

## THE INDIANS

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Queer and sharp street photography, with strong splashes of colour, take you on a voyage through urban and rural lanes, marked with the sweet redness of beetle juice and walls covered with the paints of matrimonial advertisements and effortlessly sketched deities. This coffee-table captures the unpredictability of a city's structure, which gives us a chance to gasp and later, smile over the irony of spotting a life-size Hanuman in the corner of a traffic congested street, kids playing street games or a procession taken by school kids, marching towards a *gurdwara*.

The much known rituals encapsulating the faith we grow up with, whether it involves doing a *pooja* with an ash-smeared *sadhu* (sitting with his unwashed dreadlocks), shaving your head clean or taking a dip in the holy Ganges of Varanasi, to traditional *gurukuls* (carrying forward the *guru-shishya parampara*) and *madrasas* that capture the stark reality behind growing up in a space with such a different value system, and believers of a set religious faith who melt atheists with their stringent devotion, often shown towards a lone cow on the street, or a *tulsi* plant in the courtyard.

From the beautiful gypsies, with their weighty accessories, loud make-up and bold character, you flip the pages to our national



addiction: *chai*, sipped over a crunchy rusk biscuit dug out of a glass container, or over a special date at one of the many fancy joints in cities that have cropped up over the years. A book about Indians is incomplete without incorporating *desi* street food, the bubbling rush of a vegetable market, *akhadas*, obsession with Bollywood and the *dhobi ghats*, lined with every colour and texture you can think of - and it's all there to pore over.

I've often pictured getting a haircut or a head massage under a tree, sitting by the pavement, with an assortment of talcum powder and a pair of scissors placed in front of me; this read made me realise how incredible that ritual can be.

Rating: \*\*½

(Books courtesy Midland Bookshop: *Handling the Undead*, *Paths of Glory*, *Making an Elephant*, *Stephen King Goes to the Movies* & *The Case of the Missing Servant*.)