

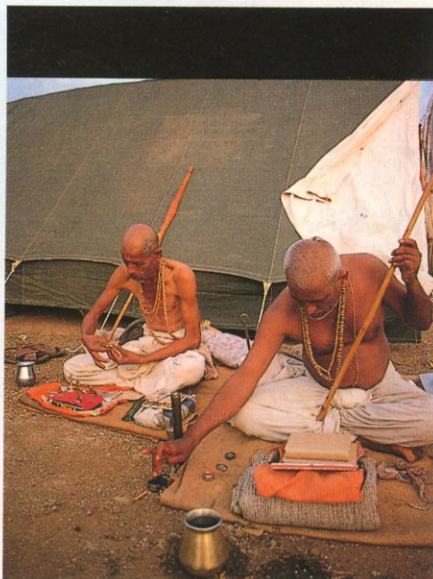
स्वागत

जनवरी JANUARY '91

SWAGAT

विमान में पढ़ने के लिए
FOR INFLIGHT READING





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A calling of the heart

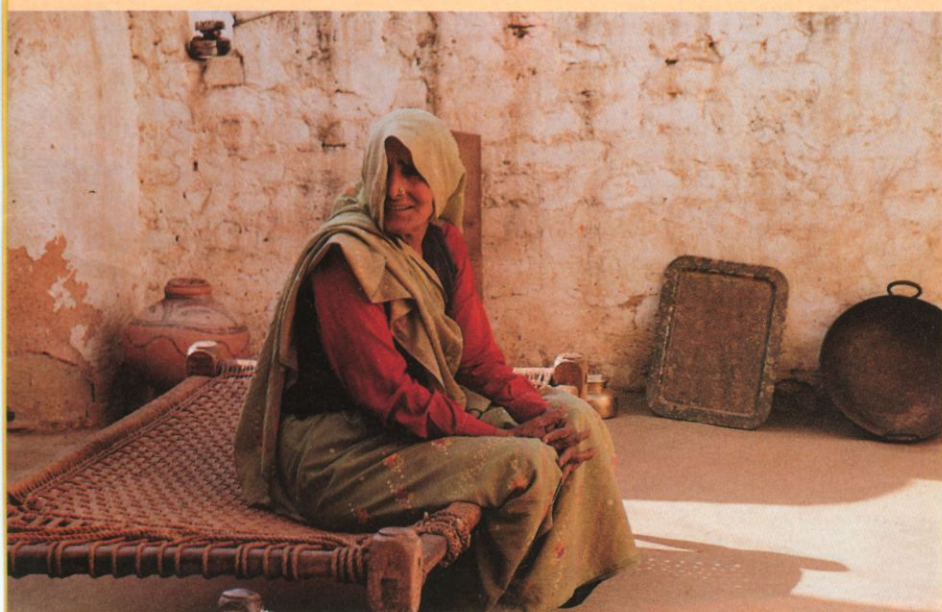
Text: Nihal Mathur

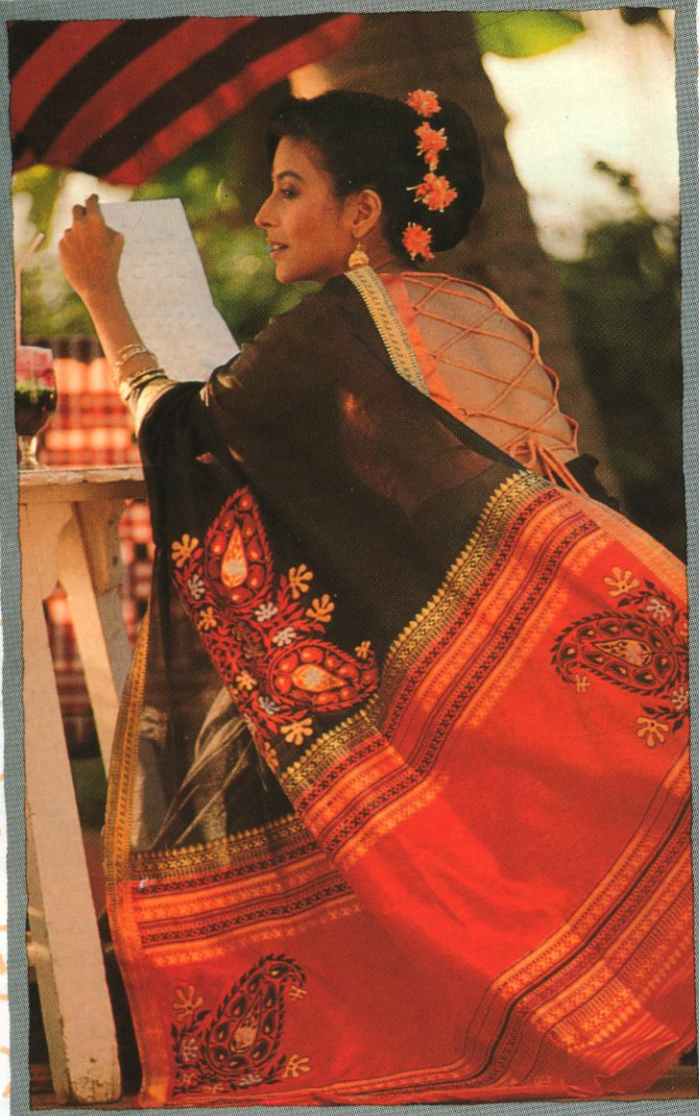
Pix: Rosmarie Grieco

Intuitive and inexplicable, it is a calling of the heart that only lovers and mystics seem to understand. She is perhaps a bit of both. That is why she comes to India, unfailingly every year, almost as if on an annual pilgrimage, in search of something she has yet to find.

But she has found the people. The extraordinary, ordinary people that make India bubble with life. Quick to smile and laugh, her people are the 'teeming millions' of this country whose drama of life seems to unfold on the streets. It is these simple souls celebrating the joys and sorrows of life, like people anywhere in the world, that are endeared to her and are the main focus of her photography.

Her photography is to do with





Sunset, strangers and silks...

Sunset by the poolside. An evening with special friends. She waits. Looking alluring. In a Benarasi black crêpe georgette. With exquisite handwoven motifs in sunset shades. The world seems to stop. And stare. A message hurriedly scrawled asks "Are you for real?"

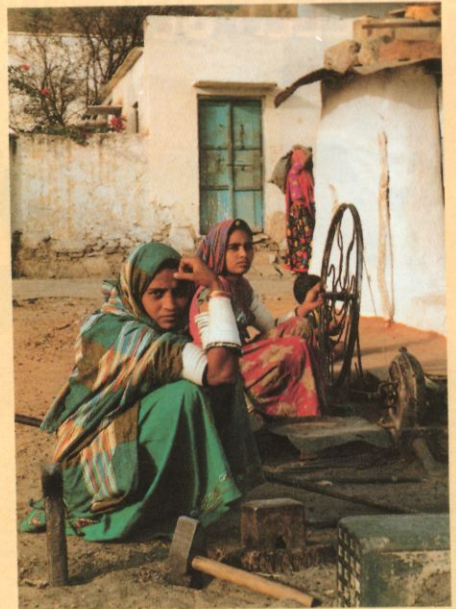
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feelings In taking pictures technical perfection is not her consideration nor her forte either. Rather, the emphasis is on the spirit of the moment. Her photographs seek to capture the ordinary and the commonplace and invest them with something special. Her images reveal a beauty in the simplicity of plain folk and their little realities of life that are truly seen in the everyday things and actions.

