

In Love With  
**Life**



*A journey through life in photographs*

**T. S. Satyan**

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## In Love With Life

A journey through life in photographs  
by T. S. Satyan

180 pages  
148 photographs

In the course of a career spanning 50 years, T. S. Satyan has photographed leading luminaries in politics, industry and the arts; the rich; the famous... He has enjoyed privileged access to many of the great names of our times and has chronicled some unforgettable moments in history.

Yet this book does not feature faces that have made headlines or occupied impressive positions in corridors of power.

This is a book about Satyan's favourite people—the simple, ordinary folk—some of whom live in comfort, most of whom struggle to survive, all of whom seem to leap out of the printed page to touch you with their stories. *In Love With Life* offers poignant glimpses of the *Shri Saamaanya*, or common man, coming into this world, moving through childhood, learning the skills to earn a livelihood, getting married, shouldering the responsibilities of parenthood, enjoying youth, accepting its loss and coming to terms with the inevitability of death. It is a story in photographs, sensitively told.

As you travel through the pages ahead, you may find that imagination takes over where pure observation ends. Which is as it should be.

"(Satyan's) pictures touch us as only great art can. Here is poignant searching of our own hearts."

— *The Times of India*

"...one of those disarming experiences which leaves the spoken word hardly capable of the right expression."

— *The Hindu*

"(Satyan's photographs) add up to a wonderful insight into the reality of life."

— *W. G. Eagleton,  
Former UNESCO Executive, Paris*

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## Satyan and his camera

by H.Y. Sharada Prasad

STUDYING in the University town of Mysore, I had the privilege of having as my contemporaries a few persons who, in later life, rose to the top of their chosen fields. Among them were E.S. Venkataramiah, who became Chief Justice of India; V. Dorerwamy Iyengar, the veena maestro; Gopala Krishna Adiga, who left the mark of his poetic genius on Kannada letters and R.K.



Laxman, the cartoonist. The last three of them had caught public attention even as students. Another person who had begun to be looked upon as a man with a future was T.S.

Satyan. Already he was a familiar figure, with his smile and his camera. I still recall his pictures published in the journal of the Mysore University Union, along with cartoons by Laxman. That was in 1941. Today, six decades later, Satyan is one of the best-known and best-loved photographers in our country, one whom the nation has honoured with the Padma Shri as a tribute to his talent.

Some contemporaries drift apart and come together again, like logs carried by a river. With Satyan I have been lucky to be in close contact all these sixty years. For some time we shared the same room in Bombay when he worked in that fondly remembered magazine, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and I was with the *Express* newspapers. Then we both migrated to Delhi, where we lived near each other for thirty years and met several times a week.

We also worked together on a book on Karnataka. It had pictures by him and the text was by me.

This nearness has enabled me to see how Satyan works. I have marvelled at the speed at which his eye and mind size up the pictorial possibilities of a situation. His work is marked by a characteristic spontaneity, openness and zest for life. He is not one of those professionals who brood for hours over camera positions, shutter speeds and the lens to use.



25-year-old Satyan, Udupi, Karnataka, 1948



Jawaharlal Nehru, Parliament House, New Delhi, 1962

His mind moves like lightning. His eye observes more than his camera does. In this respect he is like the star batsman who must take advantage of every new ball bowled at him rather than the painter who has time to set up his easel. The result is that Satyan's art conceals itself and gives one the impression of effortlessness. He communicates instantly. He emerges as a discoverer, not a mere recorder.

Satyan began his working life as a school teacher but he soon realized that the camera was his metier. He worked as news cameraman for the *Deccan Herald* of Bangalore. But right from the beginning he took care not to be imprisoned by the banal and the routine. He caught the eye of the editors within

the country and abroad through his innovative and imaginative features. His stories were not only visually vivid but were marked by humanity and humour.

