressions, subtle interpersonal interactions, and the visceral relationship between people and their environment. The memories and images from *Chikhhal Kalo* and *Sao Joao* remain foundational creative benchmarks for Menon, continually reinforcing his core belief that the most profound visual stories emerge when people are given the space to simply be themselves.

Text: Anirudh iyer

AP PRO PROFILE



Poras Chaudhary

READING THE LIGHT

Poras Chaudhary is an internationally acclaimed Indian photojournalist and documentary photographer known for his vibrant visual storytelling, masterly use of colour, and graphic compositional structure. Over a career spanning more than two decades, his work documenting the rich cultural landscapes, sacred traditions, and daily life across South Asia has earned widespread global recognition. His accolades include being named Digital Camera Magazine's Photographer of the Year, winning the prestigious Travel Photographer of the Year award, and receiving multiple honours from National Geographic Traveler. Renowned for his ability to find order within chaotic environments—from the intense, colour-drenched celebrations of Holi to the overwhelming scale of the Kumbh Mela—his photographs capture both the monumental scale and the intimate human moments of the region, establishing him as a seminal voice in contemporary visual documentation.



Chaudhary views light as the fundamental organising force within a composition rather than a simple means of exposure, reading it to create structure. He explains that almost everything in photography revolves around light—specifically how it interacts with both the primary subject and the background by revealing certain elements while obscuring others. For Chaudhary, luminosity serves as a vital tool for establishing spatial separation and depth within a frame. He frequently leverages contrast to simplify intricate environments, positioning a subject bathed in light against a darker backdrop or, conversely, placing a shadowed figure against a brightly lit surface. By utilising these varying levels of brightness as compositional building blocks, he transforms light from mere illumination into a structural mechanism that isolates subjects, establishes distinct visual layers, declutters complex backgrounds, and purposefully directs the viewer's gaze toward key elements within the image.

When asked about his method for distilling chaotic mass gatherings like the festival of Holi into structured visual summaries, Chaudhary notes that his process relies heavily on an innate sensitivity to colour and geometry. He approaches a scene by analysing its structural potential long before an event unfolds, actively deciding where subjects might fit, which background details serve a purpose, which distracting elements must be excluded, and how surrounding hues interact. While colour saturation during Holi presents a rich



palette, he acknowledges that it can easily clutter a frame by forcing every element to compete for visual dominance. To bring order to this intensity, he focuses on smaller segments of the environment, utilising architectural features like doorways or pillars to impose framing, while monitoring shifts in movement and colour. Once this underlying visual geometry stabilizes, he waits for a candid gesture or fleeting expression to complete the frame. He clarifies that his intention is not to sanitise the natural chaos of the festival, as that energy remains essential to the experience, but rather to construct



a clear visual entryway that allows the viewer to engage with the photograph without feeling overwhelmed. In his view, a singular focused face or unexpected color relationship often communicates the true essence of an event far more effectively than a wide shot of a massive crowd, making the core challenge one of deciding how much visual information is necessary.

Addressing the challenge of executing multi-layered framing within dynamic, fast-moving environments like

“I started by asking, ‘Is this a good photograph?’ Now I am more likely to ask, ‘Why does this photograph need to exist, and what does it add to everything around it?’”



the Kumbh Mela, Chaudhary emphasises that he thrives on complex visual environments rather than seeking out simplified backgrounds. While high-density events offer endless subject matter, the main difficulty lies in harmonizing overlapping elements—such as foreground interactions, mid-ground pilgrims, background banners, and distant landscapes—so that they complement rather than clutter the image. Through extensive field experience, he has cultivated the ability to evaluate multiple visual layers simultaneously. His process involves either identifying an intriguing background to serve as a stage before waiting for a foreground subject to enter, or instantly reacting to a foreground action by making micro-adjustments to align the background narrative. He attributes this quick execution to an instinct honed over years of practice, allowing him to anticipate human movement, structural overlaps, and physical gestures before they materialise. Ultimately, he finds the greatest satisfaction in images that function on multiple narrative levels, where the foreground delivers an immediate emotional touchpoint while the background provides essential context regarding scale, location, and atmosphere, thereby elevating a portrait of an individual into a broader commentary on their environment.

In response to a question about avoiding visual clichés when working in heavily photographed destinations such as Varanasi or Vrindavan, Chaudhary explains that his strategy





centers on prioritising human experiences over famous locations. He observes that iconic settings often carry strong pre-existing imagery—such as riverbanks, temples, priests, and ritualistic bathers—which can easily trap a photographer into reproducing familiar postcard shots. To bypass these visual tropes, he focuses his lens on the residents and visitors who inhabit the space, observing their movement, their everyday routines, their use of public areas, and the subtle ways faith integrates into ordinary life. By adopting the perspective of the people within the environment, the location reveals itself in a more authentic manner. Furthermore, he draws a sharp distinction between capturing what a location looks like and conveying what it feels like to exist there. Where postcard imagery focuses on immediate geographical recognition, Chaudhary seeks to convey the lived experience of a place through quiet, subtle occurrences—a person waiting in an alley, bathing, praying, or sharing a brief moment of conversation. He notes that by reducing the emphasis on explicitly proving the geographic setting, the true character of the location emerges with far greater authenticity.

When discussing how to maintain a balance between aesthetic choices and photojournalistic integrity while documenting sacred cultural practices, Chaudhary highlights his commitment to visual truth and narrative clarity. As a documentary photographer, his foundational instinct is to

capture moments that accurately inform the viewer about the context, timing, and nature of an event. However, he maintains that aesthetic components like precise composition, refined lighting, and thoughtful colour management do not inherently compromise journalistic truth; rather, they serve as the expressive vocabulary used to communicate the story effectively. For Chaudhary, the critical factor is whether aesthetic choices serve to illuminate the reality of a situation or work to distort it. To present a balanced portrayal of sacred traditions, he avoids relying on single frames to convey an entire narrative, choosing instead to build comprehensive visual stories using a mix of wide environmental shots, close human interactions, intricate details, formal portraits, and varied perspectives. Additionally, he stresses the ethical responsibility inherent in documentary work, pointing out that having the physical opportunity to take a photograph does not always mean it is appropriate to do so. Recognising when to refrain from photographing out of respect for participants is a vital skill. Ultimately, he believes that when a photographer's primary goal is to understand and document with genuine purpose, aesthetics and integrity align naturally, ensuring that visual technique remains in service of the subject.

Reflecting on how his criteria for a successful photograph have shifted over the course of his career, Chaudhary explains that his perspective has evolved from a focus on surface





aesthetics to a deeper commitment to contextual purpose. In his early years, his primary drive was creating striking, beautiful imagery centered around technical mastery of light, color, and structure. While these elements remain integral to his methodology, he gradually realised that a visually captivating image lacks impact if it lacks a meaningful message. In his current practice, particularly when embarking on new projects, he prioritises establishing a clear personal perspective, constantly interrogating why he is documenting a subject and what deeper insights he aims to communicate beyond the immediate visual surface. This shift has altered how he evaluates individual frames within a broader project. Rather than judging a photograph solely as a standalone piece, he now assesses its thematic contribution to the complete narrative. He notes that a quieter, less visually dramatic image often plays a vital role in establishing context, adjusting narrative pacing, or bridging distinct visual ideas within a series. Consequently, he measures success not by the production of isolated highlight images, but by the creation of a cohesive, meaningful body of work with a distinct point of view. Where he once evaluated an image by asking whether it was visually pleasing, he now considers why the photograph needs to exist and how it enriches the surrounding narrative.