A woman grinding spices; the look of a street kid; a young *Rebari* girl with her camels; a *dhobi* with his donkeys, a tailor at work, a roadside conversation between two friends and other images of the prosaic, populate her pictures, making the mundane into the memorable, turning the typical into the novel and highlighting the details that we almost always seem to overlook.

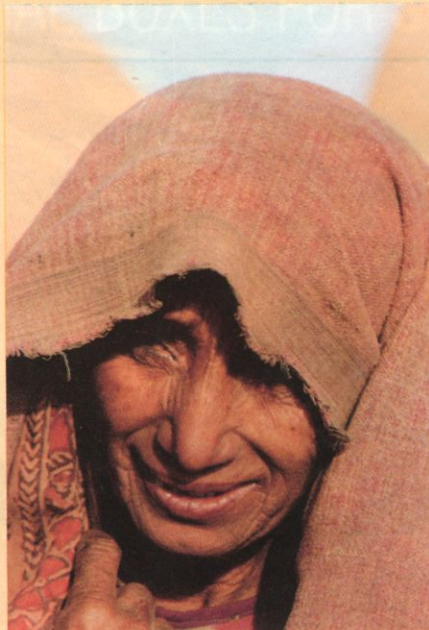
There is no place for the contrived and the calculated in her photography. In place of the clever mind there is simply the way of the heart. She prefers to photograph things spontaneously as and when, they arise. In that sense, the pictures come to her. She doesn't go to the pictures. Of course, there are the considerations of composition and the quality of light that make her move towards taking a picture, but beyond that, there is no tampering with the real to suit the needs of the image, which is photographed with complete honesty—just as it is—with the warmth of affection, understanding and empathy.

Each picture she takes means several things to her. "It is an interconnected world," she says

“and there is no way we can compartmentalise reality.” Hence, it is not surprising that she is unable to categorise her pictures into clear-cut themes. For her there are no objects in her photography, only subjects and feelings, as they naturally manifest.

