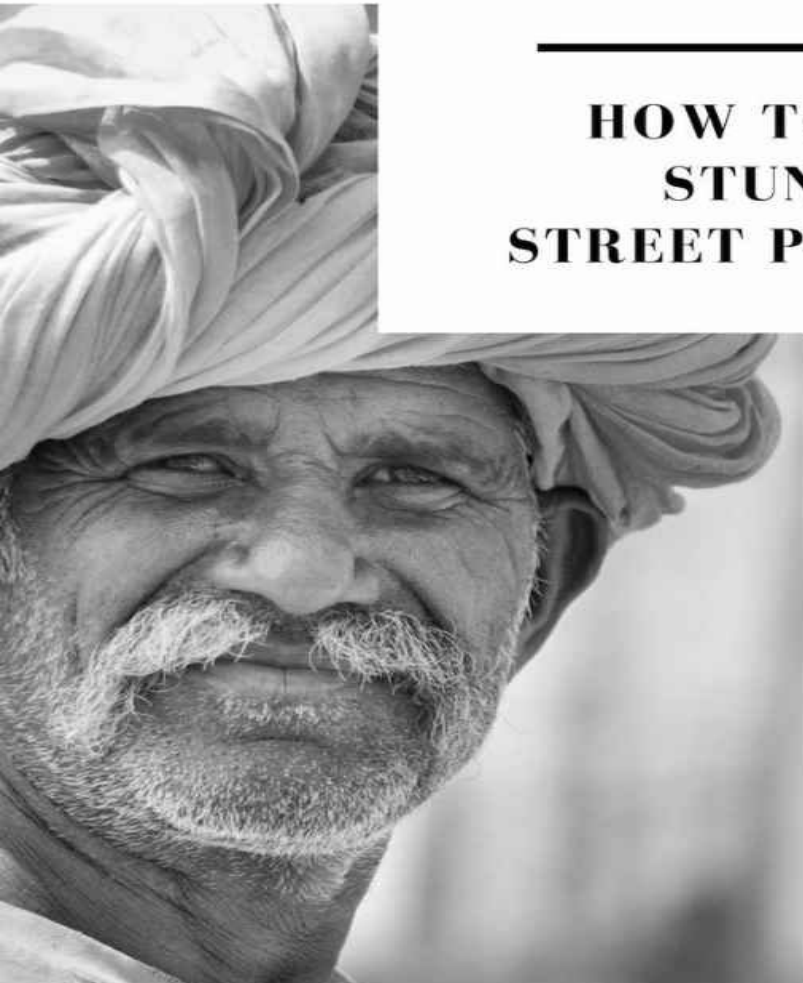




STREET PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

**HOW TO MAKE
STUNNING
STREET PORTRAITS**



PRIYA RANJAN

Street Portrait Photography



How to make stunning street portraits

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Dedicated to
my wife Reena
and my son Tarun
without your support
I won't have learnt photography
Leave aside writing a book on photography!

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Introduction

What makes you comfortable can ruin you, what makes you uncomfortable is the only way to grow.

– Bill Eckstrom

It takes courage, boldness, and a magnetic personality to make portrait of strangers, right? No. If that was the case, I couldn't pose any stranger on the street or a public place, couldn't document life on the streets, and couldn't engage with them for stories.

As a kid, I was petrified about the idea of facing strangers. I preferred to stay in my shell rather than make new friends. Now I chase strangers and love to engage with them. That's the transformation street photography has brought in my life.



Photograph 1: Can't resist myself taking his photo.

Contrary to the belief that street photography or photojournalism is meant for the extroverted souls, it just takes preparation, participation, and practice (3Ps), to capture stunning portraits (4th P) of amazing people (5th P) you meet on the street.

Wow! You just discovered *5Ps of Street Portraiture*. Sounds like *4Ps of marketing*.

If you've understood this, you can drop this book now, save time, and hit the streets with your camera. If you need to make this concept more profound, then bear with me. This is a very crisp book to help you with vital concepts without meandering.



Photograph 2: The enthusiastic cadet ready for the parade.

Before I introduce the book to you, I would like to thank the people who allowed me to shoot them. These people help reach one civilization to another through their photos and stories. They had courage, or, maybe, I encouraged them, to let the life of the city, state, and country get documented through their own pictures.

Why should you take street photos?

People relate to people. They want to know and learn from what other people are doing. Photography helps make this process easier. It connects civilizations of one part of the world to the other part of the world. Embrace this responsibility.

Streets are so vivid that there is no dearth of subjects. It's your job, as a photographer, to document this life and share with other parts of the globe.

For example, a person sitting in India admires the street fashion of New York City. The Western world admires the rich heritage and vivid colors of Rajasthan. People want to know the countries through their people, not just the monuments and landscapes. Take the

challenge.



Photograph 3: Kids smile doesn't know no money!

My evolution as street portrait photographer

In my childhood, I was a very silent observer on the street. Being an introvert, I seldom approached a stranger even for a query, address, or favor. I used to watch, try to understand their mood, and then approached when I felt it was safe. Net-net, I was scared of strangers.

As I graduated to high school, I picked a series in a monthly magazine. The series was about Body Language. The series was excerpts from the *Body Language* book by Allen Pease. I devoured the whole series, reading every month's articles in the magazine. It provided me people perspective and their behavior without explicitly asking them about their mood or intentions – with help of their gestures and movements of hands, legs, head, eyes, and lips.

Well, the body language knowledge took me few steps forward – I needed to engage with people to make successful transactions – there is absolutely no substitute for effective communication. If I need my work done by people, I need to talk. How do I talk effectively was the next challenge...



Photograph 4: An activist promoting vegan diet.

Here's my way of handling any new assignment, be it professionally or personally. I make my concepts clear – first by reading, then by seeing and then doing it myself. I know I'm a slow learner if I keep following this long-drawn method. But that's the only way I'm comfortable in exploring any new endeavor. So, engaging with people was no different. I picked some knowledge from books of Steven Covey and Dale Carnegie – I guess, nowadays, every college students get exposure to these books. I watched lots of movies and specifically concentrated on communication. I read the *Vocabulary* book of Norman Lewis.



Photograph 5: Dard aryan woman in traditional Laddakh dress following the cultural legacy.

Fast forward to 2016...

Only after I picked up my camera and hit the streets, I got to apply all my people knowledge and skills. I met thousands of strangers, convinced them to let me take the photograph, and encouraged some of them to share their stories too. With the help of their photographs, I want to showcase what a stranger looks like. With the help of captions and stories, I want to showcase their unique perspectives. The idea was to *unstranger* them!

Why I picked photography is not sure to me yet. But whatever would have been the reason to hold the camera, it's a soothing experience. Photography is my way of meditation.



Photograph 6: Vietnamese girl in traditional áo dài dress.

Learning photography seemed daunting at the first go. Techniques sounded more difficult than composition or exposure. To understand technique, I applied my trusted method of reading, watching, and doing. So far, I've read nearly hundreds of photography books, thousands of blogs and articles, watched hundreds of hours of videos and shot more than 10,000 photos of various subjects.

I have a habit of hustling. So, when I read, I skip a few familiar topics. When I watch videos, I fast forward past the known or boring parts. That paves the way for me to read more and more books and watch many videos. I gain more and more knowledge faster.

Each book and video taught me some lessons that I could go out and apply. That's how the wisdom is growing. That's the way I learnt to grow. Knowledge and wisdom I acquired in the journey range from making photos to sharing with the larger audience. I learnt working with a huge sense of responsibility while delivering creativity.



Photograph 7: Saree is still in fashion. Isn't it?

Why do I shoot people on the street?

Like I said, I was always a silent observer of people, their behavior, their body language, their interaction with the environment and other people, their expressions and emotions. Being an introvert, I never approached them to explore. The camera provided me the tool not only to interact with them, but also to share with you.



Photograph 8: Labour woman at a construction site near my house. Amazed, she asked for the print.

My street portraits are the visual catalogue of unique people whom we see and move on without noticing anything about them. Each face reveals the experience and reflects their past. Each eye reveals what it is that they're going through.

By the end of this book, you will see all strangers differently. There are unseen faces, untold stories — let's take this responsibility to bring these to everyone.

Alright, turn the pages to understand how you can take brilliant street portraits with ease.

Photograph 9: "Am I not a beauty queen!"



1. Seek to understand first

Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.

– Immanuel Kant

Street portrait photography is the most authentic way of navigating local people belonging to any city, village, ethnicity, tribe, or culture. It shows people on the street — as they are. As a street photographer, it's your job to help these civilizations reach out to other parts of the world.

Go to the place or the event to shoot people there. Don't try to stage the event at your convenience when being there would help capture the mood or the ambience. Be there or be square!

Where can you spot friendly people, who would readily agree to having their photo taken?

Public events



Photograph 1.1: The decisive moment when she noticed me pressing the shutter button.

Chhath Puja is celebrated with a great zeal and devotion in North India (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, mostly). One can write a book on how to perform rituals and how a devotee should dress. A portrait would replace 1,000 words about the “devotee in action”.



Photograph 1.2: A Chhath devotee at the river bank.

Will just any photo serve the purpose? No. You need an amazing portrait for the people to pay attention and appreciate it. People appreciate good photos, so don't capture sub-standard photos. Hone your skills to produce captivating photos consistently.

The photo must be taken at the *ghat* (river banks where prayers are offered), with the right surrounding, right attire, and right festive mood. You can't orchestrate such photos and you can't fake the mood in the studio.

A person is more likely to let you shoot his photo at events rather than walking solo in the streets. It doesn't mean you can ask a solo person in the street for phot – stay tuned, I'll address this soon.

City streets

To shoot local people, walk in the street. Spot and engage with the locals and take their pictures. In the next chapter, I'll guide you on how to handle people's behavior to get the best out of them.