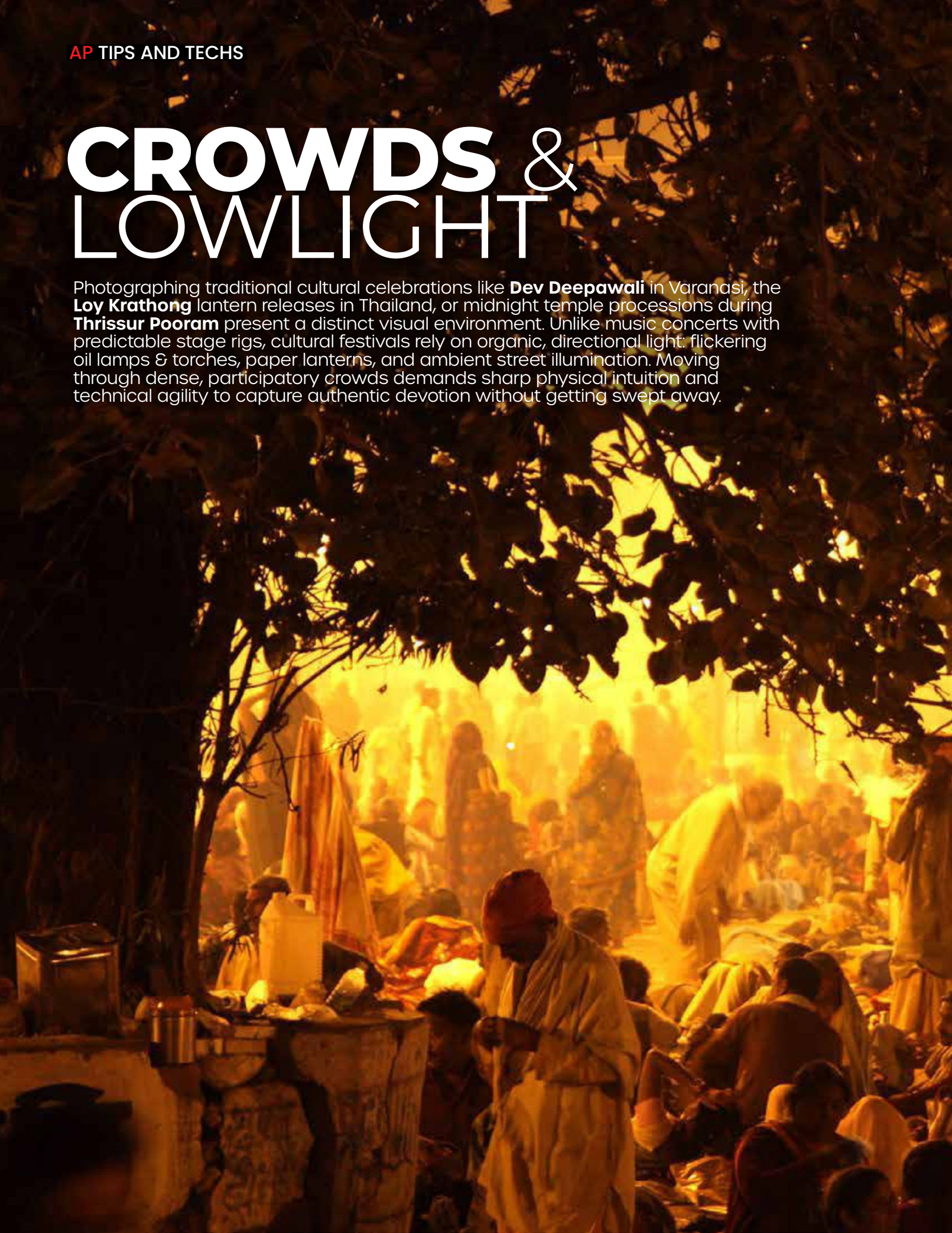
“A carefully composed photograph is not necessarily less truthful than a badly composed one. The key is whether aesthetics are helping reveal the situation or beginning to distort it.”



Text: Anirudh iyer

CROWDS & LOWLIGHT

Photographing traditional cultural celebrations like **Dev Deepawali** in Varanasi, the **Loy Krathong** lantern releases in Thailand, or midnight temple processions during **Thrissur Pooram** present a distinct visual environment. Unlike music concerts with predictable stage rigs, cultural festivals rely on organic, directional light: flickering oil lamps & torches, paper lanterns, and ambient street illumination. Moving through dense, participatory crowds demands sharp physical intuition and technical agility to capture authentic devotion without getting swept away.





Navigating and Framing Dense Cultural Crowds

Working within a street procession or packed temple courtyard requires a balance of spatial awareness, personal agility, and compositional intent. Because people are constantly moving, framing your shot effectively means choosing how you want to interact with the environment. The most important thing to do before shooting is prep—both in terms of gear as well as psychological, which involves location recce and finding angles or places to shoot from.

Establishing Environmental Context

To convey the sheer scale of a festival, seek out slightly

elevated vantage points such as temple steps, building balconies, or riverbank ledges. Shooting from above allows you to look down across processions, packed street avenues, or continuous lines of riverbank lamps. This high-angle perspective frames the grand collective effort of the community and highlights how light stretches across the landscape.

Capturing Intimate Candids Within the Chaos

While wide shots show scale, intimate portraits reveal the emotional heart of the celebration. By stepping directly into the flow of the crowd with a fast prime lens, you can capture





eye-level moments of devotion, wonder, or quiet reflection. The goal is to isolate a single face or hand gesture against a softly blurred, warm-toned background, transforming a chaotic scene into a quiet personal moment. This is where specialised tele primes like the 135mm F/1.8 come into play, although these can be achieved with a 70-200mm F/2.8 lens as well.

Conveying Rhythm with Motion Blur

Cultural festivals are rich in movement—from whirling folk dancers and palanquin bearers to rhythmic torch swinging. Instead of freezing every action, intentionally dragging your shutter to speeds like 1/25s or 1/15s while panning alongside a moving subject creates a sense of life and energy. The technique leaves your main subject recognisable while turning ambient torches and background crowds into fluid streaks of light and motion. You can also pair this with a flash alongside a low enough ISO to freeze the subject while getting motion blur in the background.

Adapting to Organic Flame & Ambient Light

Unlike consistent artificial stage lights, organic festival lighting drops off rapidly over short distances—the inevitable inverse square law. A face inches from a burning torch may be brightly lit, while someone standing two feet behind them falls into deep shadows. Preserving these delicate lighting

dynamics requires careful visual evaluation.

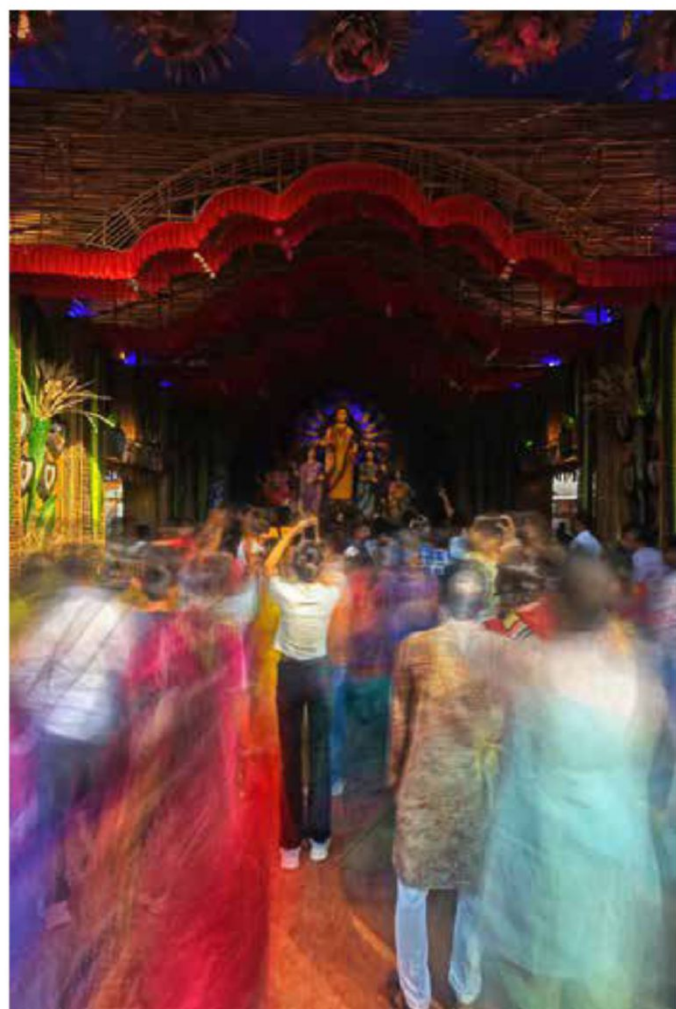
Traditional fire sources and oil lamps cast a warm, golden radiance that defines the mood of night rituals. Allowing ambient darkness to envelop the edges of your frame enhances the atmospheric depth, drawing the viewer's focus entirely to the illuminated subjects. When fire or lanterns serve as your key light, focus on how the light wraps around faces and fabrics, prioritising key highlight retention over bright shadow detail.

