

Time Out Mumbai

The big picture

TS Satyan takes the long view of a life in photography, finds **Jaideep Sen**.

As someone who began his career with the *Deccan Herald* in 1948, shot for the *Illustrated Weekly, Time and Life*, received the Padma Shri and exhibited at the UN headquarters, TS Satyan has viewed the nation's evolution through his lens. *A Long Exposure*, a retrospective of his work, covers milestones from his career, from images that won him global acclaim to pictures that are the last records of an India that has disappeared. Now 85, his works are as much a lesson in India's history as a visual memoir of his career. *A Long Exposure*, each emerge as powerful as the other.

Does the world look more pleasant at 85?

Not really. There may be more material comforts thanks to technology and development. But I worry about some of the values that have been devalued today. There is more violence and ill will fuelled by corrupt politicians. Patriotism is absent in many people.

Which of your photographs would you preserve?

The whole body of my work, but more importantly, my images that have elements of art – some pictures take you back in time, and are witnesses in the court of history.

When was the last time you scrambled to get a picture?

I have not encountered a situation like this. As a freelancer, I had the freedom to shoot what I wanted. Some of the events I covered, Pope Paul VI visit to India and of the US President Eisenhower and many other VVIPs, were all crowded.

Is there any other politician you'd like to photograph as much as your favourite subject Jawaharlal Nehru?

I have begun to despise politicians and their ways. At my age, I don't want to photograph any of them unless Barack Obama visits India.

Has photojournalism become more demanding and the field a lot more crowded today?

Yes. Those wanting to take to this profession must consider it carefully. You have to know more and work harder to earn less than in many other professions. You need the strength of a packhorse to carry around all the equipment. You must develop resourcefulness, ingenuity and adaptability to solve assignment logistics. Most important, you must stay healthy, always. You have to be your best self. The expectations of editors

and readers are high.

News photography in modern times is not only fatiguing, but also dangerous and calls for alertness and dedication. In India there is not much money for those wanting to work for the print media. No wonder more and more young persons are branching out to other areas like advertising, industrial and fashion photography.

Does the sense of service that you have spoken about as an essential trait, appear lost in the context of new age mass media?

Yes, it has. The person I have in my mind is the “concerned photographer”. Indian editors are not bothered about him and his work. They are not visually thrilled. They don’t seem to realise that in its own way, a picture can activate the conscience of the reader. They don’t realise that without being preachy the photographer can sensitise, motivate and subtly show us the need to search our own hearts. It is unfortunate that rank commercialisation of the mass media has worsened the situation.

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