

One Chai and a Wills Navy Cut

By Amitava Kumar

Title: Outside In

By: Pablo Bartholomew

Pablo Bartholomew's beautiful photo-show "Outside In" opened in Manhattan a few evenings ago. The exhibition is being held at Bodhi Art in Chelsea. Black-and-white photographs from the seventies and the eighties—reflecting Bartholomew's engagement with people and places in Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta.

These are not the pictures that made Bartholomew famous. The undying image of the father brushing the dust from the face of the child he is burying—that was the iconic photograph from the Bhopal tragedy in 1984. It also won for Bartholomew, still in his twenties, the World Press Photo's Picture of the Year Award.

The images in "Outside In" do not commemorate grim tragedies or celebrate well-publicised public events. Instead, they are documents that offer intimate recall of a period and a milieu. Please click here to look at these photographs.

People who share a context with the photographer will have their own private reading of the scenes. For me they evoke days when happiness seemed only one chai and a Wills Navy Cut away. There is charm and candor in these scenes. And because the young believe they will live forever, there is nothing defensive or stuck-up or overly self-conscious about their faces and postures.

Even the language of the captions is true to this spirit: "Self-portrait after a trippy night..."; "Nona writing and Alok zonked out..."; "Hanging out with the Maharani Bagh gang...." The exhibition catalogue has a fine essay by Aveek Sen that has also been published in the latest issue of *Biblio*.

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