Technical Adaptations

When operating in low-light and often-unpredictable environments, configuring your gear for maximum flexibility allows you to focus entirely on composition and timing. With that being said, practice is of paramount importance.

Exposure Strategy (Manual + Auto-ISO): Set your aperture to its widest setting (f/1.4 to f/2.8) to gather maximum light physically, and lock your shutter speed between 1/160s and 1/250s to prevent unwanted motion blur on moving people. Enable Auto-ISO with an upper limit capped at ISO 6400 or 12800, letting the sensor automatically adjust exposure as subjects move toward and away from light sources.

White Balance Control: Avoid Auto White Balance (AWB), which often attempts to correct warm lighting into neutral grays. Manually set your White Balance to 3000K–3600K or Tungsten to preserve the rich orange glow of traditional fires without making skin tones look oversaturated. You can avoid





this by shooting RAW+jpeg as RAW retains all detail required, and allows you to tweak the WB in post.

Highlight Metering: Because flames burn far brighter than the surrounding night, standard evaluative metering can trick your camera into overexposing faces. Use Highlight-Weighted Metering or Spot Metering pointed at flame-lit faces to keep human features exposed cleanly without blowing out the primary light sources.

Focusing System: Utilise Continuous Autofocus (AF-C/ Servo) coupled with Eye Auto-Focus paired to a button on the camera to be toggled quickly. In dim environments, single-point autofocus often hunts; eye-tracking locks reliably onto human faces even through smoke and crowd movement. However, sometimes the eye AF can hunt if there are too many people in the frame, so toggle it off and use a small zone/single point focus point to acquire focus more accurately.

Optics: Pair this system with fast prime lenses like a 35mm f/1.4 for environmental storytelling and an 85mm f/1.8 for candid portraits from a respectful distance. You can also use an all-in-one lens like 35-100mm F/2.8 from Tamron for

additional manoeuvring flexibility—however, the 1-2 stops in the loss of light means you will have to bump up your ISO to use reasonably fast shutter speeds, or pair your shots with a flash.

Agile Equipment Choice: Leave tripods and heavy zoom lenses behind. A minimalist setup featuring one or two compact prime lenses and a comfortable cross-body strap ensures you remain mobile, safe, and respectful while navigating tightly packed ceremonial spaces. Even for an external flash, you have compact, retro-style flash options that sit almost flush on the body and deliver adequate power when needed.

Photography cultural festivals at night is an exercise in balancing technical discipline with deep respect for the tradition unfolding around you. By adapting your settings to organic light sources and embracing the energy of the crowd, you capture not just how a festival looks, but how it feels to stand in the middle of it.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

Capturing Festivals with Phones:

Tips for Best Quality



Cultural festivals are an explosion of movement, colour, and deeply rooted traditions. Whether you are walking through the vibrant pigment storms of *Holi*, the glowing lantern-lit streets of *Diwali* and Mid-Autumn Festival, or the dynamic processions of Carnival, capturing the spirit of these celebrations requires speed, adaptability, and eye for detail. While heavy DSLR setups used to dominate event photography, modern smartphones equipped with advanced computational photography, multi-lens arrays, and high-dynamic-range sensors are fully capable of producing gallery-worthy images. Mastering mobile festival photography comes down to preparing your device, mastering tricky lighting, using deliberate action-capture techniques, and engaging with subjects ethically.



Preparation & Device Setup

Before stepping into a crowded festival street, your device needs to be configured for maximum performance and image quality. The fast-paced environment leaves very little room for troubleshooting settings on the fly, making pre-event preparation essential.

- **Clean your Optics:** Festival grounds are routinely filled with dust, street food oils, powder, and constant fingerprint smudges. A dirty lens creates a distracting hazy glare around light sources, ruining nighttime lanterns or sunny outdoor shots. Keep a dedicated microfiber cloth in your pocket and clear your lens frequently.
- **Enable Gridlines:** Turn on 3x3 gridlines in your camera settings. In chaotic festival crowds where moments happen in milliseconds, visual gridlines help you instantly apply the Rule of Thirds, ensuring your horizons stay level and your subjects are balanced naturally within the frame.
- **Shoot RAW or High Resolution:** Switch from standard JPEG or HEIC compression to RAW mode, available in native settings or dedicated Pro/Manual modes. RAW files retain uncompressed sensor data, capturing maximum dynamic range. This gives you invaluable leeway during editing to recover shadow detail in dark crowds or preserve highlight details in bright daylight.
- **Clear Storage and Power Up:** High-res files and continuous shooting consume massive amounts of storage and battery power. Clear space beforehand, disable non-essential background apps to prevent overheating, and carry a compact portable power bank to keep your phone active through all-day events.

Lighting & Exposure Mastery

Lighting at cultural festivals is notoriously dynamic, constantly shifting from harsh direct sunlight to flickering candlelight, fireworks, and deep ambient shadows. Adapting to these dramatic contrast variations determines whether your photos look amateurish or professional.

- **Avoid Digital Zoom:** Digital zoom merely crops pixels from your sensor, degrading overall image resolution and introducing digital noise. Stick to your phone's dedicated optical lenses, switching cleanly between standard wide, ultra-wide, and optical telephoto focal lengths. If you need a tighter shot, physically move closer to the subject whenever safe to do so.



- **Lock Exposure Manually:** Allowing your smartphone camera to auto-expose every shot often results in blown-out highlights, especially when photographing light displays, bonfires, or brightly illuminated traditional garments. Tap your subject on-screen to focus, hold to activate exposure lock (AE/AF Lock), and slide the brightness icon down slightly. Underexposing slightly preserves rich colour saturation and prevents bright areas from losing detail.
- **Stabilise Low-Light and Night Shots:** Capturing nighttime rituals requires longer shutter speeds, leaving your shots vulnerable to motion blur from micro-jitters. When night mode activates, transform your body into a stabiliser by tucking your elbows tightly against your torso and taking a slow breath before tapping the shutter. Leaning against a stationary street structure or mounting your phone onto a compact travel tripod ensures crisp night exposures.

Dynamic Action and Framing Techniques

Capturing the energy of dancers, musicians, and sprawling crowds requires proactive framing and tailored shooting techniques. Rather than pointing and shooting standard eye-level snaps, experiment with dynamic perspectives to convey scale, movement, and emotion.

