Re-discovering life through the lens

- **Abhijit Sharma**

As we get caught up in the pace of the modern life, small little beautiful things fail to catch our attention. As a matter of fact each fleeting moment of our lives has within them boundless beauty in the form of myriads of beautiful little things.

I re-discovered this very aspect of life in my adulthood, as I drifted into photography. This has opened to me a new horizon to re-discover and capture these fleeting moments. And as I return back to the captured images again and again, not only do I get an opportunity to recall the memories but also, amazingly, reveal to myself new things in those moments which I may not have even noticed earlier! These are some of those precious little things that we fail to notice as the moments had passed by. I won't deny the fact that being hooked to photography, my perspective of the world around me has changed as I constantly look for those special moments and sights that pass by which could be captured in photographs for eternity.

Photography also gives you an opportunity and the freedom to look at the world around you in an entirely different point of view (literally and otherwise!). This is where artists delve into. And there is an artist in everyone one of us! We can create angles of perspective and frames which can give even mundane objects entirely different appearances and therefore an entirely different position in the same world. Here I don't mean that this is done by manipulating the way things are, but by only 'looking' at things in a different way. It is possible to create beautiful visual interpretations of very ordinary things. So whether it's an old rusted door handle or an abandoned car by the roadside or your daily cup of tea, you can create wonderful images out of them by simply using your imagination of a perspective or framing or lighting or whatever! Basically you can discover beauty in the most unexpected things around you. By framing I mean the way the object is placed within the boundaries of the photo - could also be called composition.

The primary challenge that any photographer faces is to capture the image the way it looks to the human eye. But please remember that the human eye behaves more like a super intelligent video camera than a still camera. It's a dynamic image that the brain interprets and re-interprets based on the incoming images to the eye. So it makes it even the more difficult to reproduce that visual picture with a still camera! When you are looking at a scene, your eyes constantly move from one point to another of the scene and continuously adjusting and readjusting the physical components of the eye along with their processing by the brain to give you a final comfortable picture. Though it's hardly possible to emulate this while taking a photograph, you have to adjust the controls which are within your reach to arrive at the best possible result. It has happened to me so many times that I look at the photographs and find out scornfully that, "Oh! It actually looked so much better out there!"

A primary aspect of a really good photograph is the level of exposure across the whole picture. Basically one should strive to capture as much detail as possible. Usually one loses a lot of detail to the darkness in the shadows resulting in pure blackness or to extreme brightness in the illuminated parts resulting in pure whiteness. In normal lighting conditions, if you notice, there is never total black or total white in the vision of the human eye. There would only be shadows and illuminations. However, if you go back to your photographs you will see portions on the photos which are total blacks or total whites (except, of course which were really so in appearance!). This is something we should try to overcome and it is quite a challenge. But again, depending on the theme or for purposes of artistic expression, total darks or whites may be used.

Fortunately, with the advent of digital photography and computer based processing, this challenge can be handled quite aptly by you right on your home PC if not even with the most expensive camera in the market! But don't think that such 'corrections' are possible only because computers are here today! As a matter of fact, even long before digital photography was even imagined of, such controls were in the hands

of those unheralded studio guys who used to develop your negatives and produce the prints. While developing the films the expert hands could 'selectively' expose dark areas and underexpose the over-illuminated areas of the pictures you had taken. Basically what we can do on software like 'Photoshop' today, those guys in the photo studios used to do in the yesteryears! But of course, most of the renowned photographers used to develop and print their own photos too. Such comprehensive control over digital photographs which emulates the traditional film photography can be achieved more effectively with the RAW mode of capture which is usually available in all digital Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras and even some advanced compact cameras.

