

Deccan Herald » Metro Life - Thurs » Detailed Story

**BRYOND THE LENSE**

## Turn pages of unsung stories

Jackie Pinto

***Huylers cast of 20 characters are colourful and fascinating. A sample includes Indra, a (Merasi) Muslim woman whose male family members have been musicians to local Hindu royalty and in a temple for the past 37 generations***

It is not too often that one comes across women who have used their unhappy living conditions to their advantage. Somehow, they are lost in the crowd. And surprisingly, it takes an outsider to bring them before your eyes. Stephen Huyler has been travelling the length and breadth of India since 1971, living in Indian homes and from the perspective of an art historian, cultural anthropologist, photographer and author, endeavoured to dispel the stereotypical images of Indian women, that of being submissive victims of circumstances.

"I am not trivialising or discounting the issues that some of them face everyday. But by focusing on the inspiring real life stories of these 20 women, I have closely interacted with, from all walks of life I hope to convey the true strength and resilience of Indian womanhood. My book is a salute to their spirit and I hope the world will acknowledge and recognise that," he says.

Huyler's cast of 20 characters are colourful and fascinating. A sample includes Indra, a (Merasi) Muslim woman whose male family members have been musicians to local Hindu royalty and in a temple for the past 37 generations. Indra herself worships the Hindu Goddess, Bhati Rani, in a small shrine in her home.

Samabai from Kutch in Gujarat lost her entire village in the in the earthquake.


Today, thanks to her efforts, her village is a tourist attraction as it was the only one rebuilt in the traditional manner. No bricks, cement or modern gadgets are in sight, the mud walls are decked with colourful murals, women wear only the beautifully embroidered clothes and jewellery of their clan while local arts and crafts do a roaring trade.


Huyler has also detailed the struggle of high-achieving urban women like Achamma, a bored housewife turned software millionairess, who still faces tough issues of being a woman in a man's world, and several others.

"My book Daughters of India is a celebration of 'shakti', the supreme feminine power in India. The strength, courage, and resourcefulness of Indian women, from a wide variety of backgrounds that I have personally been privy to, leaves me deeply humbled and my book is a tribute to the way they live their lives. Some of them may have been victimised but they have never allowed



themselves to become victims," adds Huyler as he signs off.

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