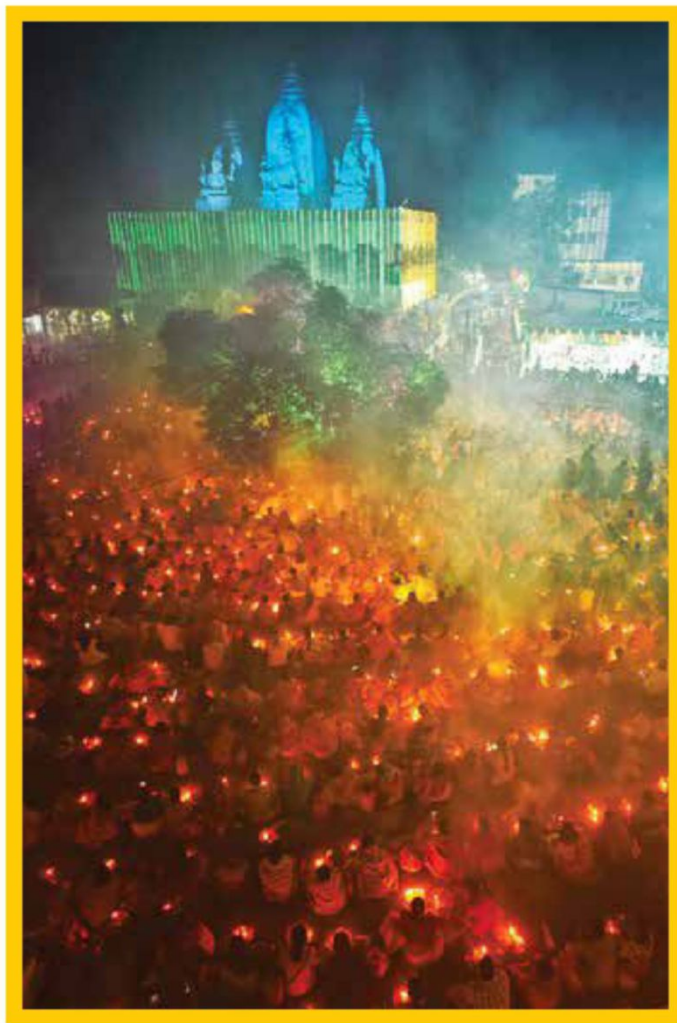
- **Using Burst Mode for Fast Motion:** Cultural

performances feature rapid, unpredictable movements—from spinning dancers to traditional martial arts displays. Relying on single shutter taps often misses the peak moment of action. Activate burst mode by holding down or sliding the shutter button during high-speed action. This captures a rapid series of frames, allowing you to select the precise split-second where lighting, posture, and facial expression align perfectly.

- **Leveraging Portrait Mode for Intricate Crafts:** Cultural celebrations feature incredible artistry in costume design, body paint, and ceremonial jewelry. To make these elements stand out against busy backgrounds, utilise portrait mode or manual wide-aperture settings (f/1.4 to f/2.8). This isolates your subject using software-generated depth of field, blurring out background crowd distractions and keeping the intricate details of traditional clothing razor-sharp.
- **Adopting Low-Angle Perspectives:** Default eye-level photos often fail to communicate the grand scale of festival floats, tall architectural structures, or commanding performers. Lower your device to chest or ground level and tilt the camera slightly upward. This low perspective elongates lines, magnifies depth, makes performers appear heroic, and gives viewers an immersive sense of standing directly within the crowd.







Ethical Storytelling & Candid Moments

Technical perfection means very little without authentic emotion. Cultural festivals are fundamentally about human connection, community, and heritage. Capturing genuine moments while respecting the local community creates meaningful visual storytelling.

- **Focus on Unposed Candid Moments:** Staged portraits can feel stiff and disconnected from the festival's actual energy. Step back and observe the subtle interactions unfolding around the main stage: craftsmen preparing backstage, elder community members sharing stories, or children marveling at light displays. Candid shots preserve the natural atmosphere and genuine expressions of celebration.
- **Seek Consent and Respect Boundaries:** Festival photography requires an ongoing balance between capturing authentic moments and respecting personal privacy. Before taking tight portraits or photographing intimate spiritual ceremonies, make eye contact, smile, or offer a polite gesture to request permission. Building instant rapport leads to relaxed, trusting subjects who

welcome your lens. If someone signals discomfort, respect their boundaries immediately and move on.

- **Build a Complete Visual Narrative:** Avoid focusing exclusively on one element of the event. Aim to capture a balanced mix of wide, medium, and close-up shots. Combine wide environmental scenes that highlight the overall crowd scale with medium shots of active performers, and finish with macro close-ups of festive foods, instruments, and traditional crafts. Assembled together, these varied perspectives form a rich, immersive photo series that truly captures the heart of the festival.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

The “One-Lens” Festival Loadout

Minimalism, Mobility, and Creative Discipline Amidst Chaos

Entering a cultural festival with a heavy camera bag is an exercise in self-inflicted friction. Navigating either the dense, powder-choked streets of Vrindavan during *Holi*, pushing through the vibrant processional crowds of *Ganpati aagman/visarjan*, or documenting the rhythmic twilight dances of *Sinulog* in Cebu, cultural festivals are chaotic, fast-moving, and sensorially overwhelming environments. In these settings, every extra piece of gear is not just physical weight, it is a tax that dilutes your presence and slows your reaction time. The “One-Lens” approach is more than an aesthetic constraint. It is a foolproof strategy and psychological philosophy. By deliberately stripping down your kit to a single camera body and one prime or versatile zoom lens, you trade theoretical flexibility for practical speed, intimacy, and uninterrupted visual flow.







1. Creative Paralysis & The Illusion of Choice

In high-intensity documentary settings, decision fatigue is the enemy of compelling storytelling. When you carry a multi-lens kit like a holy trinity, your brain is perpetually running background calculations: Should I swap to the 85mm for this portrait? Is the 24mm wide enough for this procession?

While you hesitate, reach into your shoulder bag, and swap optics, the fleeting glance, the falling light, or the spontaneous burst of emotion is gone forever. Carrying a single lens—be it a prime or an all-in-one (AIO) zoom—removes the question of “how to frame this from afar”. Primes force you into physical engagement, stopping zooming with your fingers and starting moving with your feet.

2. Speed, Agility, and Personal Safety

Cultural festivals are notoriously unpredictable. Processions move erratically, weather conditions can turn rapidly, and crowds can condense within seconds. A photographer laden with a 15-pound backpack is slow to pivot, prone to fatigue, and easily blocked by dense crowds.

