

An Exhibition of Photographs

By Sunil Janah

3rd Dec.1996 - 20th Dec.1996

Matighar, IGNCA



Recognition of Photography as an art form as also the use of the photographic medium in the multi-dimensional activities of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has led it to develop a serious interest in the growth of photography in India. Since 1992, many important collections of photographs, including the works of Raja Deen Dayal, Cartier Bresson and Martha Strawn have been acquired and were exhibited in series of Exhibition entitles "Through a Photographer's Eye". Alongside this, the IGNCA has also been presenting exhibitions of sensitive photographers of national and international status such as Ashvin Mehta from India. Sebastiana Papa from Italy, francisco D'orazi Flavoni from Italy and David Ulrich from USA.



Following upon its earlier exhibitions, IGNCA presents a selection of photographs of Sunil Janah (1943-63), from its archives. Sunil Janah was inspired and drawn to tribal India from a very early age. In his own words, "while broadly speaking, my subject was the Indian people, my emphasis had been on the distressing conditions of their lives, their poverty and wretchedness and their repeatedly manifest revolt against it. That out of my assignments of famines, epidemics and slum conditions, I could collect so many pictures of smiling, handsome women is not however entirely strange. I have photographed her because she represents the youth, charm and vitality which are not yet quiet destroyed in such a people, and which appear as irrepressibly as the hunger I had gone to portray. These women belong to the poorest masses of India. I have found highlands and the jungles of Assam and in the mountains of Kashmir.

I have found them too in our vast plains, in wheat and paddy fields and fishermen's huts and in the squalid tenements of Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay. Anyone who has been close to them cannot but feel deeply that the poorest are the least distorted of our people".

Another of his passions has been to arrest movement through the lens. In his photographs on Konarak, he captures the movement of the lissome figures in stone; in some others, the movement of the dances performed by well known dancers such as Balasaraswati, Indrani Rehman and Rukmani Devi, as also the rhythmic way of the Marias in Tribal India.

The sensitivity of his eye is evident in the manner in which he has captured the subtle nuances of the suffering human conditions, the pain of the famine, toil and sweat of industrial workers or the dexterity of

the hands in the picture of the weavers.

Like some celebrated photographers of the 20th Century such as Cartier Bresson, Sunil Janah too, was captivated by the personality of Mahatma Gandhi, whether in his moment of isolation or his public life.



Sunil Janah born in 1918 in Dibrugarh, Assam, received a gift of box camera from his grandmother on his 16th birthday. This launched one of the most versatile photographer who went on to take some of the exceptionally powerful images on variety of subjects.

He recorded events which were altering the India history during years of pre and post independence, beautifully photographing the turbulent aftermath of the Partition of India in 1947 which was published in Margaret Bourke's book *Halfway to Freedom*. India's classical art and monuments inspired Sunil and on the women of India he published a photo feature *The Second Creature*. His comprehensive study of Indian dances through rendering by Shanta rao have been published in the book *Dances of the Golden Hall* and the study of Indian tribals in the book *Tribals of India*. His photographs have extensively appeared in books, in journals and have been exhibited all over the world. He was awarded the Padma Shree in 1979 and now lives in London.