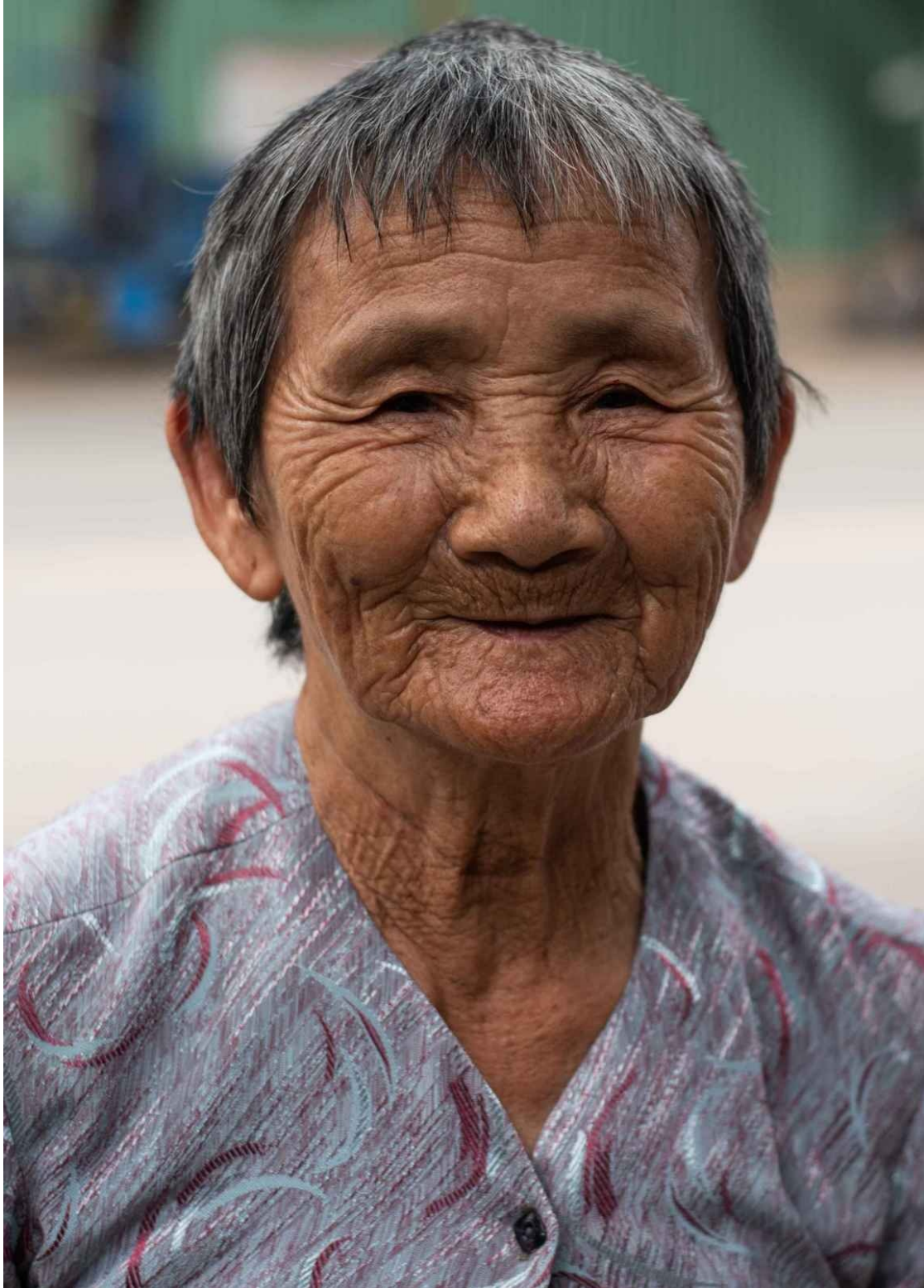
Photograph 1.3: Happy school girl.

Above picture was taken in the streets of Vietnam. It is one of the most photo-friendly countries I've visited. Locals are welcoming and

enthusiastic about letting their photos taken.

Rural locations

We spend our whole lives in cities. Seldom do we get to see the rural areas. Your street portfolio is incomplete without taking the extra effort to go to rural areas and shoot people in their rustic condition.



Photograph 1.4: "Wow... I never though look so beautiful."

Above picture was taken in the rural area of Saigon. The old lady was extremely happy after looking at her photo. She said, "I never

thought I looked so stunning."

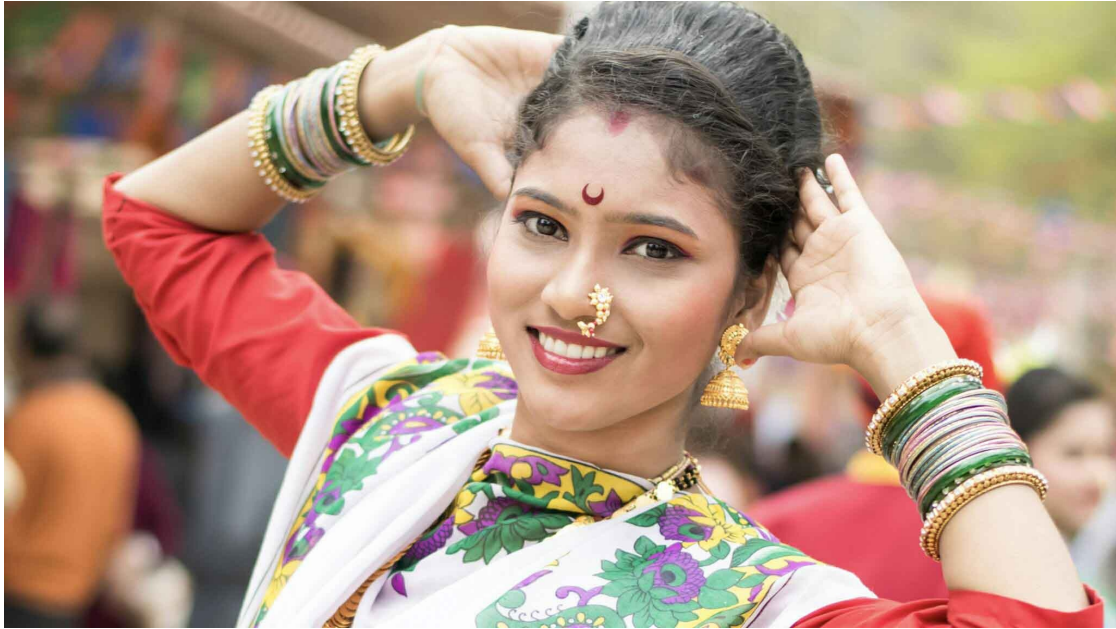
Every face is unique. Expressions are captivating — waiting for you to frame. Real-life street expressions are so spontaneous that a street photoshoot for apparel or a brand won't give you the real feel. It should be life as it is, neither larger nor lesser. Brands do target streets to depict their street fashion apparel. Those are posed and larger than life to sell their products. They are close to street life, but not actual street life.

Capture the real "real life," not the orchestrated, real-looking life.

Depending on the purpose and theme, isolate the person or shoot along with other people. Include multiple people to exhibit how humans exchange emotions and expressions when they're engaging with each other.

If the story calls for it, keep the background in focus along with the subject or make the background completely blurred to make the image pop out of the screen or print. Blurring the background depends on the camera capability — it's a good strategy to focus completely on the person if the background is noisy or not part of the narrative.

I mostly focus on headshots. Vivid faces. Myriad expressions.



Photograph 1.5: "I'm a dancer. Shoot me in my dancing pose only."

With a series of street photos, you can define a city, a community and a civilization. As a street photographer, you can take the responsibility to do justice to this challenge.

Let's now deep dive into the techniques of street photography. I intend to make you an ethical and street-smart street photographer in next chapter.



Photograph 1.6: One of the most enthusiastic stranger I met ever! She's a good friend now.