A feature writer works with two instruments—the camera and the typewriter. Satyan is as much at home with words as with pictures. Those who have seen his work in the old *Illustrated Weekly of India*, his features released through the celebrated Black Star Publishing Company, New York and the pictures he has done for *Life*, UNICEF and many other international organizations will agree that he ranks with the best of contemporary pictorial essayists.

Every photograph is a record of some event, some place, of some person, a visual document which can be called in as evidence in the court of history. But the better photograph ceases to be a thing of the past. It acquires a life of its own and remains perennially fresh and relevant.

Satyan has given us many such pictures. I recall his famous picture of Jawaharlal Nehru in the corridor of Parliament House. Even more than in his pictures of the famous, it is in his pictures of the anonymous—the village schoolboy, the concerned mother and the dimpled girl whose eyes outline the gleam of the jewels she is wearing—that Satyan's sparkle and sympathy manifest themselves.

Satyan has done his quota of news pictures and studies of landscape and architectural masterpieces. But it is people that he most loves to photograph, particularly children. Little wonder that UNICEF organized an exhibition of his pictures of young people in the UN headquarters in New York during the International Year of the Child in 1979. It is his gift of sympathy that has enabled Satyan to remain bubbly youthful and creative in his late seventies. ■

remembering a photo-feature I did in the late forties.

For me, work is like meditation, photography is my *sadhana*. Whatever one does should be one's *sadhana*. If you don't evolve as a person, then no amount of craftsmanship or technical skill is worth anything. It was on the basis of my work that I got my first freelance assignment with UNICEF in 1972. They felt they had at last found a photographer who would capture images of children, as they wanted. This eventually led to my exhibition at the UN in 1979 to mark the Year of the Child.

I did work as a regular newspaper photographer. Puthan Joseph invited me to join the *Deccan Herald* when it was started in 1948. One of my first news photographs was the *azhagetrans* of dancer Indrani Rehman. But I resigned in 1950 when C.R. Mandy asked me to join him at the *Weekly* as a feature writer in Bombay. I didn't like the city. Neither did I like working in an office; I wanted to be footloose and fancy-free. Mandy readily agreed with me and let me return to Mysore. I began writing too, and my first article abroad was published in *The Christian Science Monitor*. When my brother Nagarajan got a job in Delhi as a photographer attached to the Photo Division of the Government of India, I eventually joined him in 1957 and made the city my home. I was freelancing for *Life* magazine and they too felt that it would be better for me to be based in Delhi. With Delhi as my base for thirty-five years, I travelled widely in India and neighbouring lands and returned to Mysore in 1989 to continue my romance with the camera.

GREAT pictures are made, not taken. There is no room for being casual. There has to be time to spend with the subject. One should not be easily satisfied. It is only then that the image transcends the merely documentary.

I always endeavour to make sure that my images are sharp, clear and uncluttered. My emphasis is always on the main subject. I concentrate on getting this right, as far as possible, and let the surroundings remain as they are. While shooting I compose my shot full-frame. Although development in technology has made a difference, I don't want the machine to dictate to me. I do photography on my own terms. I try my best to be a down-to-earth realist. I don't indulge in any gimmickry. I have no pretences. I try to make my pictures as refreshing as possible.

I prefer black-and-white photography. For one thing, it is more graphic and lasts longer. (I still have the negative of my first prize-winning photo!) It is also as challenging as colour photography. Though there is colour all around, a black and white image does not distract; indeed it highlights the essence.

My greatest reward has been public recognition. I have been able to communicate to the common people, those who ask during the show, "who is the photographer?" and are surprised to see it is me, not somebody on a pedestal. They talk to me. I am loved in return; I have to give them something—my best. I have to share my aesthetic delight. My concern is not to impress people. I am content to be a recorder of life, beauty and truth as I see it. ■



Every child comes with the message  
that God is not yet discouraged of man.

— Rabindranath Tagore (1916)





Chandi Chowk, Delhi, 1962



Brahmawara, Karnataka, 1984



Thandavapura, near Mysore, Karnataka, 2000





Bhanupatna, Orissa, 1977