

'Structuring is important in photography'

art beat

Pramita Bose

HIS SURNAME might differ from a certain Picasso or a Neruda, but both aesthetics and poetry reign supreme in eminent Indian lensman of mixed origin, Pablo Bartholomew's album of photographs. A critically acclaimed award-winning photojournalist, Bartholomew is a New Delhi-based independent photographer. With a creative zeal to teach the finer nuances of photography, this self-made lensman also spearheads a slew of photography workshops. He is in Kolkata to exhibit his collection of snapshots, "A Tale of Three Cities (1970s to 80s) and his late revered father Richard Bartholomew's array of works titled "A Critic's Eye (1950s to 1970s)" at the Harrington Street Art Centre. On till September 26, this month-long display has been presented by distinguished art curator Ina Puri.

KEEN TO GO CLICK-HAPPY

PHOTOGRAPHY IS in my blood and genes. My father, Richard Bartholomew, was a world-renowned photographer himself. I have an inseparable bond with the craft. It seems like an umbilical chord connection and the ties can never be severed in this lifetime.

I inherited the art and its magic through a familial legacy. The presence of a dark room at home with a camera contraption around was nothing unusual for my sight. As long as the eyes were wide awake, I could catch my dad busily shooting stills of some site, symbol or action.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

MY FIRST brush with the camera was at eight. My father gifted me a box-like gizmo that without much hiccups seeped into my soul. There was a latent passion to curiously chase extraordinary elements out of an ordinary subject. True that a pair of eyes always arrests the attractive, but how about making a negligible thing captivating? That is the challenge of photography. Gradually, growing up from my formative years, I mellowed with the technical know-how and vision to make things appealing to the audience. I started helping out my father at his work. From choosing snaps and art objects to holding up the canvases of illustrious painters when he clicked them at their private space of creativity, I dabbled deeply into his vocation as a diligent apprentice.

SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST

I LEARNT photography more by watching, observing and reading the stimulus and my gadget responded accordingly. It was all around me and all over the place. I never treaded the commonly followed academic path to get myself enrolled in a school for formal training or join some institute classes to package my presentation. I always loved to capture the natural light of beauty. At times, a raw and unfinished product appears more teasing to the tastebuds than a cosmetic substance with its synthetic fibres.

KOLKATA CONNECTION



Photographer Pablo Bartholomew at the exhibition of his works at the Harrington Street Art Centre in Kolkata. PHOTO: Abhijit Mukherjee

I REMEMBER occasionally visiting Calcutta (now Kolkata) in the 1960s to see my grandmother. I used to saunter to various spots to explore the place as well as its vibrant ambience during those summer vacations. Soaking in the spirit of streetlife with my clicking and hanging out with my close buddies were all part of a growing up process and to being besotted with the city. After breezing past the era of retroculture, the cult of hippies and the flower-power generations, I off and on touched down on my short trips to the city in the 1980s and 90s. Besides freeze-framing a melee of events and stories that spurted up now and then, I chanced upon the funeral of the benign Mother Teresa which I covered it in its length and breadth with a

heavy heart and a teary eye.

A RAY OF HOPE

FILMMAKER SATYAJIT Ray had exercised a tremendous impact on my youthful mind. Ray was an endearing Manikda to me. When I came to the culture capital in the '70s, only to work as a still photographer on the sets of his *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, I could experience a seminal influence on both my life as well as profession. I clearly understood that here was a person who wrote, composed music, illustrated storyboards, maintained a red *khaata* (exercise copy/diary) and stood behind the camera to reel his milestone films. He was a multitasker, a man of letters and manifold facets. His versatility made him a complex yet a complete man. He had an uncan-

ny skill to employ all his given faculties to get a fascinating end result. I was in my early 20s then. And he was an adept institution in himself. There was so much to discover and cultivate from his fathomless treasure-trove. So, I was visibly spellbound by his magnetic aura and he left an indelible impression on me.

MUNDANE AND THE MARGINALISED

I ALWAYS try to locate something subjective and otherworldly among a matrix of cliché, objective items. A photographer's perspective decides for his dexterity and craftsmanship. It defines his class and sets it apart from the run-of-the-mill crowd. Even in a heap of debris or a mound of garbage, you must zero in on

a glaze of gold. That's what depicts your signature masterpiece. A writer may pick up an ordinary plot, but it is his unique references and allusions that make it a best-seller. The involvement of a larger audience in your work and creating a wire of connect with them is paramount.

From ragpickers, prostitutes, slums to street urchins, I've groped for every other grain of existence to create a collage of life on my creative canvas. Is our planet complete without the smallest atomic structure in its atmosphere or on its soil? No. So, nothing is surplus or unwanted. All are welcome under the starry blanket called sky. I can also identify myself with the marginalised sections of the society. Because of my hybrid past, I too got my share of flak for no

rhyme or reason. May be it's a part and parcel of every immigrant or a minority's life. For instance, alone in Kolkata, there are Armenian, Jewish, Anglo-Indian or Chinese communities dwelling in several pockets. But they are a cut above the mainstreams. And very few of them are actually able to achieve something bigger in life. This is like a cursed caste system.

A WANDERLUST

AS A photographer, you always have this vigorous thirst for travelling frequently from one place to another. As a nature photographer, I also traipsed around the globe from one corner to another and went on a recording mode, whatever came my way. Even a wildlife photographer scouts jungles and deep forests to arrest reptiles, tigers or birds in his repertoire.

WORK IN PROGRESS

I'M KEEN to work on the diasporic progeny of French colonies scattered across the world, be it Chandannagore in Kolkata, England, Martinique and Waterloo islands in the Caribbean Sea, apart from Reunion Island and Mauritius situated in the Indian Ocean, below the African continent.

ADVICE TO ASPIRANTS

DREAM ON. You must have the power to think with a concrete vision and bring out that thought in a cohesive form. Photography is not about taking one picture here and another shot there. Structuring one's thoughts is important in order to suggest a comprehensive idea in one's body of work.