

# Solar Eclipse

## Opportunity for Images of Human Interest

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The sun has always been worshipped by humanity as a supporter of life, but whenever eclipsed by the moon—total or partial—different cultures view it with a unique approach. The impact of total solar eclipse astonishes even the animals and birds as the sudden darkness provokes a sense of fear and uncertainty. Such ominous events have also played an important role in human history. Many references on the impact of solar eclipses can be found in literature and ancient religious scriptures.

The rare phenomenon of solar eclipse is as old as the existence of the celestial world itself. For astrologers, it may be a rare happening when spirituality and the psyche combine anew, but at the same time its religious or mythological aspect has immense photographic opportunities to offer to photographers. Therefore, during the solar eclipse, photographers should not confine themselves only to the images of the course of the fleeting celestial splendor or of the people watching it with

amazement. They should explore more than that to make the best out of this rare phenomena.

Millions of Hindus throng places of pilgrimage, especially sacred rivers and tanks to have a dip in them during the period of solar eclipse and make offerings to the Sun God and give alms. On such occasions, the gathering of people at religious places increases so much that local administrations officially hold fairs in an organized manner. One such fair is known as the *Solar Eclipse Fair*.

As an eclipse was drawing near, this photographer was becoming more curious to visit one such place to avail of this rare photographic opportunity. It was decided to visit Kurukshetra, a place of immense religious significance. At Kurukshetra, the partial solar eclipse was visible for about two hours, from 4:00 pm to 5:55 pm. It is a place where a large number of devotees and pilgrims come from various parts of the country and abroad to have a dip in its sacred tanks. Special buses and trains are pressed into service to enable followers to reach Kurukshetra earlier than the specific time of the solar eclipse.

But why is there always a sea of humanity at Kurukshetra during the solar eclipse fair? Since times immemorial, a holy dip in sacred tanks of Kurukshetra, namely the *Brahma Sarover*



Controlled breathing—a saint performs a unique feat



A puff for relaxation



Looking at the eclipse

and *Sannihit Sarover* during a solar eclipse has an added significance for attaining *moksha* (salvation), which is the ultimate life goal of every devout Hindu. Their strong belief in such rituals has support in the ancient religious scriptures.

Before the day of the eclipse, pilgrims including saints clad in saffron robes reach Kurukshetra and stay on the banks of the sacred tanks thus adding to the religious fervor of this rare and big event. They gather in groups, play traditional musical instruments, recite hymns and religious songs and some saints perform miracles of yoga. The entire area around the sacred tanks wears a festive look. Saints clad in saffron robes add to the colorful environment.

As the time of the eclipse draws near, excited men, women and children make room for themselves in sacred tanks. And as the eclipse



A holy man

become visible or the clock strikes the time of commencement of the eclipse, they enter into the sacred tanks in a large number, offer water to the Sun, pay obeisance to the Sun God and have a bath. People also give alms during the period of the solar eclipse.

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All for alms



Reciting prayers with rosary





*A saint applying "Tilak" after taking a bath in sacred Brahma Sarover*

The scene is similar at other places of pilgrimage, which are located on the banks of sacred rivers. This religious fervor on the

rare occasion of solar eclipse unfolds ample photographic opportunities to capture moods and moments and add to the kitty of images of the element of human interest.

One may capture images of the devotees praying while standing in water; having a dip and offering water to the Sun God; or children dressed up as saints to get alms; pilgrims and saints in interactive situations or any other attractive situation of immense emotional impact which one may like to freeze with the camera. One may also capture images of saint's faces or saints busy in prayer or smoking.

Generally these people do not object to being photographed thus providing easy subjects. However, while making images of people taking a bath in the rivers or tanks, one must take care that they are not captured in any compromising situation. In the case of Kurukshetra, there are covered places in sacred tanks to facilitate women taking baths privately, but still many of them have a dip in the open.

One may look for how other cultures view solar eclipses and may avail of the photographic opportunities of a different kind.

Nowadays it is easy to precisely predict solar eclipses and the information is highlighted through the media. The recent solar eclipse at Kurukshetra was a dazzling visual spectacle. Be prepared to capture the spirit of the next solar eclipse but with a caution: neither look at the sun directly with a naked eye or sunglasses nor through your camera or binocular, slides, x-ray films or photographic films during a partial or total solar eclipse. The rays of the sun will converge through the lens and cause damage to the eyes. Welder's glass, eclipse glasses or prescribed filters made by reputed companies are recommended to view the eclipsed sun. ■



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*Pilgrims having bath in sacred Brahma Sarover*