

BOOK

THE INDIANS



a temple's rooftop into the Ganges at the Benares Ghat, a woman selling momos at some place in North-east, a street hawker doling out *chholakulcha* in Haryana. It's an impressive layout of the ordinary world and the publishers have done well to categorise the whole thing. So in the 250-page book, you have chapters like *Desi Khana*, *Akahada*, *Rituals*, *Karwa-Chauth*, *Garam Chai*, *Hizras*, *Presswallahs* and *Dhobi Ghats*, *Bollywood*, *paan-mania* etc...the pictures are real to the level of becoming haunting for someone who has been part of those worlds at some time or the other. Some of them, though, seem to be a repeat of some earlier works, but their numbers are far less to be worth debating. Over all, the collection is not only worth a *dekho* but even preserving as Sumant says, "The book will have a historical value as in fifteen years later, those boot-polish *walas* and *chaiwalas* are going to be shooed away from the streets.

The cover picture of a child painted as Lord Shiva clicked six months back at 'Pushkar Mela' has already raised a row with accusations of encashing on the success of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*. But Sumant refutes all such accusations by saying that the profit generated by the book's sale will go to the Loomba Trust of Cherie Blaire, wife of the ex-British PM Tony Blair. In fact Cherie Blair has written the foreword for the book, in which she mentions about the Loomba Trust's activities amongst the



Indian widows abandoned by their spouse or families. This I think should have been better avoided in the foreword as it gives a feeling of deliberately marketing the Trust to the readers. Again a minor blemish!

However attractive the book might be for the nostalgic Indians, it seems to be meant for the foreigners, as the ideas captured in the frames seems to be taken from the perspective of a foreigner watching those activities in amusement. Take for example, the picture of a Muslim garment manufacturer at his small town manufacturing facility who is sitting on something wearing rings of the size of *idli* on almost all his fingers or a lady making balls of the cow dung or that of *pehelwans* working out with *desi* equipments in an *akhada*. These will shock and amuse foreigners more than the Indians as these

are common things for people – even for those living in metros. Some others that stand out for us are the ones that appear in the *desi-khana* chapter, especially the title of '*Jalebi*' put up on a cart while the seller is busy frying more and scores of *kachori* floating in hot oil and tempting to the extent of provoking one to try taking one out to have a bite!

The photographer, Sonhal, scores big time in these pictures. The author traveled to parts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh in his quest of getting the real India on a coffee-table book. I would suggest them to work out a sequel pretty fast as that India is really hot these days, for foreigners as well as to Indians. ■