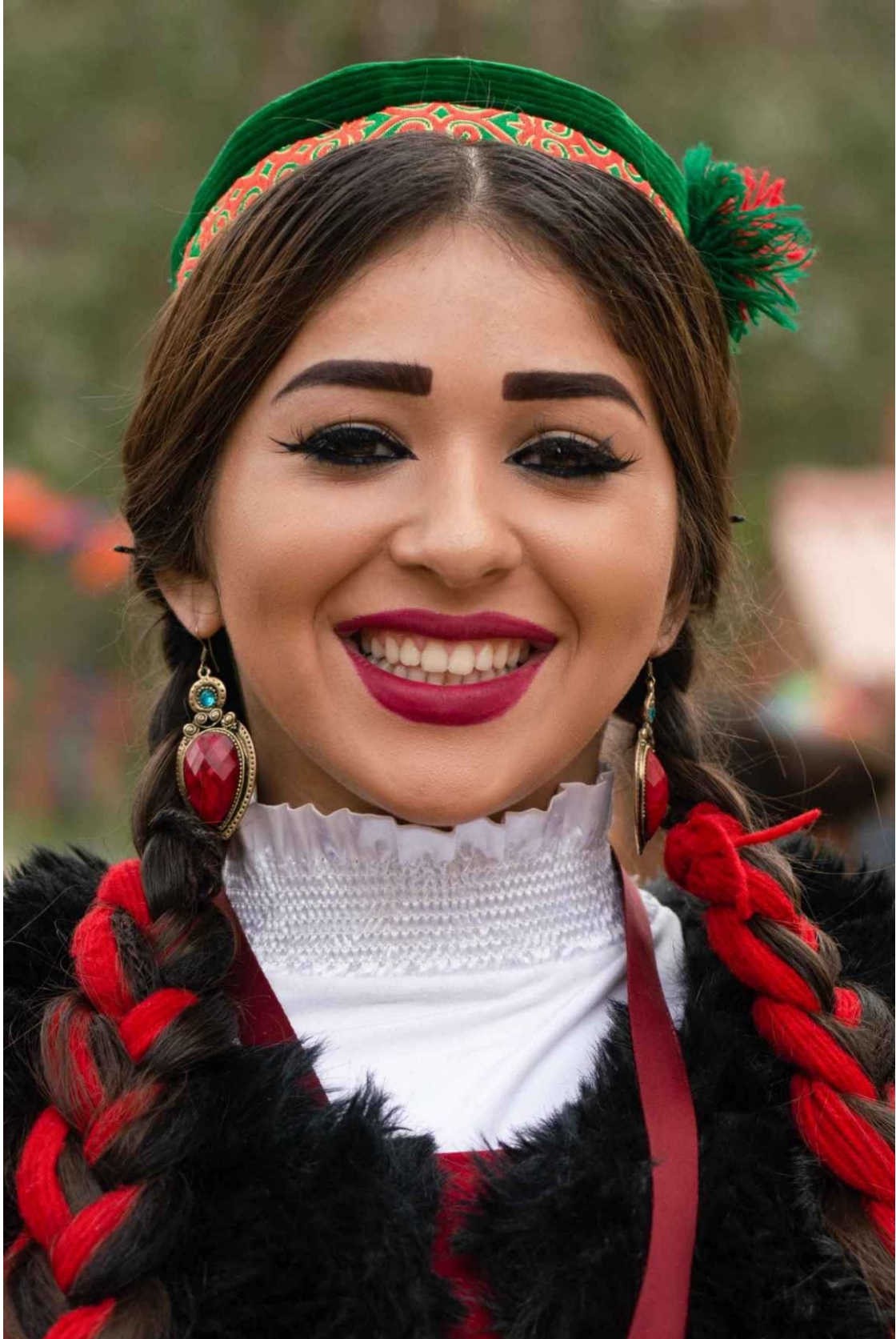
2. Prefer techniques over tools

Art without technique is invertebrate, shapeless, characterless.

– Ignacy Jan Paderewski

Hitting the streets with a camera and asking random people to pose can be stressful. Arm yourself with the techniques to approach the right people at the right place and at the right time.

A camera, the tool, is just an enabler – technique will make you a professional photographer. Even a monkey can possess a camera. You need to grab the techniques as soon as you possess a camera.



Photograph 2.1: I love taking artists' photos backstage.

When I was preparing for India's most prestigious competitive exam, where only the top 1% made it to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), students used to buy a Physics problems book by the author I E Irodov. Almost every student who was serious about cracking the entrance exam had the book. Those who had clear concepts and could solve most problems from the book were able to crack the exam. So, it was important to be able to gain the Physics concepts, not to buy the book. Books alone doesn't help you crack exams, applying concepts will do.



Photograph 2.2: A school girl in an open school for underprivileged kids.

With that context, let's get going...

Engaging with strangers for good street portraits pushes you out of your comfort zone; it also pushes the people being shot out of their comfort zone too. I'll guide you on how to make the stranger comfortable, build trust, and make the engagement warm for both of you.

First things first, would you shoot candid or posed portraits?

Street portraits can be candid or staged. Candid portraits are those photos where the person is busy in their work and you freeze one moment from their set of actions. Staged portraits are posed photos where you ask the person to follow your directions for the photo. I don't qualify candid or posed street portraits. Shoot what suits you.

90% of my street portraits are posed. I ask strangers to pose – he may smile or stay serious or be in a playful mood, and it doesn't matter if this makes a good story. I take all possible poses and pick the one which suits the mood of the photo.



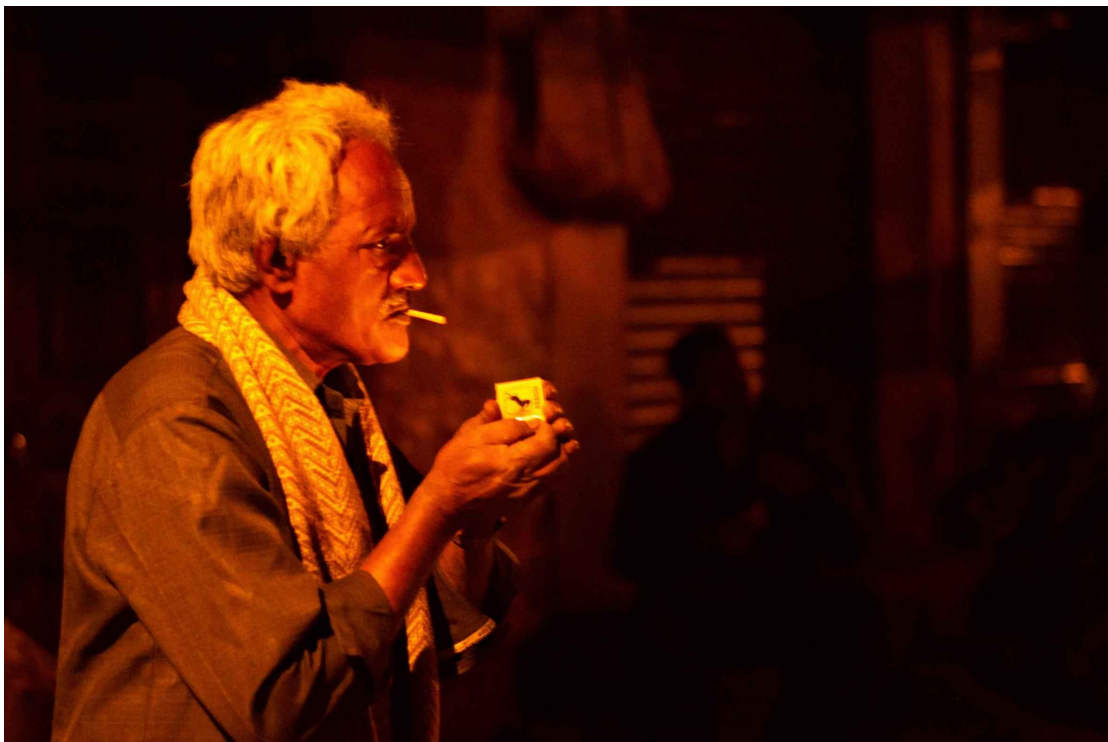
Photograph 2.3: An artist from North-East India, performing in Surajkund Mela.

I shoot posed street portraits for two reasons:

First, I see some uniqueness in the person which sets him apart from rest of the crowd. It can be his expression, way of dressing, hairstyle... anything that grabs and attracts my attention toward that person more than other folks. As a creative person, you can define your own criteria to select someone for the portrait. During the early days, my criteria was anyone who would agree to pose for a photo. Now I look for uniqueness.

Second, I need to know more about the person and engage with him in an interview. It paves my way to know new people and uncover unique stories. I take responsibility to spread those stories.

In the case of candid portraits, you don't direct the person – you place yourself at an angle so that you frame the best shot. You may need to wait for the right action to start if you've visualized the photo in a certain manner.



Photograph 2.4: The face is lit by the matchstick light.

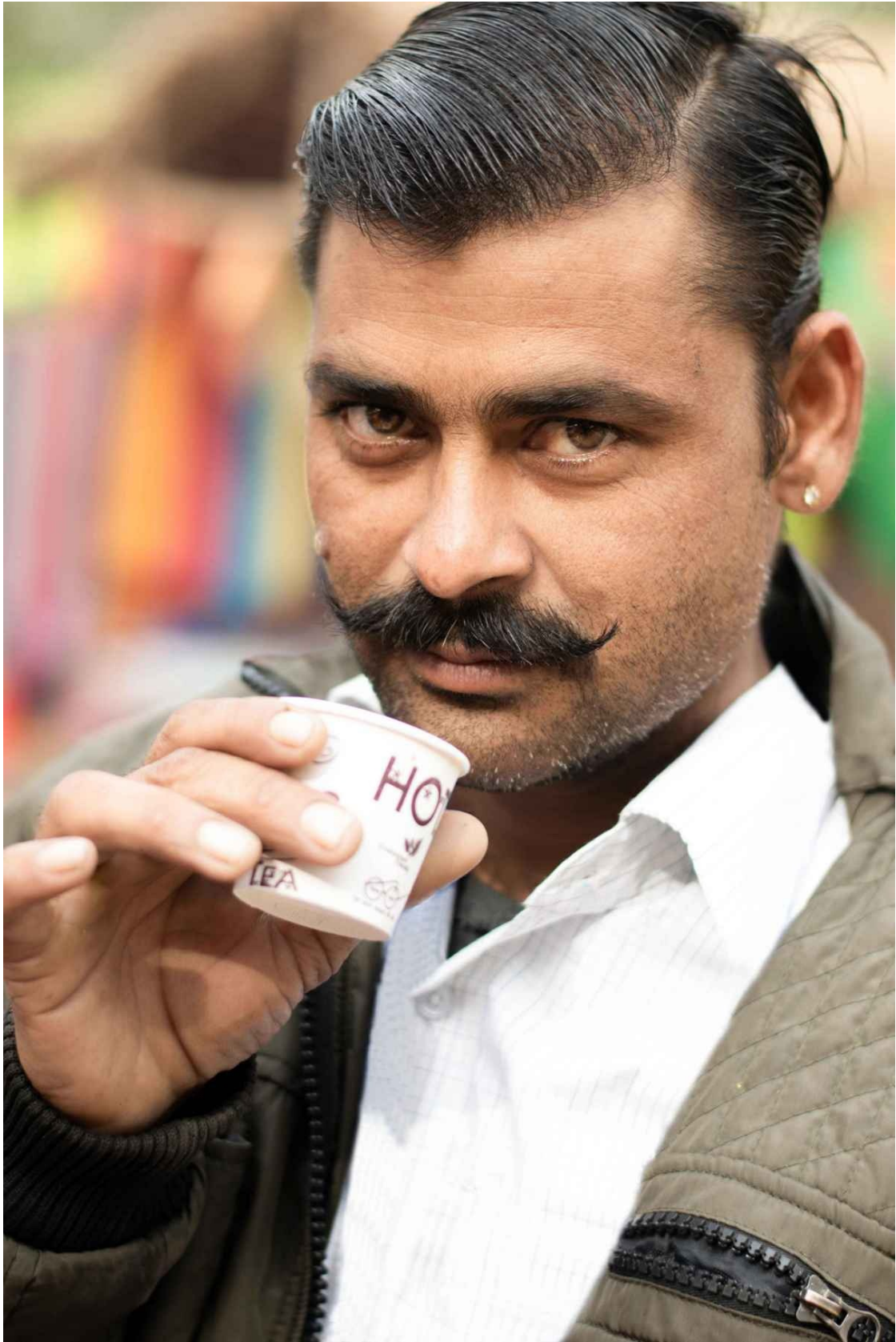
I shoot candid street portraits for two reasons:

First, I don't want to disturb the person who is busy with their work. For example, a shopkeeper won't want to pose if he's in the middle of transactions with customers.