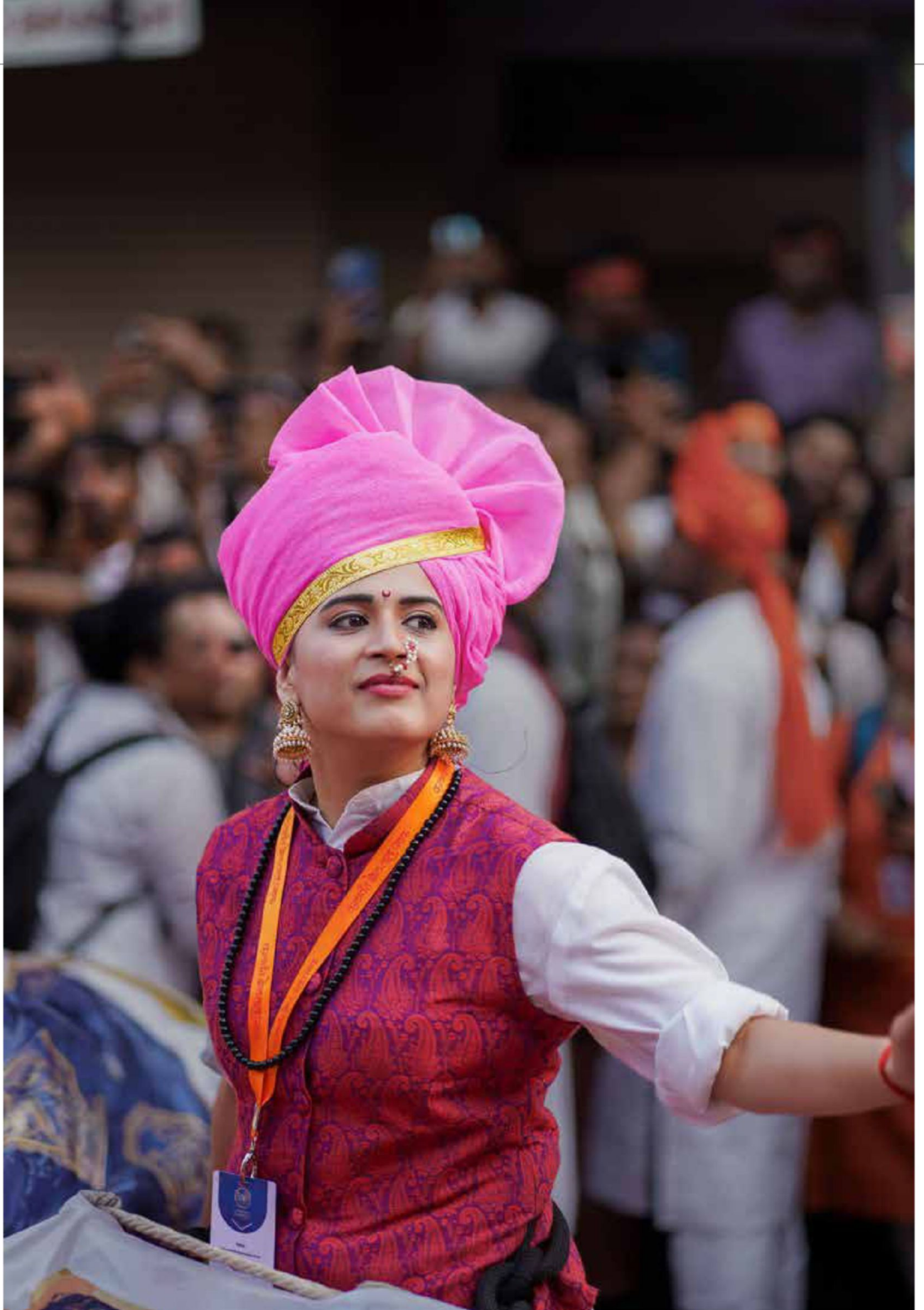
Operating stripped-down with a lightweight setup offers immense tactical advantages:

- **Physical Endurance:** Walking 15 to 20 kilometres across uneven terrain over a multi-day festival requires stamina. Less weight directly translates to sustained energy and sharper focus during peak golden-hour moments.

- **Element Protection:** Changing lenses in an environment flying with coloured powders (*Holi*), water spray (*Songkran*), or airborne dust and mud (Glastonbury or rural rituals) guarantees sensor contamination. Sealing a single lens onto your body beforehand mitigates risk completely.
- **Low Profile:** Massive telephoto zoom lenses scream “outsider” or “press”. A compact setup allows you to blend smoothly into the crowd, reducing visual intrusion and allowing subjects to act naturally.

3. Selecting Your Ideal Single Optic

- **35mm Prime:** Serves as the classic environmental focal length. It excels at capturing surrounding context while staying close enough for intimate portraits, and its wide aperture makes it ideal for low-light situations like street processions, night markets, crowded temple grounds, and indoor rituals. However, its primary trade-off is that tight portraits require you to stand very close to your subject, yielding minimal background compression.
- **50mm Prime:** Renders subject geometry with a natural perspective, delivering outstanding subject separation and clean background isolation. It shines when shooting individual performer portraits, detail shots, and medium-range crowd interactions. The main limitation is that it can feel overly restrictive when navigating tight indoor spaces or narrow, packed alleyways.



- **28mm or 24mm Prime:** Provides an immersive, visceral perspective that forces the photographer directly into the action. It offers excellent depth of field for zone focusing, making it a great match for high-energy dance circles, ritual sprays, wide festival landscapes, and chaotic street dances. Its drawback is edge distortion, which can stretch facial features if subjects are positioned near the borders of the frame.
- **24-70mm f/2.8 or 24-105mm F/4 Zoom:** A standard zoom lens part of the holy trinity, this lens delivers maximum framing versatility without requiring lens changes, allowing for rapid adaptation from wide environmental scenes to tight portraits. It is particularly useful for fast-moving, multi-stage events with restricted physical access, such as media pits. The key downside is its physical footprint: it is significantly heavier and can draw unwanted attention.
- **50-150 F/2.8 Zoom:** An advanced, specialised version of the everyday standard zoom lens, this particular focal range is available natively to Sony shooters, and Nikon shooters can choose Tamron's equivalent, albeit a vari-aperture. It is heavier than your standard 24-70, considering some of those even have refreshed versions cutting their weights, but allow you to achieve even more compression and depth as compared to 70mm or 105mm.

4. Developing “Focal Length Intuition”

The ultimate reward of the one-lens strategy is the

development of pre-visualisation. When you shoot exclusively with a single focal length—such as a 28mm or 35mm—for several consecutive days, your eyes internalise the boundaries of the frame.

You no longer need to look through the camera to know where to stand. As a dancer spins into view or a shaman raises a fire torch, you naturally adjust your physical distance so that when the camera reaches your eye, the composition is already 90% complete. This seamless synergy between vision and physical movement produces photographs that feel spontaneous, immersive, and visually authentic. This is what the masters did in the era of film, manually using zone focussing to shoot streets.

5. Field Workflow & Practical Tips

To maximise your success with a single-lens loadout, adopt the following field practices:

- **Wear your camera, don't bag it:** Use a comfortable cross-body sling strap or belt holster. Your camera should be immediately accessible at chest height, not stowed away in a zippered pocket.
- **Harness environmental geometry:** Without a telephoto lens to crop out background clutter, lean on natural elements like doorways, arches, smoke, backlighting, or dramatic shadows to isolate your subject within wide or medium environmental frames.
- **Work the extremes of perspective:** Avoid standing at eye-level for every shot. Crouch low under processional





banners, raise the camera high above crowd heads using live view, or shoot over shoulder lines to add depth to your composition.

Essential One-Lens Field Checklist

- **Optic Choice:** Fast prime (35mm or 50mm recommended) with weather-sealing.
- **Protection:** Clear UV filter (acts as a sacrificial glass layer against paint, dust, or moisture).
- **Strap System:** Ergonomic cross-body sling to distribute weight evenly across a 10-hour day.
- **Body Accessories:** Dual high-capacity memory cards (slot-1 backup) and 2 extra batteries in your pocket.

Presence Over Gear

Cultural festivals are celebrations of human connection, heritage, faith, and artistic expression. The true measure of a festival photograph lies not in pin-sharp corner resolution or extreme focal range, but in its ability to capture the emotion, energy, and atmosphere of a shared human moment.

By shedding the weight of additional lenses, you set yourself free to step out from behind the wall of equipment and fully participate in the event, moving faster, observing deeper, and connecting more genuinely with the people around you. In cultural festival photography, less gear, in a lot of times, invariably leads to more meaningful images.

Text: Anirudh Iyer

STREET PHOTOGRAPHY: LEARNING TO SEE THE MOMENT BEFORE IT HAPPENS

Street photography is often described as the art of capturing the unexpected. A stranger steps into a patch of sunlight, two people briefly align against an interesting wall, a cyclist cuts across a crowded intersection, or an expression appears and disappears in an instant. The photographer presses the shutter and, if everything comes together, the resulting image feels almost accidental, yet complete. The best street photographs are rarely as accidental as they appear. What looks like luck is often observation, preparation and timing. Experienced street photographers learn to recognise patterns in the environment, anticipate movement and wait for the right person to enter an interesting frame. For someone beginning in street photography, the most useful shift is to stop thinking about simply *finding photographs* and start learning to see *photographs before they happen*.



