

# Pablo's long love for Mumbai shines through

MANJUSA MADHU

The opium den manager reclines, fleeting light in the background. His eyes seem lost and his entire being exudes a curious idleness – restless and inert at the same time. Meet Bengali, one of the many seemingly non-descript characters that populate Pablo Bartholomew's latest exhibition *Chronicles of a past life, Bombay (1970s-80s)* at Photoink gallery, Jhandewala.

An astounding collection of 102 black and white images captured by a young Bartholomew in the '70s tells the story of his long love affair with Bombay. Each picture tells you something about the place, its people and through them the man who is Pablo Bartholomew. "I grew up in Delhi. Back then it was extremely stratified and was almost a village. Excepting the fact that it was the power capital, it had nothing else. Bombay on the other hand had many layers – money, showbiz, etc. Bombay gave me a chance to become someone," says Bartholomew.

The Bombay he talks about, through the magic of his lens, is poetic and evocative. The mosque in Pydhonie with its towering minarets and bright lights speak of the grandeur of the city. A man running in the rain reminds the visitor of Bombay's fiery



Coolies reading a newspaper by Pablo Bartholomew



The opium den manager by Pablo Bartholomew

monsoons. The Olympia cafe and the beer bar pictures tell you about fun, joy making and simply hanging out with friends.

Yet, it is his 'people', the

subaltern lives he chose to immortalise, that set Bartholomew's work apart. Any city is about its people – the ordinary men and women who live and die

shop boys all dazzle in his works. "I wanted to capture the outsider, the man pushed to the fringe. Voices from the margin always drew me," he explains.

Even Bollywood, in his photos, is not about the big bucks or the *badshahs* and *begums*, but about the millions of extras and low-rung technicians who have, over the decades, made the industry what it is today. They speak to you about the lure of Bombay, its ability to entice and draw to her innumerable millions looking for a means to survive or simply to live a beautiful dream. "I used to be a still photographer who was one of the most dispensable people in the movie business. I was automatically drawn to the sub cultures of the film industry – the support system of filmmaking," he adds.

When Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci first employed the term 'subaltern' in early 20th century, the idea of rendering a voice to those outside the structures of power was novel yet unwelcome. Since then the concept has only grown with the everyday lives of ordinary folk commanding attention and gaining prominence and vibrancy in various disciplines. It is this spirit of the subaltern and the concept of 'everyday' that Bartholomew inadvertently brings forth in this breathtaking exhibition.

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within its shadow lines. In Bartholomew's pictures, the bold and the beautiful give way for the 'pariah', the eternal outsider who knows not how, when or if to blend in. Thus, eunuchs, beggars, rag pickers, homeless and