Second, it's a good storytelling opportunity if the photo is taken candidly.

In either case, posed or candid, the person knows that I'm taking his photo.

Many photographers use 'shooting from the hip' as one of the techniques for candid shoots when they feel that the person would object to photos. I also tried it, but it never worked for me. This is a technique where you place the camera away from your eyes, maybe towards your waist, and shoot. It catches people unaware. Even though it is legally okay to shoot people in public places, I find it awkward to shoot people who are unaware or who have not given their consent.



Photograph 2.5: What a mustache sir!

Don't shoot just one photo. If you've got a fraction of second, then shoot in burst mode. A subtle change in expression can uplift the photo value. If you've a minute with the person, try different angles to select the best one later during post-processing. If you've got a couple more minutes, double check the photo for the right exposure and sharpness, refine, and then shoot again.

How to handle people's behavior? Whether candid or posed, you need to learn this technique. Mostly, you'll learn yourself. I can help you become more aware. So here we go...

Human nature is diverse. Some people are easygoing, others are tough nuts to crack. This is true for the people in your family, colleagues, friends, and associates. This is true for the strangers you meet at public places like street or trade fairs or community gatherings.

As a street photographer, you've got limited time to apply judgement about whether your target person is amicable or not and whether you can persuade him for a portrait or not.

The decisive moment will come and go. You need to act quickly or else you will miss an iconic portrait.

I'm telling you all this not to put extra pressure on your shoulders. I want you to stay abreast and push the idea to secondary memory. The mind has huge a capability to process lots of information in real time. With awareness and knowledge, I want you to enable your mind with additional parameters to make you a professional street portrait photographer.



Photograph 2.6: A handicraft artist in the International Crafts Fair.

Handling people's behavior is a trial and error process. Here are a few tips for you to hit the ground running:

1. **Appreciate honestly:** Tell the person what you liked about them, honestly and candidly. At times, even a smile or subtle body language help them understand that you are genuinely interested in them.
2. **Behave like a pro:** A professional's body language doesn't come by faking. A lot goes behind the scenes for you to appear and sound like a pro street photographer or a photojournalist. Keep shooting whatever comes your way in the street – shooting even walls, doors, buildings and objects in the street will aid you lots of confidence. The confidence reflects even before you start talking to a person in the street.
3. **Define the purpose:** You must be clear in your mind about why you

want people to pose for you. It could be regarding documenting city life, making your own portfolio, or working on a special assignment. If asked, share the purpose with the person.

4. **Stay ready to answer any queries or concerns:** People may ask you not to shoot. They may ask you why you're shooting them. They may ask you to share pictures. They may ask about your background. They may raise privacy concerns. In case of any conflicts, stay calm and address the concern amicably. I had many such experiences where the person told me not to shoot them, but eventually they agreed and asked me to send them the photos. Once they see good-quality photos, they also feel good about it.

5. **Show them what you captured:** If they're relatively free, you can show them the amazing photo you took. I have experienced that they feel great about it because they have never looked at themselves in the way you captured them in the picture.

6. **Buy more time:** If you find it worth spending more time and the person also agrees, you can spend more time engaging with the person. A good photographer is a good storyteller too. You need these stories to come out in society. A good photo with a complementing story make it a great package.

7. **Stay sensitive about the situation:** If the person is very busy, don't disturb them to pose. If it is a funeral, asking them to smile or appreciating any of the person's attributes is not a good idea. If people are jovial and playful, don't ask them to give a serious look. Stay sensitive about the situation. The person is on the street for a purpose. Don't drag them away from what they're doing. If you distract them heavily, you will invite trouble and make a worthless photo.

Shooting kids needs extra care – get permission from the kid’s parents, guardian, or the teacher before you shoot them. Minors can’t apply their judgement. An ethical photographer won’t want to put the kid in any dilemma or danger by taking non-consensual photos.

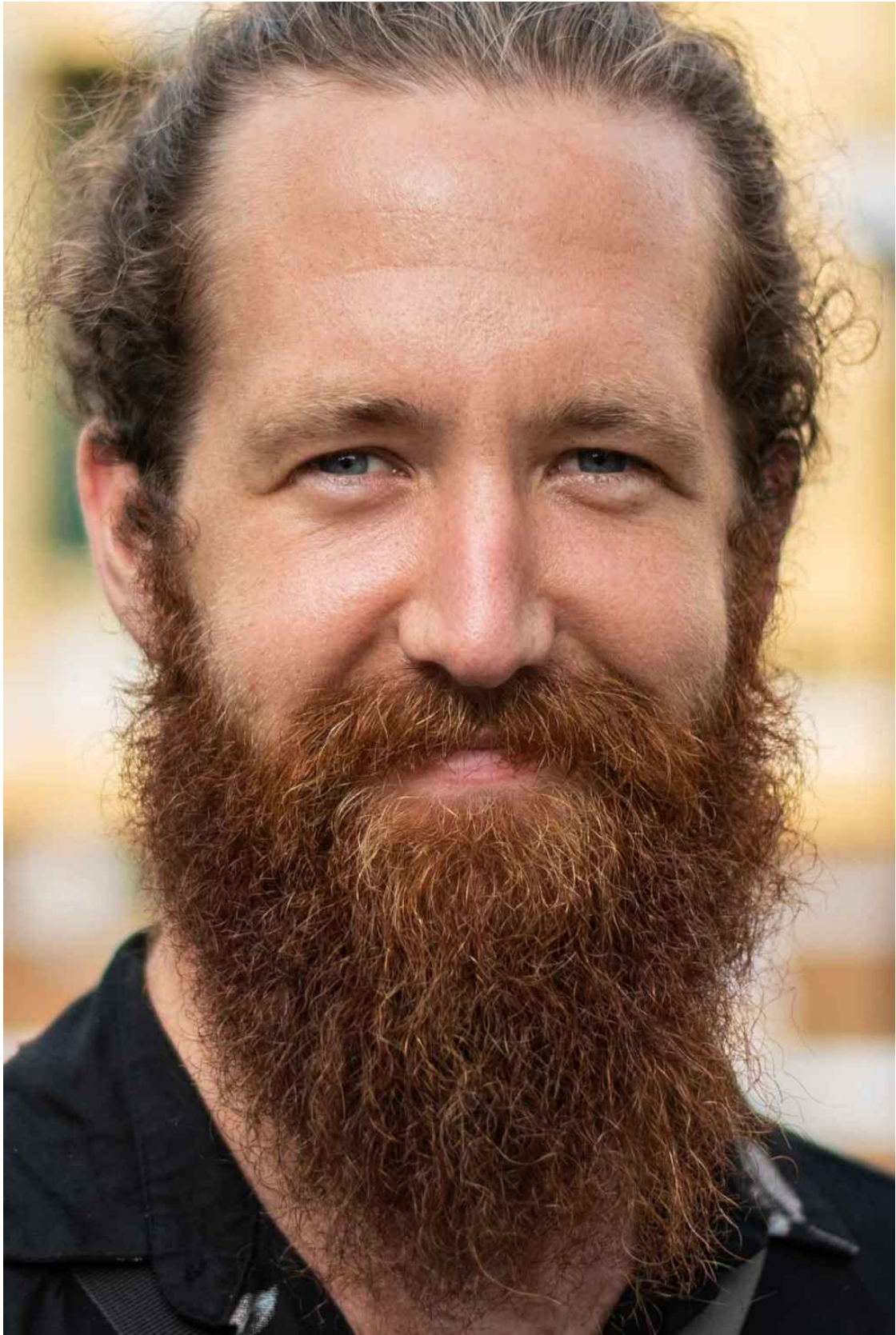


Photograph 2.7: "It's very hot sunny day today. I borrowed my fathers sunglasses."

To sum up the chapter, a good technique of shooting street portraits is to spot the right person and to pose him or not based on your story. Stay abreast of situations to handle any concerns.

The technique will not only make you a professional photographer but will also make you feel safe, ethical, and responsible.

On that note, let's understand how you can make your images stand out with the help of right composition. Hop on to the next chapter.



Photograph 2.8: Smile is contagious. Try this technique with any stranger.

3. Make a composition

Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.

– Pablo Picasso

Street portraits are impromptu and on the spot. You can't control the surrounding. You can't procure props instantly. You have a challenge to isolate the subject. You can't ask a person to follow you to a different location. Whatever the natural ambience offers you, you're bound to work with it.

Does it mean you are at the mercy of the environment alone?

No.

What is the solution?

The answer is structure, a.k.a. composition in photography.

While you play under limited choices to compose and structure your frame, don't place a person randomly. Let each item and negative space add value to the narrative.

If a subject or person distracts the viewer from your photo, it shouldn't be there. If you want attention on the subject at first glance, the photograph needs the right structure. Make the photo clutter-free. Distraction-free. Unchaotic.