The Decisive Moment: Anticipate, Don't React

Street photography moves quickly. A person can cross a patch of light in a second, an idol can disappear behind a bus and an expression can change before you have even raised the camera. If you wait for the perfect moment and then react, you will often be too late.

Instead, look for situations that have the potential to produce a photograph and position yourself before the action occurs. A shaft of sunlight falling across a pavement is already interesting; now wait for your subject to walk through it. A colourful wall may provide the background, but the photograph may only come together when a person wearing a contrasting colour enters the frame.

A useful exercise is to spend 20 minutes photographing without walking continuously. Find one interesting location, observe what happens there and wait for the photograph to come to you.

Reading Light on the Street

Street photographers often look for interesting people first and light second. Reversing that order can transform the way you photograph. A narrow strip of sunlight between buildings, the shadow cast by a balcony, light spilling from a shop or the glow from a bus window can become the stage. Once you identify that stage, wait for the right subject to enter it.

This is particularly effective in cities where architecture creates constantly changing patterns of light and shadow. Harsh midday sunlight, which can be difficult for conventional portraiture, can become extremely useful for street photography because it creates strong graphic shapes and dramatic contrast.

Exposure becomes important when the contrast is extreme. If the subject is standing in bright light against a dark background, check your highlights and consider using exposure compensation rather than allowing the camera to make an average decision for the entire frame. In manual exposure, take a moment to establish an exposure for the light you intend to photograph and wait for your subject to enter.

At night, a faster lens—perhaps around $f/1.8$ to $f/2.8$ —can help in low light, although a wider aperture is not always necessary. If you want more of the street to remain recognisable, stopping down slightly and increasing ISO may produce a stronger environmental photograph.

The Art of Layering: Make the Chaos Work

Busy streets can be intimidating for a beginner. But rather than trying to eliminate all of that information, learn to organise it. Layering is one of the most effective ways to create depth in a street photograph. Think of the frame as having a foreground, middle ground and background. A person might occupy the middle ground while pedestrians pass close to the

camera in the foreground and a shopfront or building provides context behind them.

Wide-angle lenses around 24mm or 28mm are particularly useful for this approach because they allow you to work close to subjects while retaining a significant amount of the environment. A 35mm lens can provide a slightly more natural perspective while still allowing several layers to coexist.

But layering is not simply about putting as many things into the frame as possible. The photograph still needs a visual hierarchy. Ask yourself what the viewer should notice first. One useful exercise is to find a busy location and deliberately photograph it from three distances: wide enough to include the entire scene, closer to isolate an interaction, and very close to concentrate on a detail. Reviewing the three versions will help you understand how distance changes the story.

Beyond the Candid: Photographing Strangers with Respect

People are at the centre of street photography, more so in the event of a festival being celebrated in a public space, but photographing strangers requires more than technical confidence. It requires awareness. There is no single rule that determines when you should ask permission and when you should photograph candidly. Context matters. A person participating in a public procession is different from someone experiencing a private or vulnerable moment.





This dilemma can often be mitigated by learning to read body language. If someone notices the camera and appears uncomfortable, lower it and respect their decision to not be photographed.

Street photography also becomes more interesting when the photographer resists the temptation to photograph people merely because they look “different”. Clothing, age, occupation or appearance should contribute to a story rather than become the sole reason someone is photographed. This is particularly important when photographing children, religious ceremonies, vulnerable communities or emotionally sensitive situations. The strongest street photographs preserve the dignity of the person while revealing something about the environment they inhabit.

Keep the Kit Simple

Street photography is all about timing and precision, even more so when one is capturing festivities and celebrations. These instances demand that anticipation become the practice and dealing with equipment, muscle memory. It is also important that in these cases your kit does not become the reason you miss a valuable shot. A versatile zoom lens can therefore be extremely practical. A wide-to-standard zoom can cover establishing scenes, groups and environmental portraits, while a telephoto zoom can provide reach during processions and performances. Carry spare batteries and



memory cards, and protect equipment from dust, rain, colour powder and unexpected contact with the crowd. During Holi, for example, equipment protection is not an afterthought.

Conclusion

The four skills—anticipation, light, layering and respectful engagement—work best when they are combined. While the camera is only recording the final fraction of a second, it is the photographer who has already made the important decisions: where to stand, what to include, what to exclude, what light to use, what moment to anticipate and how close to get.

For beginners, the most productive exercise may therefore be to slow down. Instead of walking through a neighbourhood trying to photograph everything, choose one location and spend 30 minutes watching. Look at how people move through it, where the light falls, what repeats and what changes. Over time, the street stops looking like a chaotic collection of unrelated events. Patterns begin to emerge. Light becomes something to search for. Backgrounds become deliberate rather than accidental. People become part of visual stories rather than simply subjects passing through the frame. And eventually, what once looked like luck begins to feel like anticipation.

Text: Natasha Kittur

CAPTURING THE COLOURS AND CHAOS OF INDIAN FESTIVALS

Festivities in India rarely come in disciplined, monochrome frames. Streets change character almost overnight, neighbourhoods become gathering spaces, music spills out of loudspeakers, and crowds move through familiar surroundings in a rhythm that can be both exhilarating and overwhelming. For a photographer, it is an almost endless supply of colour, movement and human expression. Photographing an Indian festival is not simply about turning up with a camera and pointing it at the brightest thing in sight. The very abundance that makes these celebrations so visually compelling can make them difficult to photograph well. The challenge is to find order within that chaos. Whether it is the grandeur of *Durga Puja* in Kolkata, the colour of *Holi* across northern India, the illuminated streets of *Diwali*, the energy of *Ganesh Chaturthi* in Mumbai, the elaborate processions of *Onam* or *Dussehra*, or a smaller temple festival in a local community, the photographer needs to look beyond the obvious.

See the Festival Before You Photograph It

The first mistake a photographer can make is to arrive and immediately start shooting. Indian festivals are often deeply rooted in local traditions, religious practices and community participation, and understanding what is happening can make a significant difference to the photographs.

Start With the Big Picture

Before moving in close, establish where you are. An establishing photograph is particularly important in



Indian festival photography because the surroundings often contribute as much to the story as the participants themselves. A wide-angle lens in the region of 24mm or 28mm can be useful here, particularly when working in confined streets. Around 35mm can offer a more natural perspective while still retaining enough of the surroundings to provide context.

Look for visual relationships rather than simply trying to fit as many people as possible into the frame. And once the environment has been established, move closer.



Photo: Hari Menon

Find the Human Story Inside the Crowd

The spectacle is easy to spot from a mile away. The raw narrative often requires more patience. Look for expressions and gestures. A child covered in Holi colours, an elderly devotee watching a procession, or a woman adjusting a family member's traditional clothing can reveal the human experience behind the event.

Portraits become particularly powerful when the environment remains part of the frame. Rather than isolating a subject against a completely blurred background, consider

showing the pandal, market, procession or decorated home around them. A 35mm or 50mm lens works well for this kind of environmental portrait, while a 70–200mm-type telephoto can be useful when working at a respectful distance during performances or rituals.

Learn to Work With Colour

Colour is one of the defining characteristics of Indian festival photography, but simply increasing saturation does not necessarily make a better photograph. India's festivals

offer an extraordinary palette naturally: marigold garlands, vermilion, turmeric yellow, gulal, painted idols, brightly coloured saris, illuminated decorations and elaborate costumes. The photographer's job is to organise those colours within the frame.

