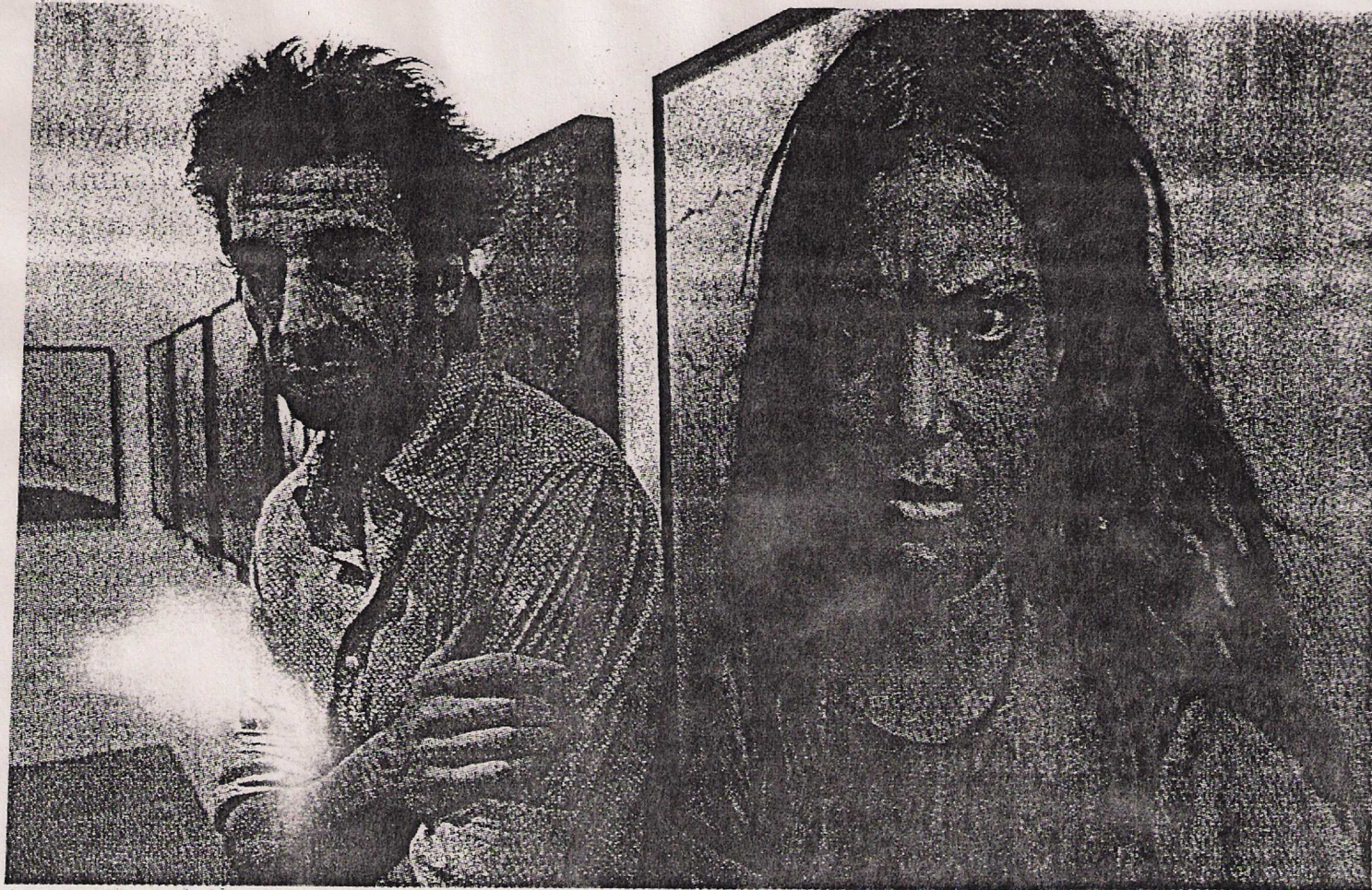


TOS: SAMIR JANA



Behind the facade: Johann Rousselot with his works on show at the photography exhibition titled India Shining, India Crying

An India at odds with itself

Images of a country torn between external gloss and deeper poverty

Arindam Chatterjee

“You must look at the photographs in an orderly manner; otherwise you will miss the story within,” says photographer Johann Rousselot. For someone who is entrenched in the ethos, the politics and the culture of a country called India, the face of anguish, despair, remorse and deprivation is an old story. Occasionally, it made big news in the mainstream media when droughts or famines struck, and then everything was forgotten, quenched by the promises of a glowing future.

In the wake of the economic reforms of 1991, the cry of rural India has sustained its tone. The only difference, Rousselot points out, is that the “instrument of progress is impatient and greedy. Like a steamroller, this unbridled development ignores the destructive consequences it delivers upon the poor. The farmers, whose situation declines with each passing year, are no longer priority to the authorities who concentrate their attention on in-



JOHANN ROUSSELOT'S EXPLORATIONS INTO THE UNKNOWN HAVE FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THE DISPLAY

dustrial and service sectors.”

That realisation hit him hard when he chanced upon the metal and shine glitter of Gurgaon while travelling across Delhi. By then he had already discovered a shining India because of his various press reportages, and India

Shining, a campaign launched by the nationalist party BJP that was in power till 2004. As Rousselot dauntlessly moved from the chic nightclubs of Mumbai's Colaba, through the building sites of the new towns to the mineral belts in Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, disjoined elements slowly began to take shape in front of his eyes.

He found the architects of the New World being left out of the promises allegedly enshrined in the Shining campaign. “As a photojournalist I was searching for a story but I didn't want to photograph the poor in India in isolation. I found the leads to my India Crying story in the tribal belts. The mining issue was interesting because there is a constant demand for mineral resources. The new economy thrives on coal and bauxite and this is where many unanswered questions lurk,” says Rousselot.

His explorations into the unknown have finally yielded a plethora of photographs that provides a scathing counterpoint to India Shining. Rousselot's India Shining, India Crying, on display

at Bose Pacia, tells the story of an India at odds with itself, a deep sense of despair cuts open the apparently rotund belly of a country at the crossroads, trying to become an “ambitious, gigantic, economic giant among nations at the cost of hungry eyes, empty souls, environmental degradation and farmer suicides in the villages of Maharashtra”.

In Dhanbad, the first coal city in India, Rousselot captures underdeveloped workers surviving on the abandoned remains of coalmines. In the four days Rousselot spent in the village of Sunna, he witnessed a protest by farmers and a funeral of one suicide victim. The last photograph in a series of 30 shows ‘the funeral of the peasant Maroti Pachna Potrajwar, 62, who is the fifth person to have put an end to his life in eight months in the same village. He leaves behind three daughters and a son. His debt was Rs. 40,000’.

The show is on till April 3 between 11 am and 7 pm (except Mondays)

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