This structured approach for the story through the photo is called composition.

Every art form thrives on composition. A writer crafts each sentence and paragraph to lead you in a certain direction. A music composer

structures each element of the music to produce a harmony. A painter places each 'subject' on a canvas to produce great visual impact. In a nutshell, composition, the structure in every art, draws a viewer's (or audience's) attention where the artist wants them to lead.



Photograph 3.1: Colourful Holi festival -- portrait of a boy.

To ease the daunting task of composition in photography, professionals have laid out few rules. These rules or guiding principles are time tested. Understand the rules and practice a lot when you're hitting the street.

Cramming and recalling every rule is not possible when you pose the subject and look into the camera viewfinder. Editing provides you a second opportunity to adhere to the composition rules.

Photographers leverage these rules to produce stunning photographs — but you can break some of the rules if it makes sense for the storytelling in your photos. Creative pursuits, like photography, enable you to think out of the box — deviate from the rules to portray your imagination. Set your vision free. Keep rules in mind. That's all that is expected from the knowledge of the composition rules.

Here we go with the standard rules... Stay aware and break them at your convenience:

Fill the frame



Photograph 3.2: Indian girl in traditional Saree and jewelery.

“If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough,” said Robert Capa, the greatest war photographer.

I've seen photographers shooting in the street from a significant distance — for a street portrait, you won't get the real expression. Fill a significant portion of your frame with the subject — whether the person is the main subject or the surrounding or both. Keep the picture self-explanatory.

Rule of thirds



Photograph 3.3: Stopped the gentleman "cyclist" on a highway for the photo. We enjoyed chatting after the photos.

In portrait photography, the rule of thirds refers to positioning the eyeline of the person in such a way that it intersects with the one-third portion of the frame.

Here's how you can apply the rule:

1. Break the photo in three equal vertical and horizontal parts. You will get two vertical and two horizontal lines.
2. Place the subject's eyes or a significantly focused item on one of the intersections of the lines.

It's difficult to get this perfect when shooting. You can crop it during post-processing to stay closest to the rule of thirds.

Frame within frame



Photograph 3.4: There is nothing as powerful as mother's love, and nothing as healing as a child's soul.

Do you have a mirror, windows, doors, tree branches, or bars in your photo? Spot a natural frame within the frame of your photo and place your subject in that frame.

Leading lines



Photograph 3.5: Snake "Python" charmer!

A road, street, wall, bars, or fence — aligned horizontally, vertically, or diagonally — will lead the viewer to the location within the photo where you want them to be. Identify a leading line in your photo and decide its role in your photo.

Follow the eyes



Photograph 3.6: My camera follows your eyes.

There is a general rule in photography for the eyes of the subject — based on where the person is looking.

1. Nose pointing in the same direction where the subject's eyes point to.
2. Provide enough space in the photo in the right or left side of your frame, based on whether the subject is looking right or left.
3. If there are two people, they're looking at each other or in the same direction.

Cropping



Photograph 3.7: All I see is blue!

You may find it difficult to spot the exact composition rules being captured in your photo. Cropping helps you with two things:

1. Spot the composition opportunity in the photo.
2. Accentuate the composition effect by making it look prominent.

Break the rules



Photograph 3.8: " Sir, take my photo. Do I look cool?"

I am an artist. I don't get held down by the rules and the constraints. I pick each composition opportunity based on its merit, not to make the photo technically good but to make it artistically appealing. I suggest you also leverage rules to your advantage and not become a captive of the boundaries.

Shooting provides you with the first opportunity to frame the perfectly composed photo. If you can't follow it during the shoot, editing is your next opportunity. Almost every photo improves after editing, provided you don't overdo the editing. Don't hesitate to learn and apply editing.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to all your editing needs in street photography, specifically targeted towards portraits. Bear with me.

Flip the page to one of the most important lesson in photography – light!

Photograph 3.9: Never miss such portraits.



4. Let there be light

Everything that we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

A well-lit, properly exposed, and sharp portrait is a visual delight. Photography is all about painting with the light. I know, you already know this. I wanted to reinforce the idea to set the context for this chapter.



Photograph 4.1: Her friend, "Sir, take her photo. She is heroine in my village."

With light, you need to care about direction and quality. Direction of light will set the right mood, shape, and depth of the subject. Quality of

light would help you with right exposure, white balance, and saturation of the image. The choice of "right" depends on your artistic visualization of the photograph. A "right" for one photographer may be "wrong" for the other. But whatever "right" definition of mood, exposure, saturation, depth, shape, *etc.* you have in mind, you need to care about the DQ (Direction & Quality) of the light.

Light is one of the scariest concepts for a photographer. So, I won't overwhelm you with too many concepts. Take the basic ones to fine tune your photography. Rest, trust your learning on-the-job. Cramming many concepts before hitting the streets will confuse you more than it relieves you.

Source of Light

Whether you place your subject opposite to the source of the light or in the direction of the light, you need to first identify what the source of light is. There is one main source which generates the light, then there are other surfaces which reflect the light.



Photograph 4.2: "I'll become film star someday."

For example, if you're standing outdoors during the day, the sun is your main source of light. Walls, roads, floors, *etc.* reflect the same sunlight to various directions, depending on the inclination (vertical, horizontal, tilted) of the reflecting surface.

A light can be identified as a source for your photography, depending on the placement of the subject. If the subject is in sunlight, the light falling on the subject is from the sun and the surfaces reflecting the light. If the subject is in the shade, then reflecting surfaces become the source. If the subject is in a room, the light reflected from the surface and passing in the room through a window becomes the source of your light. If you add a reflector, or a flash or a strobe, it also becomes the source of the light.

In your portrait photography, you must visualize what the sources pouring light on your subject are. Once you nail it, you can think of reducing, increasing, or positioning your subject relative to the light.

Soft vs. Harsh Light



Photograph 4.3: Festive mood during Dussehra.

Let me explain the difference between soft and harsh light simplistically. If you place a subject in direct sunlight, the light that falls on the subject is harsh. If you place the subject in shade, the light that falls on the subject is soft.

The light is soft or harsh also depending on the relative size between the light source and the subject. In the last photo, the source of harsh light is the sun, which is relatively small in comparison to the wall from where the reflected light is coming in the shade. Well, technically the sun is much bigger, but it's about the relative size from the reference of the subject.

Whether you want soft light or harsh light, you can decide based on the narrative of the portrait. If you're showing a hardworking laborer, harsh sunlight will contribute positively. If you're showing an urban woman on the street, soft light will portray the elegance.

Short vs. Broad Light

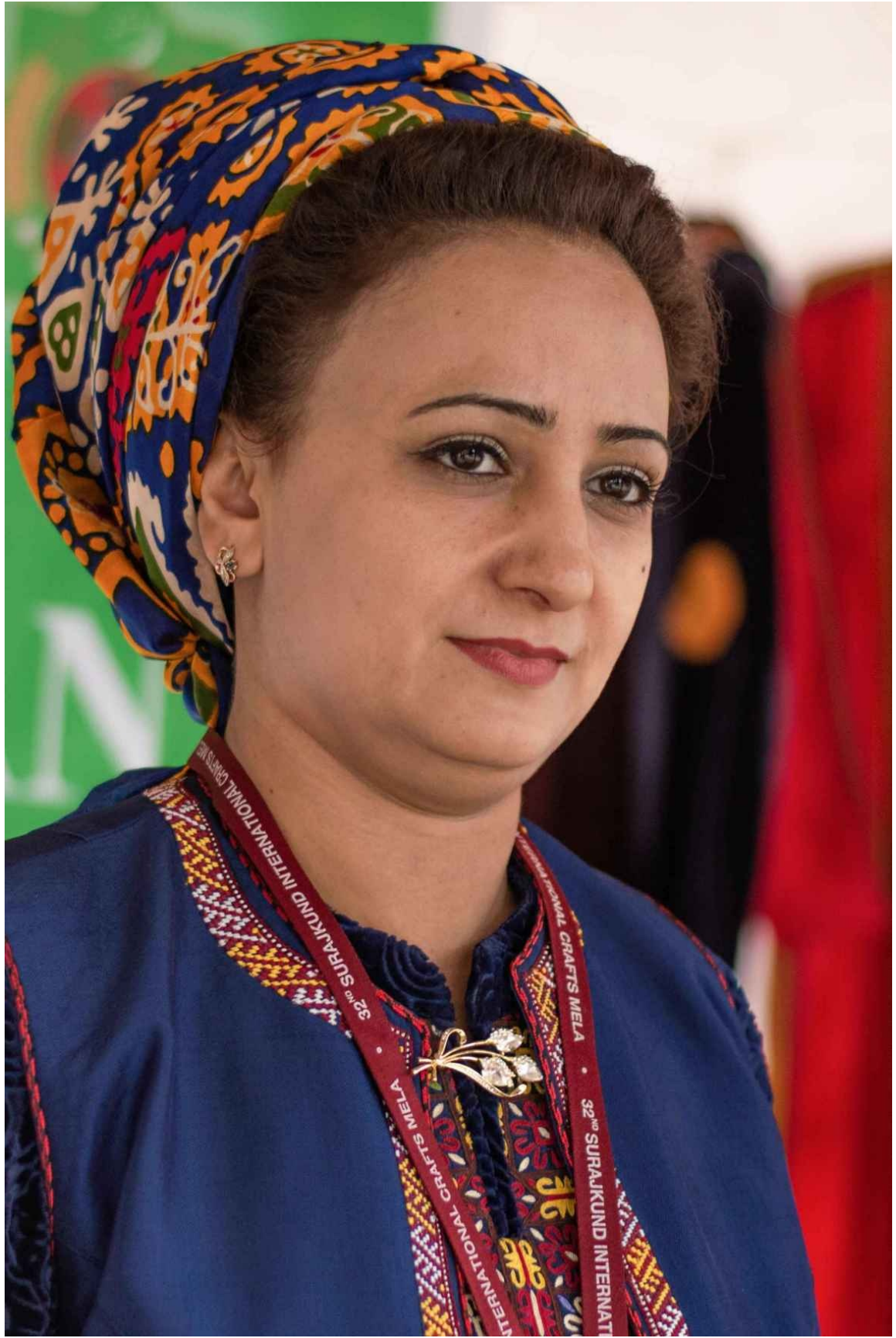
A flattering portrait typically has one side of the face with light and the other side is shade. If the light is on the side of the face which is closer to the camera, it is called broad light. The other side of the face, which is away from the camera, will have a shadow cast because of the nose and forehead. Contrarily, if the light is falling on the side of the face which is away from the camera, it is called short light.