One way to do that would be to look for complementary colours and repeating patterns. Instead of photographing every colour at once, sometimes isolating two or three dominant tones can produce a stronger composition. For instance, a row of participants in similar clothing can create rhythm, while a single contrasting colour can become a visual anchor. Another factor to take into account here would be background and exposure. Slightly shifting your perspective can offer contrasting or complementary backgrounds that provide more depth to the frame. For photographers working in RAW, there is greater flexibility during processing, but the objective should still be to capture colour accurately rather than simply making it more intense.

Embrace the Chaos but Find the Moment

Crowds are perhaps the defining challenge of Indian festival photography. There may be no clean background, no predictable movement and very little personal space. Rather than fighting this, use the crowd as part of the composition.

Layering can be particularly effective. Shooting through shoulders, raised hands, decorations or gaps between people

can place the audience inside the scene. At the same time, look for moments of stillness within the movement. For fast-moving processions and dance performances, a shutter speed around 1/500 sec is a useful starting point, moving towards 1/1000 sec or faster for particularly rapid movement. Continuous autofocus can help track moving subjects, and short bursts can improve the chances of capturing a decisive gesture.

But do not be afraid of blur. A slower shutter speed — perhaps 1/15 to 1/60 sec, depending on the movement — can turn moving lights, dancers and processions into expressive streaks. A sharply rendered face surrounded by blurred movement can sometimes communicate the atmosphere of an Indian festival more effectively than a perfectly frozen frame.

Photograph the Light After Dark

Many Indian festivals reach their visual peak after sunset. Diwali streets glow with lamps and decorative lights. *Ganesh Chaturthi* processions move beneath streetlights and illuminated floats. *Durga Puja* pandals can be transformed by elaborate lighting, while local fairs combine bulbs, neon signs, stalls and temporary structures into an unpredictable mixture of illumination.

This is an excellent opportunity to work with available light. Instead of automatically using flash, observe how different



Photo: Hari Menon



Photo: Hari Menon

light sources fall on people. A food stall can become a portrait studio. A string of lamps can create a foreground layer. A brightly illuminated pandal can provide an enormous source of ambient light.

At night, do not be afraid to raise ISO. Depending on the camera, ISO 800, 1600, 3200 or higher may be perfectly reasonable if it allows you to maintain a useful shutter speed. A little noise is generally preferable to an important photograph ruined by camera shake or subject movement. For static scenes, a slower shutter speed can be used creatively. For moving subjects, prioritise shutter speed and let ISO follow.

Use Perspective to Escape the Obvious Frame

In a dense festival crowd, changing your physical position can be more effective than changing camera settings. Get low and a procession can appear monumental. Find a balcony or elevated position and the movement of thousands of people may become a pattern. Move behind the crowd and photograph participants framed by spectators. Look for reflections in shop windows, puddles or polished surfaces after rain.

Just remember that a different angle should have a purpose. A low viewpoint should make the subject feel larger or more imposing; a high viewpoint should reveal scale or pattern. Perspective is strongest when it contributes information rather than simply making the photograph look unusual.

Respect the Ritual

The intensity of Indian festivals can make photographers forget that not every moment is theirs to photograph. Religious ceremonies may contain private or sacred moments. Certain spaces may be reserved for devotees or performers. Some participants may welcome photographs while others may not.

Pay attention. Ask when necessary. If people around you stop photographing, consider whether you should do the same. This is particularly important when photographing vulnerable people, children or communities whose traditions may already be subject to stereotyping.

Final Takeaway

The colours and chaos of Indian festivals are precisely what make them such compelling photographic subjects, but the strongest images rarely come from simply photographing everything that happens in front of the lens. Choose the face in the crowd rather than the entire crowd. Choose the hands preparing the offering rather than only the finished ritual. Choose the contrast between an ancient tradition and the modern city surrounding it.

The photographer's task is to find these moments without losing the larger picture.

Text: Natasha Kittur

FROM LOCAL TRADITION TO GLOBAL AUDIENCE: PHOTOGRAPHING CULTURAL FESTIVALS

Cultural festivals compress an extraordinary amount of visuals—think colour, movement, music, ritual, food, architecture, clothing and emotion—and human activity, all unfolding around one another, often with little warning. A quiet street can transform into a procession route within minutes and a familiar neighbourhood can take on an entirely different character when generations gather to celebrate a tradition.





In festive scenarios it is easy to point the camera at the most colourful or dramatic subject and keep shooting. However good festival photography goes beyond spectacle. It requires the photographer to understand what they are seeing, anticipate what is about to happen and make deliberate choices about what belongs in the frame. A photograph can introduce a local tradition to someone thousands of kilometres away, perhaps to a viewer who does not speak the language, recognise the clothing or understand the ritual being performed. In that sense, the festival photographer becomes both an observer and a storyteller.

The camera has the power to make a community visible to a global audience, but it can also reduce a complex culture to a handful of familiar visual symbols. Whether the assignment involves a religious ceremony, a harvest celebration or a tribal festival, the fundamentals remain remarkably similar: research before arriving, observe before photographing, anticipate rather than simply react, and build a visual story rather than a collection of isolated images.

Research Before You Reach for the Camera

One of the easiest mistakes a photographer can make is to arrive at an unfamiliar event without understanding what it represents. Find out why the festival is celebrated, who participates, which rituals are important and when the significant moments are likely to occur. Understanding the history of the event can also help distinguish between something that merely looks interesting and something that has genuine cultural significance. It is equally important to find

out whether photography is restricted in particular areas or during certain ceremonies.

The objective is not to become an expert overnight. It is to know enough to photograph with awareness.

Think in Stories, Not Single Frames

A festival is rarely best represented by one photograph. A strong festival photo essay should make the viewer feel that they have travelled through the event rather than simply seen a photograph from it.

A useful starting point for beginners is to think in terms of different types of photographs. An establishing shot introduces the location and scale of the event. A medium shot brings the viewer closer to groups of participants and their interactions. A portrait introduces an individual character. A detail shot reveals the objects, textures and small visual elements that make the festival distinctive. An action shot captures movement, performance or a defining ritual. These categories are not rigid rules, but they provide a useful foundation when working in a visually overwhelming environment.

A simple mental checklist can help a novice photographer build a sense of narrative and variety: Where am I? Who is here? What are they doing? What does it look like up close? What is likely to happen next? These questions naturally encourage the photographer to move, observe and change perspective.

Arrive Before the Main Event

Arriving before the crowds allows the photographer to



understand the location and observe how the event comes together. Look at where participants enter, where spectators gather, where performers wait and how the available light changes across the space. More importantly, look at what people are doing before they become part of the spectacle. Performers putting on costumes, musicians tuning instruments, families preparing food, artisans finishing decorations; such instances can produce some of the most intimate photographs of a festival.

The same principle applies after the main event. Once the crowds begin to disappear, the atmosphere changes. Performers rest, vendors pack up, families leave and volunteers clean the space. A quiet photograph at the end can sometimes provide a more meaningful conclusion than another image of the main ceremony.



Photograph People, Not Just the Spectacle

Festivals are visually seductive. Bright costumes, fireworks, dancers, decorations and crowded streets naturally attract the eye and the camera. But if every photograph is built around spectacle, the people who give the festival its meaning can disappear. Look instead for expressions, relationships and gestures. A child watching a procession with fascination can reveal more about the emotional experience of the festival than a wide photograph of the procession itself. An elderly participant observing a ritual can suggest its connection to memory and generations. A group of friends laughing between performances can communicate the social dimension of the event.