The main controls in a camera are Shutter Speed, Aperture, White Balance, ISO Settings.
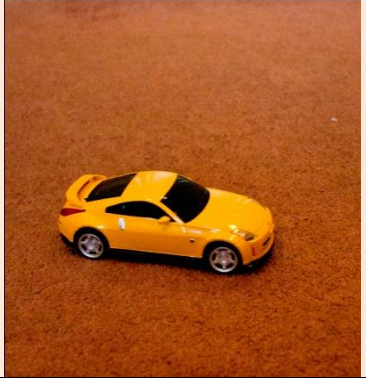
Here is Quick Guide for the reference of the photography enthusiast in you:

CONTROL	Why?	Disadvantages	Remarks
ISO Settings	**CONTROL SENSITIVITY OF SENSOR**		
	High ISO: - Easier pictures in **low light conditions**. - Good for indoor pictures, night photography, etc. - To avoid taking pictures with flash.	higher ISO: 'grainier pictures'	ISO Settings normally range from 100 to 1600
	Low ISO: -Higher resolution/**clarity** of pictures -Good for landscapes, daylight pictures, etc.	Lower ISO: less sensitivity - need slower shutter speeds.	
Shutter Speed (Symbol: Tv)	**CONTROL EXPOSURE TIME**		
	High Shutter Speed: - Capture **fast moving objects** (sports, moving vehicles, etc.)	Difficult in low light conditions, needs more light	Indicated as fraction of seconds or minutes: eg. 1/125", 1/1250", 1/4000", 0.5', 1.0'…etc.
	Slow Shutter Speed: - Capture images in **low light (dark conditions)**, - Capture motion-blur/light-streaks	Chances of camera shake, blur. May require tripod.	
Aperture Size (Symbol: Av)	**CONTROL AMOUNT OF LIGHT INTO THE SENSOR**		Indicated as reciprocal of focal length, eg. f/2.8, f/3.5, f/5.0…., f/22) f/2.8=Large Aperture, f/22=Small Aperture. Smaller number: Larger Aperture.
	Small Aperture: - Sharper pictures, - More "Depth of Field" (object, background & Foreground in focus) - Good for **landscapes**	Difficult in low light conditions, insufficient light	
	Large Aperture: - Good for low light conditions - Less "Depth of Field" (Object in focus, background & foreground blurred) - Good for **Portraits**	Background/foreground blurred (called "bokeh") - but can be used artistically	The largest/smallest aperture size is limited by the type of lens available on your camera.
White Balance (Symbol: WB)	**CORRECT COLOUR HUES DUE TO COLOUR TEMPERATURES**		Pictures have a tendency to become bluish or orangish if the white balance setting is not proper.
	Tungsten mode: for pictures with **tungsten lamps** to overcome 'orangish' hues.	-	
	Fluorescent Mode: for pictures with **fluorescent lamps** to overcome 'bluish' hues.		Can be observed in pure white objects in the pictures. The whites will tend to appear bluish or orangish under incorrect white balance.
	Other modes: Flash, Cloudy, Daylight, Shade etc.		
	Custom Mode: You can control the amount of 'Bluish' or 'orangish' hues		

Aperture Control (Av)

Large Aperture:	Small Aperture:	Small Aperture (corrected):
- Blurred Back ground (notice the lion)	- Sharp Back ground (notice the lion)	- Exposure (light) corrected digitally
- Good amount of light	- Low amount of light	*This can be done while taking the picture also by keeping slower shutter speeds.*
The above effect is due to shallow 'depth of field'	*The above effect is due to large 'depth of field'*	

Shutter Speed Control (Tv)

Slow Shutter Speed:	Fast Shutter Speed:	Faster Shutter Speed (corrected):
- Blurring of fast moving objects	- Fast moving objects captured well	- Exposure (light) corrected digitally
- Good amount of light	- Low amount of light	*This can be done while taking the picture also by keeping larger apertures.*

White Balance Control (WB)

White Balance Error:	White Balance Corrected:	White Balance Error:	White Balance Corrected:
- Too 'orangish' in tungsten light	- Setting camera to 'Tungsten Light' mode	- Too 'Bluish' in shade/ evening	- Setting camera to 'Shade' mode
	Can be corrected digitally also.		*Can be corrected digitally also.*

All Photos By: Abhijit Sharma