Photograph 4.4: Caught this gentleman in the mid of his shoot. his friend was taking photos on smartphone. He liked the DSLR photos, which I gave him later.

The face looks broader if broad lighting is used. The face looks slimmer if the short light is used. For a woman or girl, the short light technique works well. Because it gives a thin-face look. For men, the broad light gives a masculine look.

Natural Light Source



Photograph 4.5: Portrait of handicraft artist in Surajkund Mela.

The natural source of light is the one which you're not in control of. Sunlight, an overcast day, sunlight reflections from roads and walls, artificial lights in events — these are natural light sources. It is also called ambient light.

The advantage of the natural source of lights is that it comes free of cost. You don't need to manage flash and strobes and all those grand-looking pieces of lighting equipment. The disadvantage of dependency on natural light is that you look stupid if you don't get enough light or a flattering light.

At times, the natural lights are good enough. Other times, you may need to add basic lighting equipment to achieve stunning portraits.

For street photography, I don't think you need a costly set-up of strobes, stands, batteries, scrim, and other stuff which you typically use in a studio or outdoor fashion shoots.

Ninety percent of the time I used natural lights and played with the sunlight and shades by placing the subject appropriately.

Create a Light Source



Photograph 4.6: V=Victory; V=Vietnam.

I was a natural light photographer for one good year. I took photos of nature, birds, people, and buildings without adding any additional lights. When there was lack of proper light, I used to play with the ISO (because I needed the aperture for sharpness and shutter speed to avoid motion blur).

In one of the team events, I saw a professional photographer mounting a flash on his DSLR. I also took some photos in the event and then compared my photos with those of the professional photographer's. My photos in natural light were much better in composition, exposure, and narrative. But the indoor photos were grainy and poorly exposed. This was a Eureka moment for me — I added a speed light to my accessories list.

A light source can be a flash, a strobe in studio, or a simple reflector.

The light source that you create can be used as the main light to light your subject. For example, a flash gun used in a wedding. Alternatively, you can use the created light source to fill in for the shadow portion of the subject.

Additional lights can also be used as rim light of the subject if it is fired on the subject from behind. A rim light on the subject helps separate it from the background and results in a flattering image.

Light Modifiers



Photograph 4.7: At Thailand airport during transit. My camera keeps me busy wherever I go.

Well, I'm an advocate of minimal equipment for street photography. But I need to equip you with the knowledge so that you use the equipment based on the situation and to your advantage. A reflector, a scrim, a softbox, and a white umbrella are the light modifiers. These light modifiers can be used for natural or created light sources.

A reflector can bounce the light back on the subject. Mostly reflectors are applied on the opposite side of the main light source to fill some light in the shadow area. It also helps provide light to the areas on the neck and below the nose and eyes. It brightens the catchlight in the eyes.

A scrim is typically used to protect the subject from the harsh sunlight by covering it overhead of the subject. Scrim filters and distributes the light evenly on the subject, providing a soft light.

A softbox is used on a flash or a strobe to make the light soft. An umbrella also acts an alternative to the softbox. You can use the softbox to provide the right direction of the light and get a proper shape of the

catchlight in the subject's eyes.

Camera setting for right exposure



Photograph 4.8: Runner stopped for the drinks and refreshment during half marathon "Global Energy Race".

First things first, shoot in Raw!

Second things second, shoot in manual mode.

Third things third, don't mind raising the ISO in the camera if there is no other way to create additional light. Noise in a photo is acceptable or can be fixed in editing, but the blur and exposure are best handled in a camera.

Exposure of an image depends on three key settings of the camera: aperture, shutter speed, and ISO. A wide aperture provides you more exposure and less depth of field.

A low shutter speed provides you more exposure, but can cause motion blur for fast-moving subjects.

A high ISO provides you more exposure, but a high ISO in good lighting conditions can cause the image to be overexposed. Also, a high ISO in low light conditions can result in a noisy and grainy image.

I prefer shooting in low ISO (as low as possible). Try modifying light by adding more sources of light with the help of a flash or reflector. Set an optimum aperture and shutter speed setting before thinking of raising the ISO.

With practice you'll master to get right exposure, soon. Most importantly, don't mess with the gadget when you're in the mid of shooting. I told you in the previous chapter, behave like a pro!



Photograph 4.9: Shepherd with a stick, herding his cattle.

5. Get a camera, any camera

If the photographer is interested in the people in front of his lens, and if he is compassionate, it's already a lot. The instrument is not the camera, but the photographer.

– Eve Arnold

This should be the shortest chapter of the book. The reason is because you can produce stunning portraits with a lot of available cameras, lenses, and their accessories. Any of them. I'm on a budget. Hence, I will share my experience with budget photography.



Photograph 5.1: Yes, photographers are part of my street stories!

The Nikon D3200 is the only gear I had till the last couple of months. It is one of the most inexpensive gear in the market. I thought that I could do better if I upgraded my DSLR. But I kept exploring streets more than the gadgets – I never felt that my gear was not supporting me in getting what I wanted.

Ninety percent of the photos in this book are shot on a Nikon D3200, and the rest are on a Nikon D750. I changed the gear only after an unfortunate breakage of my old DSLR.

Let's start with a mobile camera. A camera in a smartphone can produce good shots, barring you take care of the lights and composition. It is a handy option if you're on the go and spot a great photography opportunity.

The flip side of using a smartphone camera is that post-processing becomes limited. Plus, a lot of other features of DSLR, such as wide aperture and fast shutter, won't be available. Even if those are available in a smartphone, there are irritating limitations.



Photograph 5.2: One of my first street portraits!

DSLRs can, undoubtedly, produce better photographs. If you edit the image, you can get even better output. You need to be ready to take the load of a DSLR and learn its technique.

DSLR has an additional advantage that you can mount a wide range of lenses on the camera, based on the genre of photography and locations. A wide-angle lens can be used in smaller rooms, a prime lens can be used for portraits, and a telephoto lens is used for distant subjects.

For street portraits, I almost always use 50mm prime lens on my Nikon gear. As I said, it's not about how costly your camera is because you can get stunning photographs with a budget DSLR too. Adhering to this principal, I use a Nikon D3200 for my photography.

Another advantage of DSLR is that people tend to take you seriously. A stranger is more likely to pose if you've got a DSLR. You always need to look, sound, and pose like a professional to gain acceptance.

Carrying a DSLR is difficult and people prefer to pick this camera only on certain occasions or for certain purposes. I suggest that you take the camera wherever you go. Buy a backpack where you can keep the camera along with your laptop. My camera accompanies me in my car and wherever I go.



Photograph 5.3: After party, still in party!

Camera settings for varying light conditions would vary. Before you look into the viewfinder to spot the right exposure, set the closest possible shutter, ISO, and aperture in the given light conditions. It comes with experience; you can achieve it soon if you start practicing shouldering your DSLR everywhere you go.

I don't prescribe any brand. You can buy a camera of any brand: Nikon, Canon, Sony, or others. While choosing a camera, keep in mind that lenses are replaceable for the same brand only. If you already possess lenses of a certain brand, buy the same brand's camera too. You can look for borrowing or renting opportunities of lenses also, because buying every lens would dig deep into your pockets.

To sum up, buy any camera of your choice, carry it with you, and acquaint yourself with the exposure setting. Spend less time meddling with the camera. Spend more time exploring streets and people.

Good going so far! Flip the page to learn how to make your photo into a

brehtaking image.

Photograph 5.4: If I spot you again on the streets, I can't not take your photo, sir.



6. Prefer quality over quantity

Quality is never an accident.

– John Ruskin

Shoot many. Delete most. Edit few. Share the best ones. That's the workflow I follow for my photo editing. You don't shoot photos only in the camera, you also make them in the laptop or photo editing software.

What you see is not what your camera gets perfectly. Myriad light conditions, noisy backgrounds, wrong framing, and aberrant white balance cause imperfections, which you can correct with editing.

You can't expect perfect conditions and excellent prior preparation (always) for street portraits. The opportunity comes in a spur of the moment. If you miss it, you can't get the photo. So, if you couldn't get the best exposure and white balance, trust your editing skills.

I don't take pride in tagging my photos as #straightfromcamera. I believe every photo's quality can be improved with retouching. Editing is both accepted and expected these days. Well, what I don't like in editing is spending a lot of time with a single photo and making the photo unauthentic.



Photograph 6.1: Labour or filmstar? You decide.

I edit my photos for five primary purposes:

1. Composition

Crop a portrait to fill the frame or leverage other composition rules mentioned in Chapter 3. I like headshots that fill the frame completely.

2. Exposure

As I said, you won't have enough time and tools like a light-meter for perfect camera settings. Do an approximate setting, if you're shooting in the manual mode. You can also use semi-program modes — aperture priority and shutter priority — based on how much bokeh you want in the photo and what speed you want to freeze. If the best approximation didn't deliver you the desired photo, you can adjust the exposure and white balance during post-processing.

Don't make contrast too high or too low. If you get the desired results with the subtle exposure changes then accept the image, else reject it and move on to the next photo.