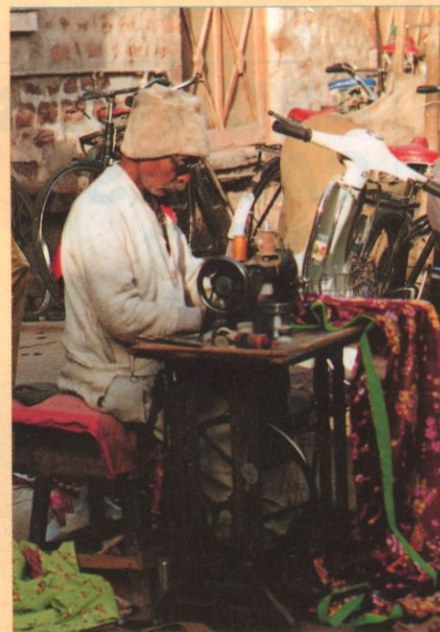
As in photography, so also in life, she likes to take things as they come. That is why she is never organised beyond a basic structure, after which she lets the bigger “design” in things take over, showing her the way. Although life is generally planned, the meticulous details are left to the chances of fate. This attitude of mind, so akin to Indian ethos, immediately makes her feel at home in India. Such an outlook to life, among some other beliefs as well, she says she first acquired in Italy, then in India and has enriched her life in many subtle ways.

Her romance with India began a long time ago, when as a young ballerina she encountered a Nataraja bronze—the Indian god of dance. But it was many years later that she came to know that Shiva was also the very essence of life and death. Perhaps, yearning for



another life, away from her predictable world in the west, she came riding Air India's inaugural flight from Frankfurt to Bombay in 1968 for the first time.

Since then, she has visited India 19 times, sometimes twice a year. Initially, India came in the form of package tours, which were gentle, though superficial introductions to this vast subcontinent. But later,



fortified with the experience of several such trips, she took on the country on her own. But it was only after what can be called the Hassalblad hassle—when she lost her camera but found some Indian friends—that this country really opened up to her. It was only then that she embarked on her journey of the discovery of India.

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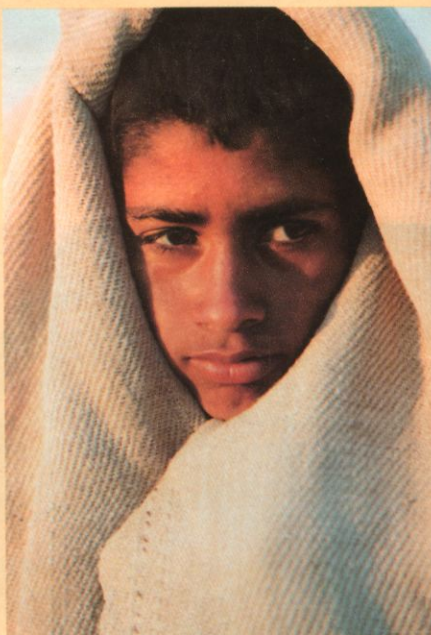


contemporary. Curtains, upholstery, bedcovers, cushion covers in pure silk. And more. Bedspreads, sheets, table linen, bathroom sets, even doormats.



east, she travelled all over the country. But it was with the desert state of Rajasthan that she experienced 'love at first sight'. She was instantly charmed by the handsome country folk, who lived a passionate life, full of zest and colour in an otherwise arid landscape. In some ways, this land of the Rajput warriors with its broken hilly countryside, crowned with forts and abandoned ancient buildings and ruins, was also very reminiscent of Tuscany, her 'adopted home' in Italy, where she has a farm. She confesses that her trips to India are quite incomplete without a visit to Rajasthan, where there are always friends to be seen, new routes and destinations to be discovered, a fair to be attended or simply, an evening to be spent listening to the *langa* musicians amidst the sand-dunes in Jaisalmer.

Over the many years she has come to enjoy many things Indian. After burning her mouth in Bombay on her first trip, she was cautious with the various cuisines in the country but came to relish the heady flavours only as the years went by. She also found a new appetite for Indian literature, as she



began to read whatever came her way, from the translations of the ancient classics to contemporary prose. Indians, she says, are natural story tellers and talking to one is like hearing stories within stories!

One success story that she has happily witnessed, is the rise in the status of women in India. She feels the women in this country have truly come of age.

Among other things about India which she strongly feels for, is the sense of respect for elders and the cohesiveness of the family, which is far more deeply rooted in Indian culture than anywhere in the western world.

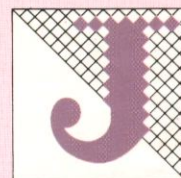
Moving between the two cultures of the east and the west with ease and fluidity, she seems to be in the enviable position of having the best of both worlds. Here or there, she is often asked where do you come from. It has always been, a not so simple question to answer, since her international identity makes it quite difficult to explain that she was born and brought up in Switzerland, has lived in several European countries, the U.S. and has travelled extensively around the world. Although, she now chooses to live in West Germany, she feels that home is where the heart is and for Rosemarie Grieco, the heart is always left behind in India.

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