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IT professional Partho Bhowmick has proved that visual impairment is not a handicap when it comes to the art of photography, notes Preeti Gupta

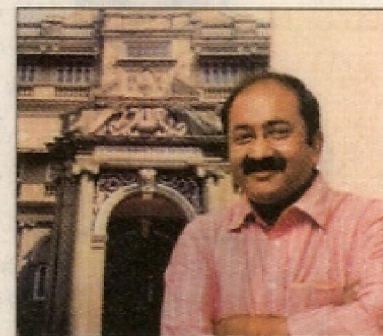
Art of visual thinking



If you thought that photography is a creative journey, explored only through the visual medium then you need to meet Partho Bhowmick, a photography enthusiast with a cause. This 40-year-old photographer conducts one-of-its-kind photography workshops and exhibitions for the visually challenged, which not only gives an insight to visual thinking but also reveals the artistic expression of the visually impaired. "It is more like exploring the concept of looking at the world through the eyes of the blind," says Bhowmick.

It was Evgen Bavcar, a visually challenged photographer from Paris, who encouraged Bhowmick to conduct photography workshops for the visually challenged in January 2006. Bhowmick, after a detailed research on visual art conducted the workshop, which went on for a year with around nine students from Victoria Memorial School for the Blind at Tardeo. Later the photographs clicked by the participants were presented in the exhibition *Beyond The Sight* held at National Centre of Performing Arts, Nariman Point. For the visually challenged visitors, the exhibition provided a combination of raised, 'touchable' images, braille footnotes, visual aides and a descriptive tour to access the photographs.

Bhowmick elucidates, "Various tactile, audio clues, visual memories of sight, warmth of light and cognitive skills are used by the visually impaired to create mental images before they take a picture. They use the camera as an extension of their 'self' to explore the visual world and gain a deeper insight while recording their imagination. A sighted companion (myself) collaborating with the visually impaired, help them to conceptualise



mental images."

For Bhowmick, the workshop was a creative journey through an unknown path, exploring ways to reach new visual destinations. Bhowmick says, "As the workshop evolved with time, I could see the undiscovered world of the blind photographer's 'inner gallery'. These photographs revealed that, a photograph could be painted successfully in the mind with or without eyes."

Bhowmick is now putting all his efforts to integrate the visually impaired into the mainstream society through the art of photography. He is currently toying with the idea to take visual art a step further. He wants the visually challenged to explore the art of video shooting, such as making documentaries and short videos with the handycam.

His attempts are not only facilitating visual thinking but also giving a purpose to the visually impaired to give the world a peek into their world of mental images.

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