3. Clean photo

Remove noise or dust or unwanted objects that would distract viewers from the photo. Well, there is no extent to what you can do cleaning the photo. You should leave it where you exhaust your energy or the photo looks acceptable.

4. Reject a few photos

In the technique chapter I suggested you take multiple photos of a person. During review, you can identify which one is the best for you to in terms of expression, exposure, and sharpness. Reject the ones which don't meet your criteria of good photos.

5. Uniqueness

Your photos become your identity over a period of time. A professional photographer develops a unique style. That style comes not only with shooting, but also from editing. Your composition, saturation, eye for detail, and subject's expressions make your photo unique.



Photograph 6.2: Tribal woman in her traditional dress.

Photoshop is my most commonly used editing tool. With its subscription-based pricing, it makes the tool much more affordable. I do my editing, almost all editing, in Photoshop.

Here is my typical workflow for a street portrait:

1. Review the .jpg version in Windows machine.

2. Pick the one which has the best expression and sharpness; white balance and saturation can be edited. I can't bring back the expression and sharpness. So, I pick the one which has the best story, not necessarily the best exposure.

3. Take your selected photos to Photoshop, one by one. I don't process images in bulk for editing because bulk processing helps when the exposure is nearly the same in all photos in the batch. In street photos, it keeps varying. Right?

4. Crop it for composition. I focus on these rules of composition (go back to Chapter 3 for better understanding of Composition):

- I. Fill the frame
- II. Rule of thirds
- III. Leading line
- IV. Symmetry

Provide enough negative space while shooting to leave the scope for cropping.

5. Set the right exposure and white balance. I shoot in Raw. So, Camera Raw filter in Photoshop enable me with lots of options to improve my photo's brightness, contrast *etc.* I typically option this to make look as i saw the person in the natural position and the light conditions.

6. Name the image in a way so that you are able to search with right filtering. I typically rename my edited image with "*editOtherAttributes*".

For example, if I take photo in Delhi, I would name the image as "DSC1287*edit*Delhi_oldman". First few characters pertain to the original image name when I downloaded from my camera's SD card. I retain the

name so that the original image and edited image remains next to each other in my computer folder if I sort the folder by file name.

7. Crop and recompose the image. At times, you may need to crop the image differently to share in various media. For example, if you've to share the image in Instagram, which has 1:1 grid size, you would need to recompose the image and crop yourself rather than allowing Instagram to crop it randomly. Similarly, you may choose to recompose on various media, if your original file size is not acceptable.



Photograph 6.3: The face reveals the experience you go through. Faces never lie!

Lightroom is another great editing software to structure and edit photos in bulk. Here's my workflow for Lightroom:

1. Import the Raw photos to Lightroom.
2. Review all photos; delete unwanted ones.
3. Optional: provide rating to the handpicked photos to filter the best ones.
4. Crop, adjust exposure, white balance, noise and saturation in Develop tab.
5. Optional, but recommended: provide keywords to the photos. You can assign keywords to multiple photos in one selection — that's the advantage of using Lightroom!
6. Export to the destination folder. A couple of things to watch out for

here:

I. If you don't want large files, you can set it up to export lower quality. For web, you won't need full resolution. For prints, you need the highest possible resolution.

II. Name the files based on the theme or city or person's name.



Photograph 6.4: Winter early morning blues!

Lightroom looks complex to use if you're not exposed to it already. Believe me, you'll fall in love with the tool once you get hands-on.

In addition to above workflow (or independent of above), I do some editing on the Lightroom mobile app when I don't have time to open my laptop and share images. You can do the basic exposure, white balance, and saturation edits. You can also reduce the noise in the photo and auto apply some of the pre-sets available in the app.

To sum up, don't worry much about camera settings while shooting because you have another opportunity in post-processing. Hone the editing skills to produce quality portraits, both technically as well as artistically.

So far, you've made a great portrait. Won't you like the whole world appreciate the photograph? Read on...



Photograph 6.5: "Wait, let me adjust my cap!"

7. Showcase your artwork

If you're always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be.

– Maya Angelou

When I was a kid, I used to run to my parents with any new drawing that I used to create. Let that kid of showing your art to the world stay alive in you. Take pride in your creations. Show the world what you believe it should look like. Your own unique perspective. Your own unique style. Your art!



Photograph 7.1: "Ageing cannot be an excuse for not working. At 81, I work on par with my next generation."

Exhibiting your work is important for three key reasons:

1. Hear nice words about your masterpiece to feel motivated and produce more iconic photos.
2. Listen to the criticism and feedback to improve in your next photos.
3. Spread your unique perspective of the art. Not sure whether there is any uniqueness in your photography? Keep sharing anyway... you'll discover soon yourself.

If you hide your photos in caves, chances are no one will notice your work, including yourself, and you will stop working on photography eventually.

An exhibit can be online, offline, closed groups, or one-to-one sharing of the pictures. Leverage art galleries and online social platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Flickr, and many more) to place your photos; call the audience to look at your picture and share their candid feedback.

Assuming no one shares this artwork and showcases the work... how would you benchmark your own work vis-a-vis best-in-class crafts? How would you get inspiration to work harder to improve your photography?

So, don't be lazy. If you've worked so hard in capturing the stunning photo, showcase it to the world.

Digital mode

There are cost-free and hassle-free digital platforms for sharing your photos.

1. Instagram



Photograph: 7.2: "Chill bro!"

Instagram is one of the major platforms for photography enthusiasts and professionals. 800 million users on Instagram are dying to see your photos.

Key things to keep in mind to increase the viewership of your photos on Instagram:

1. Write a good caption or behind the scenes story for the photo.
2. Use hashtags wisely. Don't waste unrelated or unnecessary hashtags — keep it specific and smart. The limitation is 30 hashtags. Spend them wisely. Read my article ([hyperlink](#)) for better understanding on hashtags for photographers.
3. Tag Influencers and Photography handles who can feature your work for wider reach.

I prefer Instagram ([@i.ranjan](#)) over any other social media because people are here to share and follow photography.

2. Facebook



Photograph 7.3: "You're right. Those are real permanent tattos!"

You can either create a page and invite your friends or share your photos on your personal wall. While Facebook is mainly for personal connections, sharing photography is not a bad idea on the page.

I prefer creating a page vs. sharing photos on a personal account because I like to increase the reach beyond my friends and personal network.

4. You own blog or website



Photograph 7.4: "I pursue calligraphy for my living."

Creating a personal blog or a photography portfolio website is a good idea. You can manage and flex the website design based on your own ideas.

Buy a domain, hosting, and a template of the website. It may sound overwhelming in the beginning, but it's not very tough. Once created, it gives you a feeling of exclusivity and you gain more trust with your followers or prospective collaborators/clients.

I prefer to buy a domain from GoDaddy and a suitable template from WordPress. The process is a plug-and-play job. My website portraitofhumans.com is one such example.

There are many more social sites like Flickr, *etc.* Select a couple of them wisely, because staying active on every site is humanly not possible and it becomes counterproductive after some time.

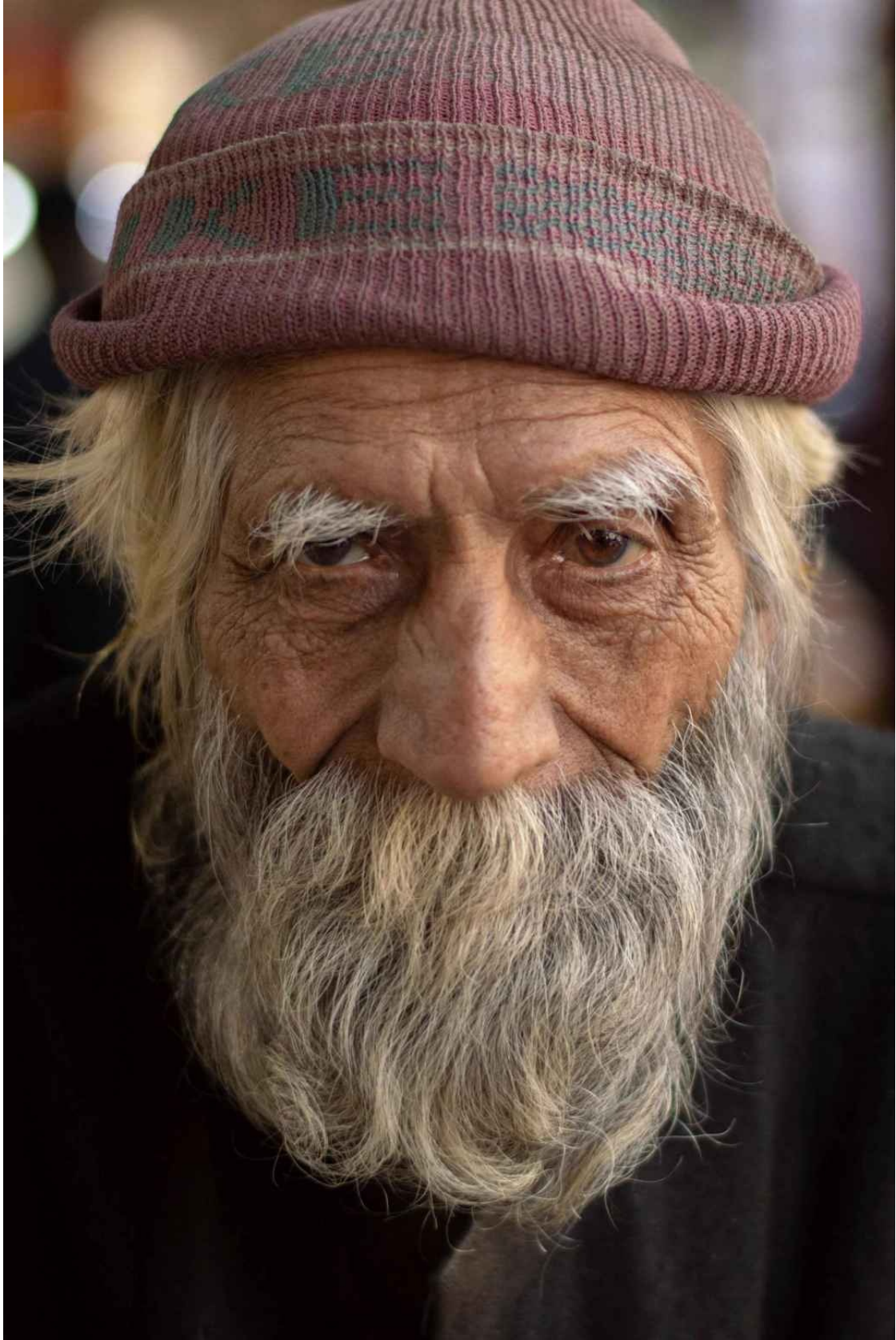
Offline mode



Photograph 7.5: Happy tourists at a Truck Foods Festival.

