

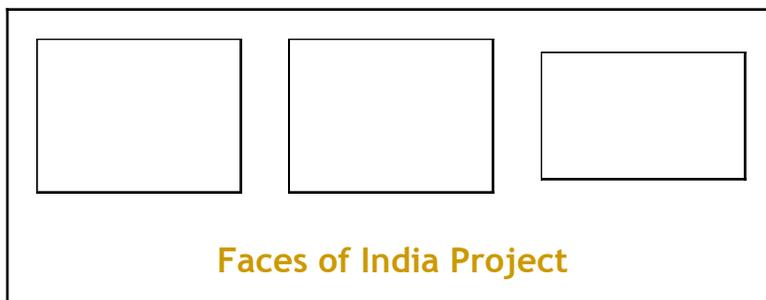
Faces of India - A Photography Project

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As a student at Boston University **Center for Digital Imaging Arts**, my first photography assignment was given in the second class, Camera and Workflow II. The assignment was called The Faces Project, and the goal was to take at least 100 photographs of faces, to be narrowed down to 50 for sharing in class, and finally to 2 for large format printing. Ideally, the student would narrow down the project to a particular theme, such as people laughing, people over 60, people jumping, or even (yes) people blowing their noses. While one of the project lessons was to get students to become comfortable with the camera and to quickly navigate and make best use of the exposure controls, the underlying lesson was a social one rather than technological one. As future professional photographers, the ability to confidently interact with and among strangers should not be overlooked. In fact, many of the students expressed a feeling of dread when given the assignment because, like myself, many are introverts or not highly social, and the thought of blindly walking up to strangers to ask for their photo made many a butterfly spin around our stomachs.

As I travel to India for work on occasion, I decided to choose the theme of Faces of India, since I was to be in Bangalore for a short while. At first, I thought the Faces project would be an impossible one. At times I was overcome with fear when contemplating photographing people in a foreign land, but at the same time I knew that I could accomplish this task that the results would likely be fantastic because of the diversity of culture and people found there.



The project got off with a few fits and starts, and I warmed up by photographing those with whom I work in the Adobe office in Bangalore. I'm very grateful for their cooperativeness while I fumbled around with positioning them, taking shots, and retaking more shots. They had a lot of patience with me. Soon a few key concepts emerged that I would quickly adapt to which would progressively help make the Faces of India project more successful. I didn't learn them all at the same time or in this order, but here's a few important ideas that became very useful:

- Ask someone for their photo when ever possible, before taking it. I wouldn't want to offend anyone by clicking first and asking later, especially when in close proximity.
- If there is some barrier to asking someone for their photo, such as being in different cars in traffic, try to make eye contact first, then point to the camera

and then point to them. This always resulted in a smile and a cooperative subject.

- If asked and the reply is "No", politely thank them and move on.
- When approaching someone, think about the composition and background. When greeting them try to put yourself in a position where the subject appears in an interesting context. Try to see the photo before you ask for it, and move your body when possible rather than asking your subject to move.
- Think of a conversation starter, something to talk about briefly while you compose the shot, and if you're quick witted, something to make them smile, laugh, or otherwise make some interesting expression.
- This is pure speculation, but you might want to introduce yourself as a photography student, even if you're just a hobbyist or perhaps if you're a professional. I think that the subject considers you as a student, they will be more at ease and more likely to be patient while you move around and take several shots. If you're a hobbyist there might be a risk of being considered a weirdo or stalker, and if you're a professional then they might become unnerved or concerned about their appearance, or worse they might demand a model release contract or otherwise begin talking business.
- When composing a close portrait, I prefer a very wide aperture such as F1.8 on a 50 or 85mm lens. This puts the whole background into a blur and isolates the subject's face. The effect is known as **bokeh**. When street shooting, you might want to widen the depth of field to F4 or 5.6 in order to accommodate for the unpredictability of the situation.
- Focus on the eye, then recompose while keeping that focus. Their eyes should be very sharp when ever possible, especially for closer portraits.
- In my (short) experience, its best to have a dark background such as dimly lit room or dark wall. Avoid light backgrounds such as lots of sky or a bright reflection in glass. This is especially true for dark skinned subjects when using evaluative metering because the camera will meter partially on the background, making the face too dark while losing detail.
- If time permits, take a genuine interest in the subject. Ask their name, where their from, what they do, etc. Chat with them and show them the photo(s) in the LCD back.
- Always thank them when possible and make it a positive experience for them too.

Still I feel a sense of nervousness when considering photographing strangers, but I feel like it will continually get easier from social and technical points of views. You can keep up with [my photos on Flickr](#), and check out the [Faces of India](#) project there too. For an interactive and fun version of my Faces of India project [look here instead](#).

If you'd like to do your own Faces project, check out the [100 Strangers discussion forum](#) on Flickr for lots of ideas.