

I Am That

We know that the camera captures moments in time. When we look at a photograph, we view a slice of someone's life. Sometimes, though not very often, we get a bit more of the loaf. If the camera is in the hands of a photographer who has shed the desire to conjure up the single magical picture, we await the opportunity to mull over a body of work, more real, more substantial. When this maker of images draws on decades of compassionate observation as a resource, we gain the added good fortune of sharing a life, of being offered a way of seeing.

In Pan India, Prashant Panjjar takes us on a site-seeing tour of construction and demolition, of homes stable and fickle, of shared habitats public and private, of secure foundations and worrisome roofs.

An unreachable concrete staircase hangs from a first-floor home, its base demolished to make way for the promise of metro-rail. A wire holds up a worker's washing to dry above bricks that hold his tin roof down. A new imposing apartment complex rises high above dry bramble -- from their windows in the sky, the owners can view snagged tatters of used plastic. A sculpted saint looks up to the heavens. Ragpickers stoop to harvest fields of garbage.

We make. We break. We consume. We survive. We pray. As we have come to expect of this master photographer, his eye remains calm in the whirl of 'development'. Faced by the doing and undoing of man's idea of 'progress', he uses a wider, panoramic format, showing you more, blunting the sharp impulse to grab the quick image, choosing instead to simply stand still and stare back. He wields not his wit, but his wisdom.

His photographs are calm, meditative. They teach. I contemplate. This is how we live. This is who we are. This is who *I* am. I carved the earth, I made that fence, I marked the land. *I am the gate, I am the lock, I am the wire.* I raised those walls, I built those flats, I sold those dreams. *I am the brick, I am cement, I am the ladder.* I painted that house, I bought that TV, I lit that lamp. *That's my Shergill, that's my cycle, that's my cow.* I mutilated that tree, I widened that road, I demolished that shanty. *That's my hammer, that's my greed, that's my future.* That's me. I am that.

There are tongues in trees, books in bricks, sermons in steel.

Bond of sand and cement, a handshake between humans for better or for worse, to these do we belong.

Panjjar reminds us that we share a life.

We learn that men live together, whether they live together or apart.

– **Sanjeev Saith**, Curator for the Pan India exhibition and book.