There are multiple options available in offline mode too. In offline mode, the reach remains limited, mostly one-on-one, but the impact is higher.

1. Photo book: I've created a photo book and keep it at my home for visitors to see and appreciate! You can keep the coffee table book at your home or office or give one away to your friends. If you're pursuing photography professionally, drop a few copies to your prospective clients or partners too.
2. Share the prints: Create and share the prints of street portraits to the person you shoot. Well, this may not be possible if you took the pictures while travelling. But if you repeat the travels or you're shooting in your own city, you can thank those people by giving away the printed copies of the photographs.



Photograph 7.6: One of my early street portraits.

I took above photograph long back, when I was learning photography. Personally, I super-liked the photo and subtle expression of the person. He just noticed that I was taking his picture and there is a little bit of delay in his response.

I was hesitant to share this photo with people and social media, because I thought I captured this by fluke and I can't repeat such photos. I wasn't even sure how I got the manual setting correct for the exposure and sharpness. I thought, *I will share this, if I'm able to repeat it.*

After gaining lots of confidence, photo after photo, I've now shared it and have received the best remarks on the photo. This remains one of my favorite street portraits.

Here are a few quick tips on what to share:

1. Share only the best work.
2. Don't share controversial photos on social platforms.
3. Don't spend more time in sharing than working on your art.
4. Don't spam people's wall and pages on social media by flooding them with your artwork.
5. Care for the community by providing your constructive feedback to fellow photographers and by joining discussion forums.

6. You can write blogs or captions on the behind the scenes stories. Beginners can gain knowledge on handling people and you can add a creative dimension to your storytelling.

Sharing is caring — not only for the community but also for your own creative pursuits. This book is my attempt in the direction of sharing and gaining wider reach through Kindle media.

Don't stop here... You've developed a great photography skills by now. Welcome to the club!



Photograph 7.7: Sadhu with swag!

8. Embrace the photography life

Every artist was first an amateur.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Street photography paved my way to become a professional photographer. My reference to professional photographer doesn't mean that I pursue photography for money. People often associate professionals to those who pursue photography for money.

A photography business needs lots of business acumen, which is beyond the scope of this book or my aspirations. I'm focused on pursuing the art, and monetization of the art may or may not happen.



Photograph 8.1: "Let me adjust my mustache... Then you take the photo."

A professional photographer, or any artist, is the one who commits to the art. A disciplined individual who has both passion and persistence for the art is truly a professional artist.

Even if you aspire to become a commercially successful photographer, commitment to the art is the first step. If your photography is not good enough, people won't invest in you and you won't make enough money any which way.



Photograph 8.2: Streets are full of good food and, of course, good people. Go out for enriching

experience.

Alright, then what are the benefits of street photography if it doesn't pay you anything tangible?

The short answer is: it empowers you as an artist.

Here's the long answer:

1. You learn to engage with various people. No, I don't want to make you an extrovert if that's not who you are. On purpose, even a reserved person engages with strangers with panache.
2. You gain core photography skills: exposure, composition, and technique.
3. You learn to pose people.
4. You know the editing workflow and create your own style of finished photos.
5. You learn to handle fans and followers with whom you've shared photos. You also know how to approach social media and, among so many websites, which ones to focus on.
6. You gain professional discipline and patience required for the artist.
7. You learn lots of soft skills while dealing with people, like ethics, integrity, and moral values.

8. If you want to continue a career in portrait photography, street photography is a great place to start. You can replicate almost every concept in studio photography. Well, studios are fairly more controlled and your models are more submissive than a stranger on the street.

9. What else? You know which gear and lens works best in what conditions. The beginner's confusion about the lens and the gear will disappear.

10. Lastly, you'll be able to define the purpose of your photography — themes, mood, and end result — the way you want it or your client wants it.



Photograph 8.3: Don't judge me by the grey hair. i'm a young artist.

If you want to stay with the art of street photography or travel photography or diverse human portraits, here are few of the options you can explore:

1. **Documentary photography:** pick a common theme of your photos and make a documentary video, article, book, or a photo essay. I keep writing to magazines and on the web about the people I shoot and a little more about their thoughts and lives.
2. **Coffee table book:** a coffee table book would help people navigate the way you want to show a theme or mood. For example, you can show all the monuments in your city in a coffee table book. 'Humans of New York' is a wonderful example. People belonging to multiple countries and ethnicities are covered in the book — together they make the planet Earth.
3. **Photography educator:** imparting knowledge is the best payback to

society. If you learn photography, do share it with the other beginner photographers. Share your experiences and make their struggle a little more painless.

4. **Photography books:** write books to spread your unique photography perspective and knowledge for the people who can't join you in person. Don't think that a topic in your mind is saturated in the books. There is always a space for novel ideas, and people would love to hear your style of storytelling and own experience of how you combat challenges.

5. **Brands association:** travel companies or photography product brands are keen to work with photographers to extend the reach of their brand through the influencers. Stay open to collaborate. It's win-win. They get better reach and your approval. You get sponsors for your photography pursuits.

That said, more avenues will open. Tangible benefits are incidental. Focus on the art. Make the camera your best buddy!

Photograph 8.4: "Namaste!" Kid from a traditional Gurukul in Vrindavan, India.



9. Bonus Chapter – How to Interview

The questions don't do the damage. Only the answers do.

– Sam Donaldson

Street photographers have a definite passion for humanity. Once you ace the street photography, you'll love to extend it to understand regional people and their society — share each story with the larger audience. This endeavor is called documentary or photojournalism.



Photograph 9.1: American "Krishna" ISKCON devotee.

You need basic writing skill, curiosity, and passion for knowledge sharing about humans.

I was once interviewed by school kids during my Vietnam travel. Kids wanted to improve their English-speaking ability and hence were engaging with foreigners.

"Excuse me, sir, can I ask you a few questions?" asked a kid who was there with two other kids with pen and paper.

The paper had a few questions written on it to structure the interview.

"Sure," I said.

"Which country do you belong to?"

"India."

"Oh, wow! I know this country" one kid told his friend. Then he looked at

me and added, "My mom likes the Bollywood movies and dance."

The cute little guy surprised me with his knowledge and wanted to know even more about my country.

He further asked questions from the printed piece of paper, "How many seasons do you have in your country, sir?"

I said, "Four."

He extended the engagement by sharing his country's seasons too, "Okay, very good. We've got two seasons — rainy and dry." Then went on asking, "What do you like the most about my country — people, food and beverages, or places?"

I said, "I love people like you in your country, my dear friend. You've lovely and happy people in the country." I showed them my camera and said, "I met many people in Saigon and took their photos."

I showed them the photos and they enjoyed it thoroughly. They got back to the questions.

"Very good photos, sir. Thank you for your response." Looking at the sheet, the other guy asked me, "Did you come here for vacation or work?"

I said, "I came here for work, but I like to travel and meet local people in the cities where I go even for the work."

Then they asked a question which was not in their sheet, "How many times have you visited here?"

I said, "This is my second trip."

He told me, "I also like to take photos on mobile. But your camera is good. The photos are also good. How can I learn to take photos, sir?"

I said, "You can learn on your own; keep shooting with mobile till you feel like having a DSLR. You can buy a book and learn to operate the camera. Continue to practice photography with your mobile camera."

They thanked me and moved on to the next tourist.



Photograph 9.2: The kid who interviewed me.

Like these kids, people are curious to know about people from different parts of the sphere. They can't reach out to everyone. So whichever part of world you visit or belong to, document about it through interviews.



Photograph 9.3: "Sorry, I can't stop to talk. I've lots of work pending."

For scheduled or impromptu interviews, prepare for the interview in advance. Do your homework. Get a basic understanding about the cultural nuances in advance. If you know the person, research about his or her achievements. Create a list of questions. Feel free to change the course of discussion basis their responses during the interview. The questionnaire acts as the reference and ensures coverage.

While publishing, write the statements of the person word-by-word. Their words, lingo, and local jargon have greater impact than when you write it in your own language.

Interviewing people will help break the jinx with strangers. While talking to people, push yourself extra for enriching engagement. The more you interview the more you feel the urge to meet new strangers.

Photograph 9.4: "I love traveling."



Final words...

There you go with the tools and techniques to shoot stunning street portraits. If you're serious about the street photography and photojournalism, keep a camera with you, wherever you go.

I wish you the best of luck and lots of fun with your photography endeavors!

Don't forget to share the goodness and care for the community.

I'm dying to hear from you whether this crisp book is of any use to you. Take you few seconds out to write the review on Amazon and let other people know if this is helpful!!



*Photograph 10: Did you like all the portraits in the book? Drop a review/
comment/ suggestions.*

About the Author



Priya Ranjan is an Engineering Graduate from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, India. He works for the world's largest Foods and Beverages corporation.

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