

BOOK OF PHOTOGRAPHS AIMS AT PRESENTING 'A RESPECTFUL, TOLERANT COUNTRY'

Celebration of India's colourful and diverse images



Sajal Ghosh and Jael Silliman at the release of the book at Bengal Club on Sunday. Picture by Gautam Bose

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Calcutta: A senior executive of a petrochemical giant travelled across the length and breadth of the country for five years and took photographs to "present India as a colourful, respectful, tolerant country".

India in Celebration, a collection of more than 200 photographs captured by Sajal Ghosh from over 27 festivals and fairs, was released on Sunday evening. "My intention was to

sorts of aberrations at present," he said.

Each photograph is accompanied by a text by writer and activist Jael Silliman to "orient the reader".

"This book brings together India's diversity, its pluralism, its dynamism. It's got secular festivals, it's got deeply religious festivals," Silliman told Metro.

"I got to enjoy the journey across India, to see parts of India in festivals. I thought I was very well read but I had not heard of some

Ghosh shared his experience of the Theyyam Festival, held for more than 1,500 years in Kasargod and through out the Kannur region of northern Kerala. The dancers in the festival are Dalits, who are considered representatives of God, and villagers come to touch their feet.

He also spoke of how he survived on fruits when he spent three nights with a Naga family to photograph the Hornbill Festival.

The book has a foreword by Shashi Tharoor who writes: "There are many reasons to be proud of being Indian. We have a long-standing and resilient democratic culture. We have a long history of peaceful relations between our immense number of religious and ethnic groups... Much of this glorious heritage can be described by the catch-all term, 'diversity', a word that feels almost inadequate to describe India's unparalleled breadth of linguistic, geographical and cultural variation.

Tharoor adds: "Many of these festivals are purely secular, harvest celebrations—Onam for example, or Dusshera, or even Holi—despite their origins in Hindu mythology... The ability of festivals to act as a unifier, to put things in perspective and remind us that we are Indi-



Visarjan procession, which is a part of the Ganapati Festival, in Mumbai



The Viva Carnival at Vasco da Gama, Goa



Theyyam inside a temple complex in a village near Kannur, Kerala

present India as a colourful, respectful, tolerant country," Ghosh, executive vice-president (CS) and head, legal, Haldia Petrochemicals, said at the book launch at Bengal Club.

He has captured the Hornbill Festival at Kisama (Nagaland), Latmar Holi in Nandgaon near Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Id prayers on Red Road in Calcutta among others and shared experiences of his travel.

"My perception of India is totally different and if you go through the book you will be able to understand what I am saying. My perception is that everybody should extend their hands to each other. That is the perception I have of India that we all belong as a nation. It's a colourful, vibrant country, like that. But unfortunately we are going through all

of these festivals...The pages throb with passion, intensity, beauty, spirituality, muscular power and great, great devotion," Silliman said at the launch.

Ghosh, too, spoke of the thrilling diversity that he experienced across the country. "I thought why not present these differences in a collective manner, maybe in the form of a book," he said.

He could not travel last year because of the pandemic. The Khajuraho Dance Festival in February 2020 was the one that he attended just before the lockdown.

Ghosh had to juggle his work and his hobby for this book. At times, he took a flight in the morning, attended a festival and returned the same day or headed straight for a meeting from the airport.

ans and human beings before anything else, is awe-inspiring.... This book, compiling Jael Silliman's text with Sajal Ghosh's stunning images of these wonderful festivals, is more than a collection of photos: it is a volume of what makes India, and Indians, wonderful."

During the programme on Sunday writer Shankarlal Bhattacharjee said: "The book is a celebration and at the heart of it is a Bengali mind".

Tridib Chatterjee, president of the Publishers and Booksellers Guild, said he saw "a slice of India" in the book.

The book will be available on Amazon and *Boighar.in*.

Ghosh announced that a substantial portion of the proceeds would go to charity.