A moderate focal length, such as 35mm or 50mm on a full-frame camera, can work well for environmental portraits because it allows the photographer to include some of the surroundings without making the subject feel distant. A longer lens, such as a 70–200mm, can be useful when the photographer needs to work from farther away, particularly during performances where approaching the subject would be disruptive. The technical choice, however, should serve the relationship between subject and story.

Choose Lenses According to the Story

A cultural festival rarely allows the photographer to remain at one distance from the subject, which is why versatility is often more valuable than carrying a large collection of specialised lenses.

A wide-angle lens in the region of 24mm or 28mm can be useful for establishing photographs, crowded streets and environmental scenes where the photographer wants the viewer to feel physically present within the event. Around 35mm to 50mm, the perspective becomes more natural for people, small groups and environmental portraits, making these focal lengths particularly useful for documentary work.

A moderate telephoto, such as a 70–200mm, offers another kind of storytelling. It allows the photographer to isolate expressions, gestures and performers without physically entering the action.

A zoom lens can be an excellent choice for beginners because it allows them to experiment with perspective without constantly changing lenses. The trade-off is that convenience should never replace movement. Even with a zoom, physically changing position can alter the relationship between foreground, subject and background in ways that simply changing focal length cannot.

However, while in flow state, do not allow equipment to become a distraction. A lightweight setup that allows you to move quickly and observe continuously can often produce a stronger documentary story than a large kit that keeps you occupied.

Avoid Turning Culture Into a Stereotype

Global audiences often encounter unfamiliar cultures through a limited number of visual symbols. That makes the photographer's selection of images particularly important. If a photo essay contains only elaborate costumes, dramatic rituals and unusual practices, the viewer may come away with a distorted impression of the community. The solution is not to avoid spectacle, but to place it alongside ordinary human experiences.

Photograph laughter, waiting, conversation, preparation and fatigue. Photograph children watching, older people participating, families eating and friends talking between performances. These seemingly ordinary moments can provide the context that spectacular photographs lack. A good photo story should leave room for both perspectives.

Ultimately, photographing cultural festivals requires two forms of awareness. Photographic awareness allows you to recognise light, movement, composition, gesture and the decisive moment. Cultural awareness tells you when to move closer, when to wait, when to ask permission and when to put the camera down. When the two come together, the photographer is capable of creating a visual bridge between the people inside the celebration and those looking at it from somewhere else.

Text: Natasha Kittur

PHOTO SCAPEScape

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Name: Nillanj Gosrani
Camera & Lens: Canon 6D mark 2 / 70-200mm F 2.8
Focal Length: 165mm
Shutter Speed: 1/250
Aperture: 2.8
ISO: 1000
Instagram ID: @nillanjgosrani



Name: Aslam Mulani
Camera & Lens: Realme 9 Pro 5G
Focal Length: 25 MM
Shutter Speed: 1/160s
Aperture: f1.7
ISO: 50
Instagram: @photographerslamnaz1133



Name: Debarshi Mukherjee
Camera & Lens: Nikon D7000, Sigma 17-50
Focal length: 17mm
Shutter Speed: 1/60s
Aperture: f/2.8
ISO: 500
Instagram ID: @framesbydebarshi



Name: Vaishnavi Karelia
Camera & Lens: Canon EOS R50 + RF-S 18-150mm F3.5-6.3 IS STM
Focal Length: 56mm
Shutter Speed: 1/1000 sec
Aperture: f/6.3
ISO: 500
Instagram ID: @lens_on_lives



Name: Priya Ojha
Camera & Lens: Iphone 12
Focal length: 1.55 mm
Shutter Speed: 1/100
Aperture: f/2.4
ISO: 100
Instagram ID: @escape_withpriya



Name: Sagar R Kumar
Camera & Lens: Sony ILCE-7M4 +
 Samyang AF 60-180mm F2.8
Focal length: 180mm
Shutter Speed: 1/1000 sec
Aperture: f/4
ISO: 400
Instagram ID: @filmoholic_sagar



Name: Rohan Sandeep Pawar
Camera & Lens: Lumix s5 & Sigma
Focal length: 56mm
Shutter Speed: 1/400
Aperture: f1.4
ISO: 500
Instagram ID: rohanpawar.1812



Name: Nutan Daulatrao Dhote
Camera Lens: Sony Alpha 6400
Focal Length: 50mm
Shutter Speed: 1/125s
Apperture: f/5.6
ISO: 6400
Instagram Id: @nutan.lens



Name: Shankar Debnath
Camera and Lens: Canon EOS R6 and EF 70 - 200mm
Focal Length: 135mm
Shutter Speed: 1/800sec
Aperture: f/4.5
ISO: 1000
Instagram ID: @shankyscreation



Name: Vikrant Mahobe
Camera & Lens: Canon EOS R6ii With Canon 35mm 1.8 RF Lens
Focal Length: 35mm
Shutter Speed: 1/640 Second
Aperture: f/1.8
Iso: 800
Instagram ID: @vikrantmahobephography

PHOTO MONTAGE

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My name is Rajesh Dhar and I am a Kolkata-based photographer. I explore the colour, rhythm and emotional energy of India's cultural and religious traditions. I am a graphic designer by profession and a photographer by heart. Since taking up photography in 2006, I've developed a distinctive visual language rooted in candid human-interest storytelling and a deep fascination with the diverse communities and festivals of India.

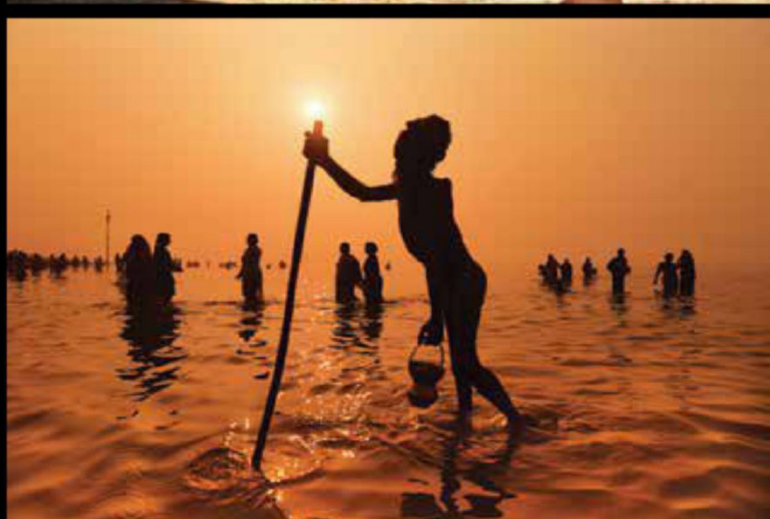
My photographic practice focuses particularly on rural festivals, communal celebrations and everyday life, where gesture and human emotion come together to create compelling visual narratives. I believe photography can reveal both the virtues and contradictions of society, transforming fleeting moments into enduring stories. My festival photographs celebrate not only spectacle and colour, but also the intimate connections between people, faith, tradition and collective identity.

Over the years, my work has earned significant national and international recognition. I have won or been awarded in

competitions including the Nebras International Photo Contest, Mela Moments, Indian Sports Photography Award, Mangrove Photography Awards, Wanderlust International Travel Photo Contest, World Energy Council Photo Contest, ACIAR Photo Competition, Dekho Apna Desh, Samyang Mega Photo Contest, Fokus International Photo Awards and numerous others. My photographs have also been exhibited internationally and published in respected magazines and photography platforms, including Better Photography, Photography Masterclass, Wisden Cricketers' Almanack etc.

I continue to travel across India, especially into lesser-known rural regions, documenting festivals, cultural practices and the lives of people with sensitivity and authenticity. Through my images, I seek to preserve the vibrancy of India's living traditions while presenting universal stories of humanity that resonate beyond geography and culture.

Instagram: @rdp5.6



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