India's Picture Vendor
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PHOTOGRAPHY

India's Picture Vendor

Meet Jagdish Agarwal and his 500,000 stock photos

Ever wondered where Hinduism Today gets those fabulous photographs of India like the one below capturing a few hundred thousand Hindus celebrating Ganesha Visarjana? The secret lies deep in the crowded Kalbadevi district of Mumbai, at Dinodia Picture Agency. The brain child of Jagdish Agarwal, DPA claims the largest collection of photographs on India. Hundreds of thousands of images in color and black and white taken by over 200 photographers and covering the time period from 1876 to the present. For pictures of anyone or anything Hindu, DPA is the place.

Agarwal's interest in photography began as a hobby and part-time business while working with his family's textile company. He traveled all over the country as a participant of the Bombay Natural History Society's annual camps, and took more than 10,000 pictures in 10 years. He got some photographs published, but being more a businessman than most shutterbugs, he shortly found a unique nitch for fellow freelancers desperately in need of marketing help. "Suddenly, I was getting calls for pictures of beaches, temples and personalities from companies. I used to meet customers during lunch, when my father stepped out for his hot brunch. I was

merely marketing the pictures of these photographers using my management background, getting them the right price. It was then that the idea of a photo library came to my mind," laughs Agarwal in an interview with Bombay Times.

In 1987, Agarwal's family decided to back DPA, and formally put their premises and resources behind the upstart business. DPA's well-organized picture library is divided into eight major categories--animals, events, nature, industry, personalities, places, sports and miscellaneous. Each category then has many sub-categories--e.g., in the animal category there are tigers, giraffes, and baby animals. In the industry section there are rare pictures of glass works. Principal tourist destinations plus major events like the Kumbha Mela are photographed and documented. They have archive photos, including thousands of Mahatma Gandhi.

Each slide is carefully stored in cataloged boxes and albums. The humidity is constantly monitored and adjusted to prevent damaging molds from attacking the slides. DPA hasn't gone digital yet; you can get low resolution images of some pictures, but can't yet download high resolution images from a website, or get them by email.

"Besides professional photographers, we also keep good pictures taken by lawyers, doctors and people from other professions. In fact, Dinodia has now become a platform for semiprofessionals eager to branch out," said Agarwal. He also says that he is open to all those interested in making their pictures available for professional work. "The idea is to continue to develop the library and bring India closer to your

home."

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